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SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY OF RUPA

A Sherdukpen Village in Arunachal Pradesh

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(Middle line)

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(Bottom line)

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FOREWORD

The Census of India has a long tradition of undertaking and promoting investigations on diverse aspects of the Socio-economic life of the country. During 1961 Census on the initiative of my illustrious predecessor, Shri A. Mitra, a study of more than 500 villages was taken up. The Socio-economic Survey of Rupa, a Sherdukpen Village in Arunachal Pradesh (N. E. F. A.) was undertaken as a part of this project. These studies would provide an integrated picture of community life. S/Shri M. S. Adhikari, Chandra Sen, Shrimati I. K. Barthakur and Dr. B. K. Roy Burman deserve to be complimented for the useful report on Village Rupa in Arunachal Pradesh.

NEW DELHI
December, 1972.

A. CHANDRA SEKHAR
Registrar General, India

PREFACE

In 1963, it was decided that Socio-economic Survey of six villages would be undertaken in N. E. F. A. (Arunachal) by the Social Studies Division of the Office of the Registrar General of India, with assistance of the staff provided by the Superintendent of Census Operations, N. E. F. A. Prior to that some preliminary investigations were made in these villages by the staff of the Superintendent of Census Operations, under the supervision of Shrimati I. K. Barthakur, Assistant Superintendent of Census Operations, N. E. F. A., but due to various difficulties no satisfactory progress could be made.

By the time the Social Studies Division of the Office of the Registrar General of India took up these villages for survey, the field staff of the Superintendent of Census Operations who had made the preliminary studies earlier, were transferred under the N. E. F. A. Administration as Divisional Statistical Officers.

The N. E. F. A. Administration, however, were kind enough to allow these officers to collaborate with the Office of the Registrar General, India for conducting the survey.

Schedules for conducting the survey were drawn up by the Social Studies Division of the Office of the Registrar General, India and the Divisional Statistical Officers were given training for three weeks in Delhi about canvassing the schedules.

Rupa in Kameng district of N. E. F. A., is one of the villages taken up for survey. The schedules

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were canvassed by Shri M. S. Adhikari, Divisional Statistical Officer. I personally visited the village accompanied by Shri Adhikari in 1964. This provided me an opportunity to reformulate the problems as well as the tools for investigation. After that detailed investigations were done by Shri Adhikari. and Shri Chandra Sen of the Social Studies Division, Office of the Registrar General, India also paid a short visit to the village and did supplementary studies on specific points indicated by me.

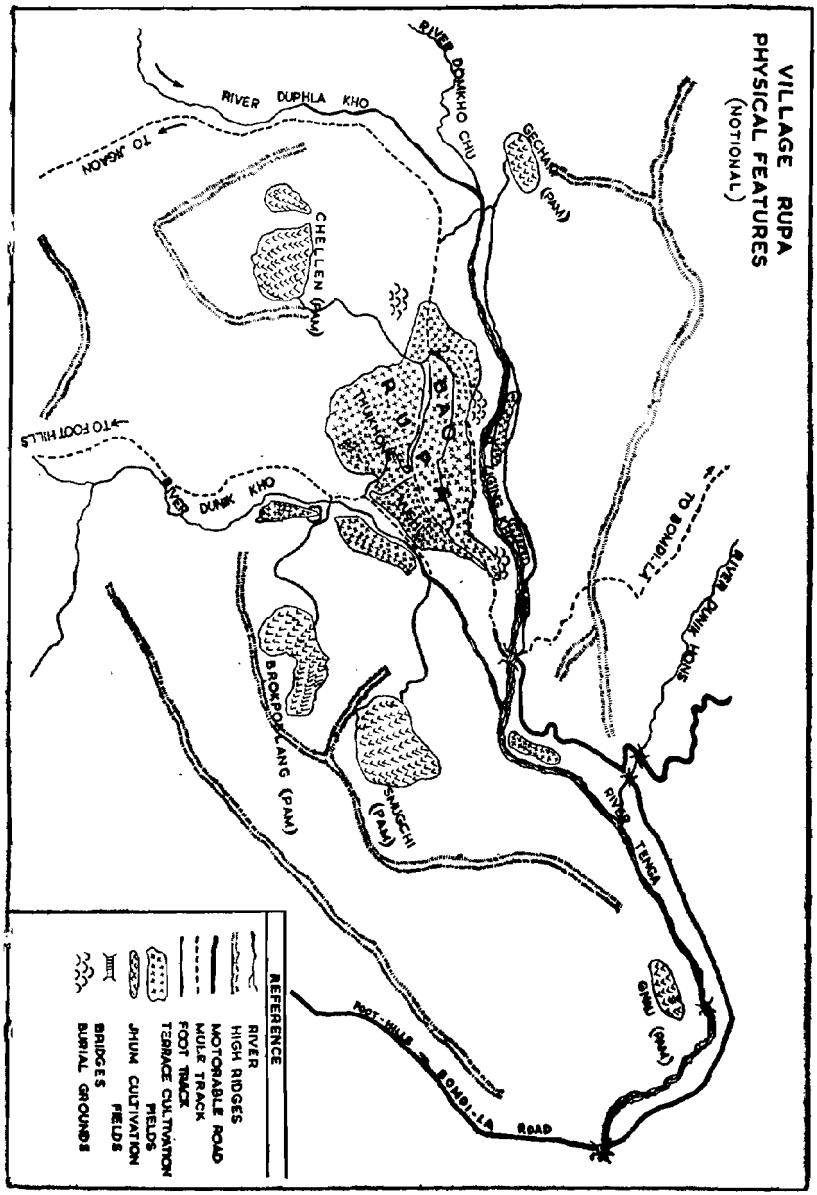
Shri Adhikari prepared a fairly comprehensive draft report. It was revised and edited by me, by inclusion of fresh analytical foci in several directions.

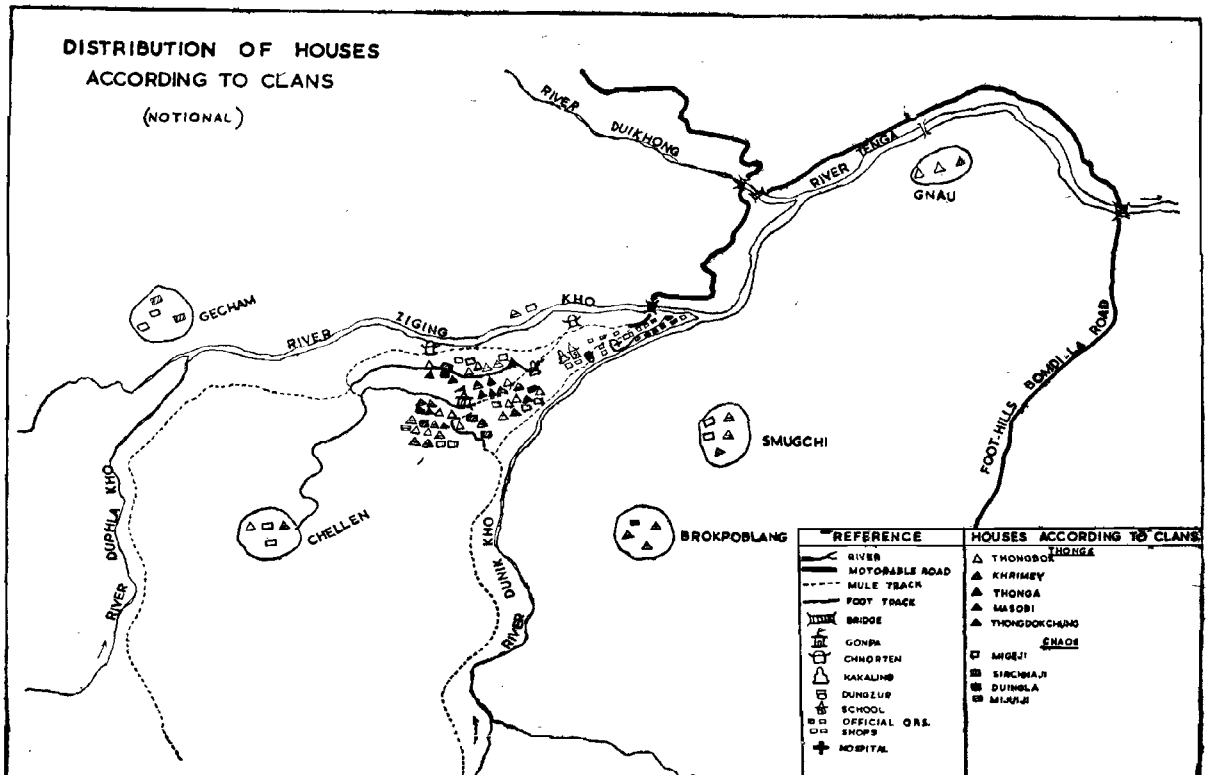
I would like to thank Sarvashri Ahmad Hussain and Kailash Chand Kaul for the photos taken by them, depicting the various aspects in the life of Sherdukpen. Thanks are due to Sarvashri R. P. Naula and N. K. Banerjee for the follow up actions at the printing stage. I am also grateful to the successive Directors of Census Operations, N. E. F. A. for making available the services of Shri Adhikari for the purpose of the present study and also for supplying the supplementary information which were required by me from time to time at the stage of finalising the report.

I would also like to thank the N. E. F. A. Administration for providing me all the facilities during my tours in N. E. F. A.

Lastly, I would like to avail of this opportunity to thank Shri A. Chandra Sekhar, Registrar General, India, for the keen interest that he has taken in the social investigations under the aegis of the Census.

B. K. ROY BURMAN


VILLAGE RUPA
PHYSICAL FEATURES
(NOTIONAL)
RIVER DUPHLA KHO
RIVER DOMKHO CHU
TO JIGAON
GECHAN (PAM)
CHELLEN (PAM)
TO FOOT HILLS
RIVER DUNIK KHO
TO BOMDI-LA
RIVER DUNIK HONS
BROKPOKLANG (PAM)
SMUGCHI (PAM)
RIVER TENGA
GHAU (PAM)
FOOT-HILLS BOMDI-LA ROAD
REFERENCE
RIVER
HIGH RIDGES
MOTORABLE ROAD
MULE TRACK
FOOT TRACK
TERRACE CULTIVATION FIELDS
JHUM CULTIVATION FIELDS
BRIDGES
BURIAL GROUNDS


DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSES
ACCORDING TO CLANS
(NOTIONAL)
RIVER DUIKHONG
RIVER TENGA
GNAU
GECHAM
RIVER ZIGING
KHO
SMUGCHI
FOOT-HILLS BOMDI-LA ROAD
CHELLEN
BROKPOBLANG
RIVER DUPHLA KHO
RIVER DUNIK KHO
REFERENCE
RIVER
MOTORABLE ROAD
MULE TRACK
FOOT TRACK
BRIDGE
GONPA
CHHORTEN
KAKALING
DUNGZUB
SCHOOL
OFFICIAL ORS.
SHOPS
HOSPITAL
HOUSES ACCORDING TO CLANS
THONGA
THONGBOR
KHRIMEY
THONGA
MASOBI
THONGDOKCHUNG
GNAOE
MIGEJI
SIRCHHAJI
DUINGLA
MIRAJI

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The village

The village Rupa is situated about 19 kilometers away south-west of Bomdi-La, the Divisional headquarters, Kameng District of N.E.F.A. It is situated at a height of about 4700 feet above the mean sea level. Its location in the geographical map of India is at 92°—24′ longitude and 27°—12′ latitude. Rupa is the nucleus village and has eight different hamlets, as follows:

(1) Thaungreo, (2) Jomiam, (3) Mukhuthing, (4) Chellen, (5) Gecham, (6) Brokpoblang, (7) Smugchi and (8) Gnau. For the purpose of Census and this survey, the hamlets (1) Thoongry (2) Jomiam and (3) Mokothung have been taken as separate villages and Rupa includes the hamlets of (1) Chellen, (2) Gecham, (3) Brokpoblang, (4) Smugchi and (5) Gnau.

The main village is spread in the depression of hills. The village land is undulated. The hamlets are spread on the hillslopes. The village is approachable both from District headquarters, i.e. Bomdi-La and from the nearest railway station of Missamari by a motorable road. Rupa is a fairly typical village of Sherdukpen Tribe. It is the oldest and an important village of the Sherdukpens. The total population of Sherdukpen Tribe consist of 1144 persons living in six main villages. The people are simple, polite and hospitable. Since it is nearer to the District Headquarters, people have received their share of modern developments and this seems to have influenced their attitude towards the outsiders to a considerable extent.

Their close contact with the plains people of Assam particularly with 'Kacharis' (a tribe belonging to the Bodogroup) has influenced their social and economic life.

The main occupation of the people is agriculture and the supplementary occupations are cattle rearing, fishing, weaving and silver smithy.

According to the villagers, in the past their territory included the villages of Jargaon, Simulguri and Udalguri (all in Darrang District of Assam State) in the South, and Rahung and Khitam in the North; Sinchong and Wanghoo, the villages of the Khowa Tribe in the East and North-East and that they used to collect taxes from Kacharis and Khowas inhabiting their territory. However, after the area has been brought under the effective control of the administration, the Sherdukpens are not allowed to collect taxes from 'Kacharis' and the 'Khowas'.

The present boundaries of the village extend in the north upto Dikhungpani, in the South upto a place called Jabrang (about 13 kilometers from Rupa towards South), in the East upto Sinchong and Wanghoo, and in the West upto Jigaon and Shergaon. These villages are also inhabited by the people of Sherdukpen Tribe.

Rupa falls under Kalaktang Administrative Circle, the Headquarters of which is located at 'Kalaktang' about 75 kilometers from Rupa, connected by a porter track. The nearest market, Post and Telegraph Office, Craft Centre and High School are located at Bomdi-La at a distance of 19 kilometers from Rupa. These two places are connected by a motorable road. The nearest Veterinary Dispensary is at Salari, about 32 kilometers from the village. There is a Dak Bungalow in the village made by the N.E.F.A. Administration. This Dak Bungalow was constructed in 1953. It is made of wooden frame but the walls are plastered with mud and the floor is cemented.

The villagers annually visit Doimara, Udalguri and Rangapara in Darrang District of Assam, the main places of their trade. Doimara is situated at the Foot-hills of Kameng District, about 84 kilometers by road or 4 days journey by the mule path, on the side of 'Bomdi-La Foot-hills' road. This is the Winter Camp of all Sherdukpens (including the people of Shergaon and Jigaon) where they stay for 4 months (December to March) every year. Udalguri and Rangapara, about 100 and 57 kilometers respectively from Doimara, are well connected by roads. The villagers can reach Udalguri in two days and Rangapara within one day from Doimara.

Physical aspects

After crossing a hillock named *Phongkung*, one reaches the site of an old village, from where a beautiful view of the Rupa village and the steep hills covered with pine and other coniferous

forests can be seen. The altitudes of the hills surrounding Rupa varies from 7000 to 9000 feet above the mean sea level. The North-Eastern hills from Rupa are known as Phongkung, which are rocky, having thin vegetation while the other hills have thick vegetation. The high hills punctuated with deep valleys make a picturesque landscape which is everlasting in the mind of the beholders.

The houses in the village are environed by terraced cultivation fields which are dotted with rock projections. The land inside the main village, is rocky with a top layer of sand.

The crystal clear water of river Ziging Kho and its tributary 'Dunik Kho' traverses through the village area and the flow is from West to East. The water of these rivers meet one mile beyond the village and is known as Tenga-river, which ultimately flows into the basin of river Kameng or Bhorelli. Due to their deep courses, these rivers are not of any use for irrigational purposes but they are the only sources of drinking water and fish. Incidentally, it is to be noted that fish is abundant in these rivers.

Climate

In general the climate of the village is healthy. Since the village is surrounded by the lofty mountain ranges which act as barrier to the progress of the monsoon clouds. The annual average rainfall is only about 35 inches.

In a year there are three distinct seasons, i.e. Winter, Summer and Monsoon. Winter (October to February) is very cold, but no snow fall occurs, only during the peak winter months frost occurs heavily. Winter is followed by a mild summer. During the summer (March to June) it is hot, but the temperature does not exceed 95°F. The monsoon or rainy season starts from the month of July and continues till September. This is the busiest season for the villagers, because they have to do hard work in their fields to produce the crops for the whole year.

Flora

The general aspect of the forest in this area shows that they are of mixed monsoon type. Around the village, the forests are deciduous and rather prominently dry, while around Jabrang and Bomdi-La the forest are ever green, having thick under-growth or ground cover. Many of the tall towering trees towards Jabrang are covered with mosses and lichena. In the village area forests are more or less exposed and strikingly poor in under-growth. The

common vegetation in this area are Pine, Oak, Deodar, Walnut, Rhododendrons, Citrus, Raspberry and Orchids of different varieties. Tree-ferns are also found in this area.

Pine (pinus excelsa) is a gregarious tree practically throughout, towering in slopes and ravines. These forests are composed of trees having varying heights; some are lofty and attain 100 to 150 feet in height. Among such trees are to be mentioned Pinus longifolius, Pinus excelsa wall, Michelia excelsa Blume and Brunoniana Car.

There are varieties of Rhododendrons found in this area. The red and purplish flowered species are pretty and ornamental. Most of the Rhododendron flowers blossom in the months of March-April. Rhododendrons niveum Hook (KHANDUK-HING) and Rhododendrons griffithianum weight (TAMO-HING) are widely distributed species in the surroundings of the village. The height of these species varies from 30 to 50 feet.

A large number of trees of known economic value flourish in these forests. The following trees are of much importance which are used for timber making and wood carving purposes: —

Botanical Name	*Local Name*	*English Name*
1. Pinus Excelsa Wall .	Bachi-Hing	Pine
2. Michelia Excelsa Blume	Chansing-Hing	
3. Daphniphylum Himalayanease Muell	Mukhu-Hing	Wal Nut
4. Acerhookeri Miq .	Kharshing-Hing	
5. Cinamomom . .	Chepsing-Hing	
6. Rhododendron Niveum Hook	Khandak-Hing	Rhododendron

Though bamboo (MA) and cane (KHU) are not abundant in these forests, they exist in remote parts of the village area. The bamboo groves are found about 6-7 miles away, towards South-East, from the main village. Different kinds of bamboo are used for construction of houses, camps and fencing of the cultivation fields where the roofing and partition walls are all done by split bamboos.

Many medicinal and edible fruit-bearing plants, are also found here. Dichroafebrifuge lour, locally known as *Goorbi-shali,* is a plant of medicinal value. The roots and the leafy tops are used for treatment of malarial fever. The fruit of Rubus elliplicus smith (Yellow raspberries), locally known as *Mlang-ha,* are edible. Punica granatum Linn (Pomegranate) locally known as *Shimbi-Limbi* is also grown in the village, Jabrang, an aromatic pungent spice is found in abundance in the forest and surroundings of the village.

In addition to the above mentioned flora, orchids of various species are also found here. Dendrodium nobili Lind, is the most elegant and attractive orchid with heavy bundles of beautiful flowers. Another orchid which exists in this area is Galeola falconri Hook.

There are two trees of Deodar species, locally known as Singmu. It is a taboo among the villagers to cut this kind of tree. Singmu is worshipped and the people believe that there resides a God called Fu-Sawang who has given birth to these trees for His shelter. In case the tree is cut the God will be annoyed and the whole village will be in distress.

Fauna

There are many kinds of animals and birds in this area. Tiger (Phaun), Wild Goat (Stan), Barkingdeer (Skhu), Spotted Deer (Juikh), Boar (Skan), Mithun (Hangbodi), Fox (Tsan), Monkey (Judung), Wild Cat (Tankoo), and Porcupine (Sba), are common among wild animals. Cow (Sphu), Horse (Stu), Sheep (Juwa), Bullock (Shyo) and Fowls (Bikhya) are the only domestic animals.

The birds available in most extensive areas, are jungle fowl, eagle, pigeon, dove, owl, wood-pecker, bulbull, fork tail and sparrow. Varieties of beautiful butterflies, snakes, dim-dams and honey-bees are also not uncommon in this area.

Fish is abundant in the nearby rivers and the common type of fish is orinous or hill-trout, locally known as *Nyu-Lang.*

Size of village

The total area of the village is about 11,000 acres or roughly 35 Sq. Kms., and the total cultivated land (in 1961) is about 320 acres only. There are 74 households having total population of 422 persons of whom 205 (48.5%) are males and 217 (51.5%) are females. The average number of members per household

is 5.7. All these households belong to Sherdukpens. The major portion of population is concentrated in the main village; while the hamlets are sparsely populated. There are 5 hamlets *i.e.* Chellen, Brokpoblang, Gecham, Smugchi and Gnau under Rupa. The distances of these hamlets from the main village are 5, 4, 3, 3, and 5 kilometers respectively.

The following table gives the size of the five hamlets by number of households and population :

TABLE 1

Size of hamlets by number of households and population

Sl. No.	Name of Hamlet	No. of house-holds	Population		
			Males	Females	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Chellen	4	16	13	29
2	Brokpoblang . . .	4	11	10	21
3	Gecham	4	14	16	30
4	Smugchi	5	6	11	17
5	Gnau	3	11	9	20
	Total .	**20**	**58**	**59**	**117**

The above table shows that only 117 persons (58 males and 59 females) or 27·72% of the total population stay in hamlets and strikingly there are only 20 households or 27·02% of the total households in the village which shows that the distribution of population according to households is identical.

A table giving the distribution of the households by number of members is placed below :—

TABLE 2

Distribution of households by number of members

Sl. No.	Households size (family members)	Number of households	
1	2	3	
1	1	2	
2	2	4	13
3	3	9	
4	4	7	31
5	5	14	
6	6	10	
7	7	11	28
8	8	17	
	Total	**74**	

The table shows that out of the 74 households 28 are large, each containing 7 to 8 persons, 31 households are medium sized consisting of 4 to 6 persons and 15 households are small consisting of 1 to 3 persons, of which two single member households.

Residential pattern

The village is not laid in any systematic manner and the houses have been built wherever a suitable plot of land is available. Therefore, the whole village is divided into six parts, the five hamlets and main village. These hamlets and the houses are distributed irrespective of clan. The houses in the main village are grouped in three places according to the availability of levelled land. These three places have different names as Bao Thuikhong and Ushir. All these sections are multi-clan. The houses are distributed haphazardly and there is no proper planning in the construction of the houses. Only the provision of Foot Paths is kept before constructing the houses.

Similarly all the hamlets are multi-clan and there is no instance of uniclan hamlet.

Communications

The village is connected by a motorable road from the nearest railway station Missamari, about 132 Kms. in distance. The road from Missamari to Foot-hills (Base Camp and Inner Line Check Post) is almost plain though untarred and it is about 34 Kms. in distance. The road from Foot-hills to Tenga-Valley (about 5 Kms. from Rupa) and onwards is known as 'Bomdi-La Foot-hills' road, climbing the hills up and down throughout the way, is very narrow and risky. Hence, only one way traffic is allowed. The gate timing is fixed by the Political Officer of Kameng Frontier Division and looked after by check post police.

The construction of this Highway was started in 1956 and was completed in 1958. Since then it is being widened and efforts are being made to make it a metalled one. Before the construction of this road, the Divisional Headquarters, Bomdi-La, was connected by a mule track which is still in existence and used frequently during the rainy season when the motorable road is

blocked due to heavy land slides. The village Rupa is five stages from Foot-hills. Recently, another motorable road has been constructed and it is called "Bomdi-La—Bhalukpung" road. This road joins "Bomdi-La—Foot-hills" road at Tenga Valley.

The village is connected with Bomdi-La by a mule track about 15 Kms. long; but one can as well go to Bomdi-La by motorable road which is 19 Kms. in length. It is connected with Circle Headquarters, Kalaktang by a mule track. All the neighbouring villages are connected by foot-tracks.

There is a cantilever bridge made of wooden logs and planks over Ziging Kho river which is the only means to cross the river. This was made by the village people who learnt this art from the neighbouring Monpa people. In Monpa area such indigenous cantilever bridges are very common.

To construct the bridge, stone retaining walls are erected at the site of bridge, on the both banks of river and over each wall many wooden logs (mainly pine trees) of equal length are laid horizontally in such a manner that 2/3rd of the length remains on the wall and only 1/3rd of the length is kept projecting over the river. The portion of logs resting on walls is covered with heavy pieces of stones and earth. Then the both projecting ends of logs are bridged by three long wooden beams. These beams are later on covered with thick planks. The span of bridge is about 40 feet.

It came to notice that formerly there was a cane bridge over the river Ziging Kho. The remains of lofty stone walls, and for hanging the cane bridge are still at the site. In eastern part of Kameng Division cane suspension bridges are supported by trees on the river banks; but since here the river passes through rocky mountains no such facility is available. Hence, the stone walls are the only means of support. The cane is not found abundantly in this village area. At the time of construction of the bridge cane ropes were brought by the Khowas who were under the subjugation of the Sherdukpens of Rupa and who used to pay tribute by way of service or in kind. These tributes have been stopped after the establishment of effective administration in this area; now the Rupa people have to get cane ropes on payment from Khowas. Therefore, the Rupa people have given up the practice of making cane bridge and taken up the construction of wooden bridge.

Public places

There is one Gumpa (Buddhist Temple) in the heart of the village. It is an old Gumpa and is looked after by a Lama (Buddhist monk) who performs all the Pujas on behalf of the villagers. Religious shrines like *Manes, Chhortens and Dungzurs* also exist within the boundary of the village. There are 12 Manes, two Chhortens, and two Dungzurs, scattered over the different parts of the village. Besides, there is a Kakaling (stone gate) just at the entrance to the main village. Inside the Kakaling is a square edifice with frescoes in vivid colour. The details about these religious shrines will be given in another chapter of this monograph.

Burial grounds

There are four burial grounds in four directions of the village, namely Manthung in the east, Thonga in the south, Ba in the west and Guchingheen in the north; at distances of $\frac{1}{2}$, 1, $1\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ Kms. respectively from village Gumpa. According to the local custom, the deceased is cremated or buried in a particular direction pointed out by the Lama with the help of his religious book Karchik. Therefore, in each direction, there is one burial or cremation ground.

The most important burial place among these four is Ba. At this place one bunker (underground cell) is constructed to dispose of the dead bodies. The cell is completely closed from all directions, except for a small entrance in the front side of the cell.

It is said that many generations ago, an epidemic broke out in the village and daily several persons became the victims of it. At this stage when lot of casualties occurred, it was not possible to cremate or bury each and every dead body according to customs. Therefore, to remove the dead bodies from the village immediately and dispose them of, this cell was constructed. This very cell is still used as a crematorium by the poor people of the village who are ordered by the Lama to dispose of their deceased in the West of the village. The dead is taken to Ba and kept inside the cell where no cremation or burial is required. The body is automatically decomposed after some time by natural action leaving the skeleton only.

Sources of water

Rivers provide the only source of drinking water. There is a water channel in the village which carries water from the river Dunik Kho to run the prayer wheel fitted in Dungzur, located

near the village. Therefore, some households of the village and Government Staff stationed at Rupa, tap the water from Dungzur. There are no sources of spring water or wells in the village.

Local shops

During 1961 there were only two shops in the village, one belonging to a Nepali man named Shri Jog Bahadur who married a Sherdukpen girl of Rupa, and another belonging to the Rupa villagers.

Welfare and administrative institution

There is one 'Adult Training Centre' (Now Rupa Welfare Centre) at Rupa. It was established in April 1963 by 'Bhartiya Adimjati Sewak Sangh', on the initiative of a social worker from Bihar Shri Narayanji.

This Centre has started one weaving section. The instructor had received her training from the Craft Centre at Bomdi-La. In 1964, nine girls were receiving training in this centre. They were provided with free lodging and boarding facilities in the hostel of the centre.

The centre also runs a boy's hostel. In 1964, eleven boys were provided with free boarding and lodging facilities in the hostel. They used to receive primary education in the school run by the W.C.Y.D. administration. Besides, they were taught the fundamental rules of morals of the centre. On Sundays and holidays they worked in the agricultural demonstration field attached to the centre, acquired some knowledge about modern agricultural methods.

The centre has also set up a small poultry form with the assistance provided by the agriculture department of N.E.F.A. administration.

There are in total seven buildings belonging to this 'Adult Training Centre'. These buildings are made of wooden frame having mud plastered wall and bamboo roofs. These were constructed by the villagers on contract basis and the expenses were borne by the 'Bhartiya Adimjati Sewak Sangh'

Besides, School and Hospital buildings, there are seven residential buildings in the village, meant for the staff of School, Hospital and Central Public Works Department.

Postal facilities

Though, there is no branch Post Office at Rupa, the mail is delivered thrice a week by the Dak-runners of the Political Department. These Dak-runners are regular Government employees and each out-post or Administrative Centre of this Division maintains communication with the outside world with the help of the Dak-runners.

History of village

The Sherdukpens claim that long ago their (ancestor) Japtang Bura, son of a Tibetan king named Ba Srongsen Gompu, was ordered by his father to rule over the present territory of Sherdukpens. He started his journey with his porters and servants and crossed the Frontier. First he camped in Monpa area, near *But* (a village under the N.E.F.A. Administrative Circle of Kameng Division). Rupa is not the original name of the village. The Sherdukpens call it Thongthuik. In their dialect "Thuik" means village and Thongthuik means, the village of the Thong people,—Thong being the dominant clan of the village. The name Rupa is supposed to have been given to it by the people of the plains. It is believed that when money was introduced in this area, the transactions in cash between the people of the hills and the plains used to take place in this village; hence, the name Rupa, meaning silver coin came to be associated with it. In course of time this name became more popular.

In 1943, when Kalaktang administrative circle was established in this outlying region, Rupa became its headquarters. For 14 years the headquarters continued here. Later on it was shifted to Kalaktang,—at a distance of about 75 Kms.

Establishment of new villages and hamlets of the Sherdukpens

As already mentioned Rupa is recognised as the mother village of the Sherdukpens. Later on due to pressure of population, a section went out and settled a new village, Shergaon at a distance of 32 Kms. from Rupa. It seems that those new settled at Shergaon were able to assert their separate identity and right to manage their own affairs, quite early. But the process of branching out of new settlements did not stop with it. As the people were mainly engaged in shifting cultivation, in the course of their cultivation cycle, they had to clear out jungle patches, at long distance from the village. It was not convenient to return to the village, after every day's work during the busy season. So, they had to construct temporary huts near the fields. In course of

time, groups of households tended to carry on jhum cycles in distinct blocks and set up semi-permanent settlement near those blocks. Thus a process of segmentation set in. These semi-permanent settlements or sub-villages are known as pams. (Pam is an Assamese word for jhum hut in jhum field.) Till recently there were ten sub-villages or pams attached to Rupa. They were Jigaon, Jomiam, Thaungreo, Mimbasur, Mokhuthing, Chellen, Gecham, Brokpoblang, Smugchi and Gnau.

With the establishment of effective administration in Kameng division, Jigaon was declared as a separate village, with its own council of gaon Buras (village chiefs) and members. The people of Rupa village strongly resented this step; they asserted that Jigaon was their sub-village, and should remain within their jurisdiction. But the people of the Jigaon had a different view in this matter and the Administration stuck to its decision to give separate recognition to Jigaon.

In 1959-60, there was a move to give the status of village to three more pams, viz., Thangeo, Jomian and Mukhuthing. The people of Rupa were very much excited over it; they held a meeting and protested against this move. The administration, on its part, responded to the popular mood and Rupa still continues to be the main village and the sub-villages continue to be associated with it.

Origin of the tribe

The people are of Tibetan origin. The history of origin of the Sherdukpens as noted by Sharma (1961) is as follows :—

The Tibetan King Be Srongtsen Gompo used to live in Devalajari in Lhasa with his Tibetan queen Be Mu Za, by whom he had a son called Gepu Roding Dorjee Chhung. In course of time he heard that the King of Assam had a very beautiful daughter and he began to long for her. He, therefore, sent his ablest Minister Rigpu Chhan, to Sibsagar to ask for her hand in marriage. In the beginning, the Ahom King was reluctant to send his daughter to a distant, unknown land and made the Minister pass through a series of severe tests before he agreed to the alliance and sent his daughter with the Minister.

At last they set out on their journey homewards and came to the Brahmaputra and crossed over the other side. There the Minister seduced the princess. The party finally arrived at Devalajari after passing through Sibsagar, Satiya, Morshing, Bumla and Tsona. The king of Lhasa was delighted to see his new bride and married her with great pomp and ceremony. Soon afterwards, however, he noticed to his great dismay that his wife was pregnant. He realized that his Minister had betrayed him and so the Minister was imprisoned and punished.

The child, that was born, had the body of a human being, the face of a dog and the horns of a goat, and was accordingly named Khi Bu Rowa. When the king saw him, he had the child taken to the forest and left there to die.

As the king deeply loved his beautiful young wife he forgave her previous act of infidelity. In course of time, he had two sons by her, the elder was named Jabdung Ngowang Namje and the younger Japtang Bura. Japtang Bura took over the present Sherdukpens territory and thus became the first "Sherdukpen King".

Route of migration

Japtang Bura first halted near Lumpu in Panchen area (Lumla Circle of Kameng Division) and after a short stay there, he had his first encounter with Bangnis (a tribe inhabiting the Eastern part of Kameng) who used to make frequent raids in this area. He, with his train of porters and servants defeated the Bangni raiders and followed them for fifteen days march, till the latter reached their present home land. There he married a beautiful and fairy-like girl named Stang Ma, who is supposed to be the daughter of a King ruling over and beyond the Gorichen (high snow-capped mountain in the border of Tawang Sub-Division in Kameng Division) towards Tibet. He returned to Panchen with his bride and brought along with him many tails of an animal called Mao-ja-Aming and offered the same to the Panchen people, which they regard as a sacred possession till now. Japtang Bura was very much liked by the Panchen people for his heroic deeds and rendering peace in this area.

After sometime, Japtang Bura again resumed his journey towards South and came to *But* via Mago and Luguthang. He could not stay at *But* peacefully due to the troubles created by the neighbouring tribes and shifted to the present Rupa area. The name of the place where he first set up his capital is Thuik-zong, about four kilometers away from the present habitation site towards Bomdi-La.

CHAPTER II

THE PEOPLE

Ethnic composition

The descendants of Japtang Bura and his servants and porters are called Sherdukpens. Though there are two classes of Sherdukpens, one socially superior to the other, there are no physical features to distinguish one class from the other.

The Sherdukpens belong to Mongoloid stock in appearance. They have fair complexion. flat faces and prominent cheek bones with straight black hair. Their eyes are usually pale to blue and they are of medium height.

Different classes

As has been mentioned above, the Sherdukpens are divided into two classes. The superior class is known as THONG and the inferior one is known as CHHAO. The THONGS are regarded as socially superior because of their royal origin while the CHHAOS are inferior as they were the subjects of THONGS. These two classes ordinarily avoid connubial relation with one another.

Each of the two classes is divided into a number of exogamous clans.

The Chhaos, though socially inferior, form an inseparable part of the local population. Both the classes are believed to have originated from Tibet and settled together in the present Rupa valley. As a tradition, the Chhaos are supposed to work in the agricultural fields of the Thongs, carry their loads or beddings from one place to another, help them in construction of house and other household chores.

A Chhao can never aspire to become a Thong. The social inferiority is manifested on various occasions. For instance in religious ceremonies the Chhaos are asked to sit at a lower position and behind the Thongs. Also the religious offerings and eatables in various ceremonies are only distributed by the Thongs and not by the Chhaos.

As a custom, a Chhao cannot marry a Thong girl and similarly a Thong cannot marry a Chhao girl. But a Chhao can dine with Thongs and he is free to move about the kitchen and other parts of house of a Thong and handle the utensils without any

hesitation. Thus, the question of untouchability does not arise among these people. In recent years, however, a trend of change is perceptible in many of these matters. For instance, the rigidity of restrictions against connubial ties has been much relaxed. There are cases where Chhaos have been allowed to marry Thong girls after payment of fines imposed by the village council.

There is also a growing reluctance on the part of the Thongs to discharge many of the obligations traditionally imposed on them. For instance, they no longer readily respond to the calls of the Thongs to whom they are attached, for rendering assistance in agricultural activities.

A few generations back, some Bhutia families who were professional iron-smiths, immigrated from Tashingaon in Bhutan and settled at Jigaon, with the permission of the Thongs. Though to the outsiders, they are also known as Sherdukpens, to the local community they are known as Yanlaks. The Thongs regard them as their subjects, and this is the main reason why they opposed a separate village status being granted to the Jigaon.

Though the Yanlaks were subjects of Thongs, they were never asked to work in agricultural fields or carry the loads from one place to another. Since they were iron-smiths, they were ordered to provide them the bare necessities of agricultural implements and fire hearths, whenever required. Of course the raw material for the articles required by them has to be procured by Thongs themselves, besides annually they used to give the Yanlaks some presents in the form of cereals and clothes. In addition to the smithy work, another service rendered by the Yanlaks was to carry the loads of betel-nuts and leaves as well as rice which the Kacharese used to offer to the Sherdukpens as a traditional payment, during the Khiksaba festival.

The Yanlaks are also required to prepare the community food in Rupa Gonpa during the Shoshi-wang festivals.

But, now-a-days, Yanlaks do not make the agricultural implements, or fire hearths without getting payment in full for their labour; but they carry the loads of betel-nuts and leaves from the Kachari villages and work during the Wang Festival.

Clans

According to the villagers, Japtang Bura had many sons but he had only five sons from his regular wife. The names of these sons were Thongdokchung, Khrimey, Thonga, Masobi and Thongchi. In due course each son became the founder of a separate

clan. Originally, there were only four clans of Thongs, namely Thongdok, Khrimey, Thonga and Thongchi. The Thongdok clan came in existence after the name of an illegitimate son, Japtang. This son was born through a Monpa girl of Kalaktang, whom Japtang Bura had met during his excursion in that area. It is said that Thongdok was the first son of Japtang. He settled down in his father's capital at Rupa, and became the founder of Thongdok clan which is the oldest and most respected clan of the Thongs. Later, three more clans namely, Khrimey, Thonga and Thongchi were founded after the names of three sons of Japtang. But Masobi did not become the founder of any clan at this time, due to his assignment as the commander of the village guard. As the name implies (Masobi means warrior), he was a brave man and led army contingents to fight enemies whenever needed. The Thongdokchung was included with the Thongdok because of being a new comer.

These original clans continued for a long time, till due to over-population or migration, they split up into more groups and gave rise to many clans. These new clans in the village originated either after the nicknames of some clan members who attained such names due to their special characteristics or due to migration of outsiders who after a long stay and free mixing with the local residents, were taken as part and parcel of the village and were given a separate name. For instance, if a man holding a special position in the society, belonged to a certain family of a particular clan, his family or clan came to be known after this name.

The Thongdok clan was divided into four groups as Thongdok, Thongdokchung, Karma and Khlengthong. The Thongdok-Achung (Achung means middle), as the name implies, was founded by the second oldest son of Japtang's two illegitimate sons.

The Khrimey clan was divided into three groups, namely Khrimey, Masobi and Wangya. Masobi, as it had been mentioned earlier was a brave son of Japtang Bura who ultimately became the founder of Masobi clan. But Wangya clan absolutely consisted of off-springs of out-siders, i.e., Tibetan, Bhutanese, etc., who migrated to Rupa. These people belonged to wealthy families and after a few generations, due to their ties of marriage and consanguinity with Thongs attained the status of equality with the Thongs for all practical purposes. Thus, such immigrant families were given superior status in Sherdukpen society and included in Khrimey clan which was perhaps in the minority at that time.

Similarly the Thonga clan was divided into two groups as Thonga and Lama. However, there has not been any division of the Thongchi clan.

Like Thongs, originally there were four clans of Chhaos namely, Migeji, Monoji, Mijuiji and Duingla. Among the Chhao clans, Duingla clan is more respectable.

Since, Chhaos were the subjects of Thongs, each Chhao clan was attached to a Thong clan as Migeji to Thongdok, Monoji to Thongchi, Mijuiji to Thonga and Duingla to Khrimey.

It is said that the founder of Duingla clan was also a son of Japtang who was born through a woman of Jhuitam village (in Dirang Circle of Kameng Division), whom he had seduced. When his son became very popular as a priest in Dirang area and his fame reached Sherdukpens, he was brought to Rupa by his mother who belonged to an inferior community. Most of the reputed priests (Jijis) among the Sherdukpens hail from Duingla clan and it is Duingla who officiates as the Chief Priest during Khiksaba, the most important festival of the Sherdukpens. Also the Duinglas had (which is still granted) the privilege of using Khrimey as their surname.

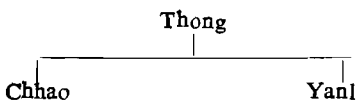
After a certain length of time, some households who were poverty stricken and belonged to politically subjugated communities, migrated to this village from Bhutan and nearby villages of Khuitam, Rahung, Khoina, etc. Such immigrants had to accept the status of subjugation under the Thongs. They were initially linked up with the Thongs who were living in the area from before. After a few generations, they were grouped together and given a separate name—Sinchhaji. Thus, a new clan originated among the Chhaos and was attached to the Masobi clan of the Thongs.

Formerly, in each clan of Chhao, there was one Chief Chhao who was supposed to be a reputed and intelligent man of the clan. Whenever there was any important occasion in the family of a Thong clan, the chief of the respective attached clan of Chhaos was called upon to organise the requisite services. These chief enjoyed the privilege of keeping some servants of their own, who also belonged to their respective clans. The households of these servants of the Chhao chiefs, could be identified by a set of distinct names, like Rangla, Buchilu, Romu, Komu, etc. Besides their Chhao masters, they served the Thong families also, to whom their masters in their turn were attached.

In the past there were altogether ten clans of Thongs and nine clans of Chhaos but Rangla, Buchilu, Romu and Komu clans of Chhaos are not found in any village now-a-days.

From the foregoing data, it is obvious that Sherdukpens society is a combination of hierarchical division as well as segmental division. The hierarchical division is indicated in Chart No. I below :—

Chart I



The Segmental division is indicated by Charts II(a) and II(b).

ORGANIZATION OF SHERDUKPEN SOCIETY

Chart II (a)

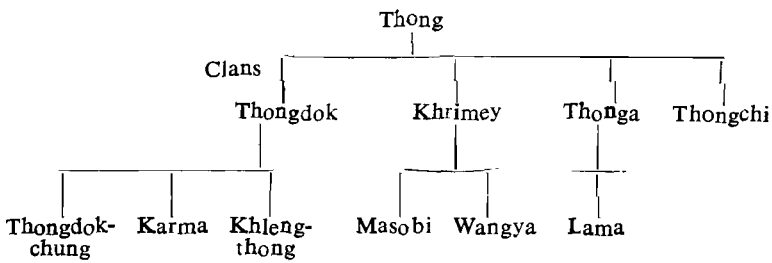
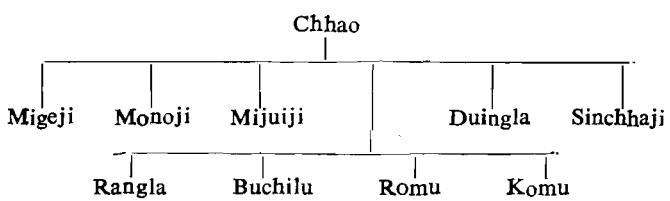


Chart II (b)



At Rupa seven clans of Thongs, viz., Thongdok, Thongdok-chung, Khlengthong, Khrimey, Masobi, Wangya and Thonga and four clans of Chhaos, viz., as Migeji, Mijujji, Duingla and Sinchhaji are found. The Karma, Lama and Thongchi clans of Thong and Monoji clan of Chhao, are not found in this village, though these are found in other Sherdukpen villages (i.e. Shergaon Jigaon, Jomiam, Mukhuthing, Thaungreo).

A table giving the distribution of the households of Rupa by clans is furnished below:—

TABLE 3

Distribution of households by clans

Sl. No.	Name of Clan	No. of house-holds	Population		
			Males	Females	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6
Thong	1 Thongdok . .	2	8	6	14
	2 Thongdokchung .	12	36	40	76
	3 Khlengthong .	1	2	4	70
	4 Khrimey . .	14	34	36	70
	5 Masobi . .	6	19	20	39
	6 Wangya . .	6	17	12	29
	7 Thonga . .	6	21	19	40
Chhao	8 Migeji . .	15	34	43	77
	9 Mijuiji . .	2	6	5	11
	10 Duingla . .	4	9	12	21
	11 Sinchhaji . .	6	19	20	39
	Total .	**74**	**205**	**217**	**422**

It is interesting to note that when the household schedules were canvassed nobody returned himself as Khlengthong or Wangya, and that only one household returned itself as Thongdokchung. It was only at a later stage that their real clan identities were known. The Thongs always claim to be direct descendants of king Japtang Bura, but the above clan names, show a shady origin. They do not like to admit it to their neighbours for fear of loss of face. It is this motive which led them to conceal real clan identity of the first stage of the enquiry. A table giving the

break-up of households and population according to the entries originally made in the household schedule is furnished below:—

TABLE 4

Distribution of households by clan, population and average size of households

Sl. No.	Name of Clan	No. of house-holds	Population			Average size of house-holds
			Males	Females	Total	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Thong					
1	Thongdok . .	14	45	48	93	6·57
2	Thongdokchung .	1	1	2	3	3·00
3	Khrimey . .	22	55	54	109	4·95
4	Masobi . .	5	17	15	32	6·40
5	Thonga . .	6	21	19	40	6·60
	Total . .	**48**	**139**	**138**	**277**	**5·77**
	Chhao					
6	Migeji . .	15	34	43	77	5·13
7	Mijuiji . .	2	6	5	11	5·50
8	Duingla . .	3	7	11	18	6·00
9	Sinchhaji . .	6	19	20	39	6·50
	Total . .	**26**	**66**	**79**	**145**	**5·57**
	Grand Total .	**74**	**205**	**217**	**422**	**5·70**

Out of the 74 households in the village with population of 472, 48 households are those of Thongs with population of 277 and 26 households are those of Chhaos with population of 145.

Language

The villagers speak Sherdukpen dialect which belongs to Tibeto-Burman group of language, but the exact structural details about their dialect are not known. There are slight lexical differences between the dialects spoken by the people of Rupa and Shergaon. According to local legends, the third son of Japtang Bura, who was the founder of Thonga clan and settled at Shergaon, married a Monpa girl of Dirang village. Since the girl did not know the Sherdukpen dialect, she frequently used Monpa words in their day to day discussions. As a result a number of Dirang Monpa words are found in the dialect spoken by the people of Shergaon.

There is no script of Sherdukpen dialect; they use Tibetan script on their prayer flags and religious shrines. Most of the villagers can speak in Assamese as a subsidiary language and some of the people know Hindi, Tibetan and Monpa dialects, as well.

House and house-type

Generally, there are three types of houses in the village, stone house (dichiya-yam), wooden-plank house (wanwa-yam) and bamboo hut (tampla-yam). The stone houses are more costly than the wooden plank ones; they, therefore, are very few in number. The bamboo huts mostly belong to poorer section; it is significant that their number is not much.

All the Sherdukpen houses, except the bamboo huts are double storeyed. In the wooden plank house, the carpenters do not use nails; but nevertheless they build durable structures of roofs, walls, etc., by interlocking the wooden planks.

A table giving the distribution of the houses by type and the population residing in them is furnished below:—

TABLE 5

Distribution of households by type of house and population

Sl. No.	Type of House	No. of houses	Population		
			Males	Females	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Stone houses . . .	6	19	23	42
2	Plank houses . . .	54	159	170	329
3	Huts	14	27	24	51
	Total . .	**74**	**205**	**217**	**422**

The table shows that out of the 74 houses 54 (73%) of total houses are made of wooden planks, 14 (18·9%) are of bamboo and only 6 (8·1%) are of stone.

There is no difference in the construction of the houses of the Thongs and the Chhaos. They are similar in the shape and also in the structural relations with reference to kitchen, cattle-shed, etc. With reference to occupation also the houses cannot be differentiated. But as already indicated, there are definite distinctions with reference to economic status. There are some Chhaos, with good economic status and they have stone houses.

Constructional details and associated rituals in respect of typical houses of different types are furnished below:—

Stone house: The stone houses of this village are double storeyed. The foundation and main walls are built with stones and plastered with mud. The platform, the floor and the wall-shelves are made of thick wooden planks and the frames of the floor and the roof are made of stout wooden beams. The roof is covered with broad wooden slabs and weighted down with big natural stones. There is one stone building in the village having the roof of bamboo mattings.

The stones are brought from near by quarries, cut into rectangular shape with the help of iron hammers procured from plains. The red and smooth, sticky mud is carried from distant places, serves as mortar. The bamboo and wooden beams are brought from far off jungles. Particularly, the bamboos and cane strings are carried from jungles situated at a distance of nine to ten miles from the main village. It takes one and a half day to bring one load of bamboo. The planks are made from pine wood, which can be found within 3-4 miles of the village.

There is no sawer in the village; the planks are made by indigenous method, with the help of big axes. For this purpose two persons with their sharp axes spilt the log into two halves and separate them; then each piece is thinned by axe to the size of the plank. Thus, from one piece only two planks are extracted. The planks made in this way, are very rough and thick. Though it requires hard labour and patience, yet people prefer to construct their houses with planks which last long.

All these materials are collected at least two or three months before the construction of the house. The persons who assist in collecting the materials are not given any wages; but they are fed well every day.

Before laying the foundation of a house, it is essential to select a proper place where the house will be built. First of all, the soil of the proposed site is brought to the village Lama (a priest), who determines through divination accompanied by the chanting of sacred formulate from a holy book, that the particular plot would be auspicious or not. It is only after he declares particular plot to be auspicious, that the selection is made final, otherwise he intending builder of a house will carry on his search for a new plot.

After the plot is finally selected, the Lama fixes an auspicious day for the laying of the foundation stone. On this day, the boundary of the building is first demarcated. Then on each of the four corners of this boundary, a tortoise (Mashasergi-Ripa) is buried, another is buried at the centre. This ritual burial of the tortoises is done by the Lama in the night. These tortoises are brought from Kachari villages in the plains. Along with each tortoise, one handful of a mixture of all types of grains grown in the village is also placed in the foundation and then on the same a bamboo pole with a flag is erected.

The next morning starts the actual construction work. Along with the ordinary workers, three skilled workers, locally known as Ja-po, who are experts in carpentry and masonry are asked by the house owner to participate in the construction. While the skilled workers are paid for their labour, the ordinary workers are not paid anything, they are however fed every day. It is a custom in the tribe, that each household is to render six days of free labour during the construction of the house of a fellow villager. If ever after that the construction remains incomplete, the clan men of the house owner help him to complete the work.

The foundation is completely made of stone and mud-plaster. The stone slabs are systematically laid by the mason, using mud mortar. On the first day one sheep is killed by the owner. The liver and the lungs of the sheep are burnt in fire and the village Lama performs the Yam-Sa-Lumba Puja by reading the holy book Karchik, while the workers carry on their task of construction. At noon, a feast is arranged by the owner, which includes meat, local beer, vegetable and Khrangpu (food made of ground maize). It is offered to all the persons present.

Before taking meal, the clan members of the house owner offer ceremonial scarfs (Khatas) to his as well as to the Lama. The next day a feast is given by his clan members jointly.

When the foundation walls are completed, the Lama performs a Puja called Yamthung-Khan, to start the construction of floor alongwith a frontal extension or platform. The wooden beams slightly longer than the breadth of house are fastened over the foundation walls and thick planks are laid on it nicely. Fish constitute a special item for the feast which is provided on this day.

As soon as the floor is completed, the main walls are raised. These are also made with stones and mud plaster. At the time when the front wall of the house is raised about three or four feet high, the wooden frame of the door is fixed. Then again the stone work is started. The walls are raised perpendicular to the ground and to check the same, the plumb is used by the masons. When walls are built up to the height of the roof, the floor of second storey is constructed. This floor is made with the help of wooden beams and bamboo-mattings. A partition wall of wooden planks is erected in the lower storey, which divides the hall into two compartments. One wooden stair-case is fitted at the extreme corner of the bigger compartment in the lower storey to connect the two floors.

After this comes the stage of the construction of the roof. At the commencement of this also, the Lama fixes an auspicious day. On this day, a worship called Dueng Thue Khan is performed and after this three long poles are brought to the site. Two young boys who are supposed not to have any prior sex experience are asked to perform a dance. They are known as Khengpo. They wear loin clothes and from the waist band of each a wooden model of male organ (phallus) hangs in the front. The dance seems to symbolise a magic so that the house owner is blessed with more children.

After the dance and entertainment for a short while, the three poles are placed to the frame of the roof. One purlin called *dueng* is fitted in the central portion, across the two towering walls and the remaining two purlins (Duengphang) are placed on the side walls. Then many rafters are laid over the purlins, which are tied with cane strings. When the construction of the frame work of the roof is completed, the wooden slates are tiled and the same are weighted down with big stones so that during windy days these may not be blown away. Thus the roof is completed.

Last but not the least, is the ceremony of fixing a prayer flag on the top of the roof. For this purpose, the sister of the house owner (Miring), who is dressed in new ceremonial garments, is made to sit on a bamboo-cot (chang) . Then the cot is lifted to the height of the roof by the villagers, then she climbs on the roof with the prayer flag and hoists the same on the top.

On this occasion, she brings one yak, the cost of which is borne by herself and hands over the same to her brother. The brother or house-owner offers one ceremonial scarf and some quantity of local beer to the yak.

Next day, the house warming ceremony called (Tashi topa) is performed by the lama on the platform of the house.

During the puja, one wooden stand covered with a piece of white cloth is placed on the platform and over it one silver cup containing flour, one bronze cup containing barley, one bronze plate and one copper jug (containing water and having a silver lid) are kept. The silver cup containing flour is called tashis. Three spots on the upper rim of the tashi are smeared with butter. After this, the Lama with lama drum and a small bell in his hand starts chanting mantras. From time to time he beats the drum, offers water and grains to the deities, and prays to them to ensure that the house remains free of all sufferings, sins and evil spirits.

On this occasion the whole village including the ga-po is invited to a feast. An yak is killed and profuse quantity of local drink (phak, arah and phakju) is prepared. The food is cooked in many big utensils; it consists of rice, Khrangpu (cooked maize) vegetables and Yak's meat. After the feast, the boys and girls of the village perform dances followed by songs. After this ceremony, while the other villagers return to their homes, the masons and the carpenters cannot. There is a taboo against their going to their respective homes for three days after the performance of the house warming ceremony. Neither can they live in the house constructed by them, during these three days. They, therefore, stay in a temporary hut constructed for them by the villagers.

As mentioned earlier, these skilled workers are paid for their labour. Among them, the one who is most expert and who supervises the entire construction, is given one horse, two pieces of cloth, one brass plate and one silver cup. The total money value of all these articles would be about Rs. 400/-. The person next to him is given one brass vessel, two endi clothes and one silver cup, the

total money value of all these articles being about Rs. 180/-. The third person is given one brass vessel, two pieces of endi and one silver cup. In his case the total money value of the articles is about Rs. 160/-.

In addition to these payments in kind, some payment in cash is also made. At the end of the house warming ceremony, each of the skilled workers is given Rs. 25/- distributed equally on five spots called (Rapse, Jolithen, Thap, Kao and Jung). Besides, the wife of each of the three persons is given an endi garment (valued at approximately Rs. 35/- each) in consideration of the fact that while the work was going on, everyday she used to bring food for her husband from the home. All these things are worth about Rs. 350/- only.

The lama who officiated in all the rituals is given one thap (hearth stand), one brass vessel or Rs. 40/- in cash.

The sister who brought the Yak is presented one silver cup set, three Sinkoos (female garment), one big brass plate and Rs. 18/- in cash. Some of the other details regarding a typical house are as follows:

The height of the basement is five feet only. The stone house is normally 46 feet long, 19 feet wide and 20 feet high. The sizes of the mainhall, rapse and platform are 30′ × 15′ × 8′, 12′ × 15′ × 8′ and 19′ × 12′ respectively. The door is 5 feet high and 4 feet wide.

Decorative elements: There is no carving of decorative designs on the wooden planks or logs either inside or outside the house. But in front of the house three wooden pieces carved in the shape of phallus (called Dung Rhongmu) are hung from the middle and the extreme corners of the roof. The Sherdukpen, believe that the three Dung-rhongmu prevent the evil spirits from entering the house.

The basement of the house is locally known as Yam-Lam-khuin, and is meant for sheltering sheep and goats and keeping grass for the livestock. The platform (Zung) is mainly used for drying harvested crops; besides in the day time the children play there. The door (Kao) which is the only entrance to the house (Yam) has got iron bolts. This is a recent development. The first storey consists of two compartments. The bigger one is meant for cooking food and living. It is like a big hall; the right side inside it is called Yamalueng, the left side is called Lahshra.

There are two fire hearths (broup) inside the hall,—one is very close to the entrance, the other is about 10 feet apart. Just above each hearth, a bamboo structure (bakhi) is hung from the ceiling where fish, meat and sometimes grains are kept to dry. Both the side walls are fitted with wall shelves and racks. The rack, on the right side of the hall is called Khoster-pham is used for keeping small agricultural implements, water pots and less valuable things. The wall-shelf on the left side is called pray and is used for keeping utensils and other costly things like silver cups. There is another pray fitted on the partition wall between the two compartments of the lower storey. The stair case to go to the second storey is known as lathen. 'The smaller compartment in the rear side of the house is called rapse and this is meant for performing worship and keeping ornaments cash money and valuable clothes and carpets. Usually a chhesam (shelf where butter lamps and photograph of important Lamas are kept) is placed in the rapse. There are four windows (Kao-du) in the first storey. No bed-stead is used in the house; the family members sleep on the floor by the side of the hearth which is called Lahshra.

The second storey is meant only for storing crops and some household articles like baskets, cane and bamboo mats, etc. It is known as chasing. The roof of the house is called Yam-fuikpa and the stone steps leading to the platform are known as dostang. The stone walls and the planks are locally known as **dichya** and **wa-wa** respectively.

There is no private room or compartment in the house, even during child birth, the delivery takes place in one corner of Yam-alueng.

Constructional details and other particulars for wooden houses : The foundation of this type of house is built with stones, but the main structure is made of wooden logs and planks. Half of the main walls are built with wooden planks and the remaining half and the roof are built with bamboo-mattings. The platform which is mostly approached through a wooden ladder is also made of planks.

The structural details and the ceremonies performed during the construction of wooden houses are the same as in case of a stone house. The furniture, the wall shelves fitted inside and the names of the different parts are also the same. Thus, the only difference between a stone house and a wooden house lies in the material used in the walls and the roof.

When the foundation and the floor of the house are completed the walls are built. In case of each wall, three rectangular wooden beams, (two at the extreme corners and one at middle) are first erected on the stone foundation upto the height of the roof. Then planks having both ends thinned by axe are placed in a panel one after another. In this way the planks are fixed upto the height of the first storey. A door is made at the right corner of the front wall. Its size is 4′ × 3′. On the left side of the door, a small hole is drilled which is used to open the door by removing a wooden bolt fitted from inside. Now-a-days in some houses iron chain and hooks are used to lock the door.

The floor of the second storey is constructed by using wooden beams and bamboo-matting and the walls are made by fixing bamboo-mattings to the vertical beams with cane strings. The frame of the roof is done in the same way as in case of stone house but the wooden beams are not used on the roof. Here the bamboo-mattings are spread over the roof structure. To check the leakage of rainwater, three or four coatings of bamboo-matting are done on the roof.

Size

The height of the ground floor or basement is five feet. The wooden house is normally 45′ long, 18′ wide and 18′ high. The sizes of the main hall (rapse) and platform are 30′ × 16′ × 7½′ and 18′ × 8′ respectively. The door is 4 feet high and 3 feet wide.

Constructional details and other particulars for bamboo-huts : The bamboo huts in this village are single storeyed constructions. These are made of wooden poles, planks and bamboo-mattings. Their size varies according to the size of the household. Though the Lama is consulted in the selection of the site and though his presence is essential during the laying of the foundation and construction of the roof, no elaborate rites, as in case of stone and wooden plank houses, are performed in case of bamboo-huts.

Shortly, after the selection of the site, the construction work starts on an auspicious day. Firstly, the wooden poles are erected according to the size and then the bamboo-mattings are fixed to constitute the four walls. These are tied to the bamboo poles with cane strings. On the first day of the construction, the owner

kills a sheep and gives a feast to the fellow villagers helping him. Along with meat, cooked maize and home brewn beer are offered.

The next day, the frame of the roof is made by using wooden beams and bamboo poles, and on the same bamboo-mattings are spread. Lastly, the wooden planks are laid on the floor.

There is no platform in this type of house.

On the day the construction of the house is completed, house warming ceremony (TASHI-TOPA) is performed by the Lama; after this the house-owner gives a feast to the people present.

Masons and carpenters are not engaged in building a bamboo-hut.

One year or so after the construction of a house, the house-owner erects a long prayer flag in front of the house. It is believed that, it ensures prosperity for the inmates of the house.

On an auspicious day, a long strip of cloth printed with Tibetan prayers throughout the length, is fitted on one side of a long wooden pole about 70 to 80 feet in length. On the top of this pole is fitted a wooden spire, with several colourful strips of cloth. The house-owner invites a number of people and the Lama to participate in the ceremony. The Lama chants some sacred formulae and then the people participating in the ceremony are asked to hoist the flag. They lift the pole and place it in position. After this the Lama performs *Darsingramne* puja on the platform of the house; the details of the worship are the same as in case of house warming ceremony. After the puja, the house-owner and his wife come on the platform; they are offered ceremonial scarfs by close relatives and clan members. After this *prasad* (food offered to the deity) is distributed among all those present. The *prasad* on this occasion includes a special preparation called *frum* which is made of fermented milk. Lastly is offered home brewn beer and invariably it is consumed in profuse quantity.

The prayer flag is changed after two or three years when it is completely torn out due to rain and wind.

Dress

The villagers generally use simple dress and most of the garments are procured from the plains of Assam, some are obtained from the neighbouring Monpa villages as well.

A Sherdukpen male usually wraps a long piece of cloth, locally known as *sape,* diagonally round the upper part of the body. It is made of endi silk and the size is about 2½ yards long and 1½ yards wide. The *sape* reaches just above the knees. Inside the *sape,* a shirt is worn which is open in the front. It is called *luduk* and made of either endi silk or mill made cloth. A thick but long hand-loom cloth called *mukhak* is wrapped round the waist. It is of maroon colour with nice designs. The head-gear normally used by them is a cap (*gordam*) made of yak's hairs. It is very thick and one side is decorated with white cockade (chitpu bomchan); on the other it is decorated with a white; red or white strips of cloth, which is known as gordam-san. Some people wear fur caps procured from the Monpas or felt hats purchased from Bhutia traders, who visit the village, once in two or three years. *Gordam* is sometimes brought from Tawang area as well but the cockades and colourful strips (*stak*) are locally arranged. One hand-woven bag called *daun,* one of the best patterns of weaving in the village, is hung on one side. A thick piece of cloth known as *bogre* is also tied across the shoulders hanging on the back. *Bogre* is locally made with the fibre of plants *hongchong* and *hongche.* Occasionally a silver dao is also tucked across the waistband or *mukhak.*

On the lower part of the body, the males use a loin cloth known as *angsee.* Shoes are seldom used. Only during festivities and visit to plains markets, long leather shoes are worn. These are procured from the Monpas of Tawang and sometimes from Kalimpong (a trading centre in Darjeeling District of West Bengal).

In recent years considerable change is perceptible in the dress of the Sherdukpens. The young folk and even some grown up people have started wearing pants, shirts, coats and shoes, brought from markets of the plains of Assam and Bomdi-La. But, there has not been much change in the dress of the females.

The main garment of a Sherdukpen woman is *sinkoo* which is made of endi silk and is purchased from the Kacharis of the plains. It is a sleeveless, long and wide white gown, covering the body from shoulder to the legs. The sinkoo is tied round the waist with a long piece of cloth called *mukhak.* A full sleeved jacket, reaching below the hips is worn over the sinkoo. It's

front is open and no buttons are used. The borders are embroidered with coloured cotton thread. The name of this jacket is luduk. One white or red rectangular piece of mill made cloth (*snap*) is also worn over these garments. The two upper ends of the *snap* are tied together in the front, and normally hung on the back. The women do not wear any head gear. On the ceremonial occasions they wear a Monpa jacket with colourful designs over the *sinkoo* in place of luduk.

The Sherdukpen males have their hair cut short. The females keep the hair short during childhood and after attaining puberty, they allow the same to grow and fall on the face. This makes natural a sort of veil till they are married. In the month of November (*Bruik-da*) every year, on the occasion of "Thongdok rek phikpa" puja all the adolescent boys and girls of the village assemble at the *mane chankong* near the Kakaling (gate at the entrance to the village). The Lama officiates in the Puja where he offers rice, fish and home brewn beer to the village deity. When the puja is over, the grown up boys order the girls to keep their hairs long and as per tradition and the girls obey the orders. From that day onward they do not cut the hair and allow the same to grow till they are married.

The married women plait their hair and keep the same on the back; sometime they tie up their hair in a loose bun and allow the same to hang on the back.

The women cover their calves with a type of mill-made cloth, known as *luffee*, to protect the calves from *Dim-dams* (a species of flies). The upper end of *luffee* is tied below the knee with a cotton thread; while the other end is left free. Ordinarily they do not wear shoes. Only during festive occasions, monpa shoes (chemjongs) made of thick hand-made cloth and having attractive designs are used by some of the woman of the village belonging to well-to-do families. These shoes are imported from Tawang area.

Recently, a new garment has been introduced by the village girls. It is a full sleeved short blouse, known as *ithee*. It covers only the bosom. Ithee is a colourful mill-made cloth and is used in place of luduk. Most probably, it is an imitation from the Kacharis whom they visit annually. Moreover, the use of *luffee* is declining.

A table giving the names of clothes ordinarily worn by males and females and the money value of the same is furnished below :—

TABLE 6

Names of the clothes ordinarily worn by males and females and money value of the same

Dress					
Male cloth			Female cloth		
Sl. No.	Name	Cost (In Rs.)	Sl. No.	Name	Cost (In Rs.)
1	2	3	1	2	3
1	Sape	30·00	1	Sinkoo	35·00
2	Mukhak	25·00	2	Mukhak	25·00
3	Luduk	20·00	3	Luduk	24·00
4	Gordam	5·00	4	Snap	10·00
5	Gordam-San	0·50	5	Monpa Jacket	20·00
6	Angsee	6·00	6	Luffee	3·00
7	Daun	15·00	7	Ithee	3·00
8	Bogre	20·00	8	Chemjongs	15·00
9	Shoes	30·00			
	Total	**151·50**			**135·00**

There is no difference between the Thongs and the Chhaos in their dress. But in either section, there are some differences based on economic status. The poorer people wear the rough quality of cloth and also possess the same in much less number than the richer ones.

The custom of tattooing their body for decoration does not prevail among the Sherdukpens. But some boys and girls show their faces and lips with a thick paste of a resin called *bachichdong* and black soot. It is believed that this is a case of adoption of a culture trait from their neighbours, the Akas.

Ornaments

The Sherdukpen males rarely use any ornament. Some, however, wear bangle, called *mabung thiring*, which is made of either silver or brass. On ceremonial occasions, sometimes, they wear a necklace of precious stones called *khee*. Again, some wear a locket round their neck, called *phaun-ney gao*. This is made of silver and fitted with two tiger teeth. The village smiths make this type of locket. In contrast to necklace, finger-rings made of silver are found quite frequently among the males. Such finger-rings are called *chhudop*.

The women are very fond of ornaments, most of which are made locally. The common ornaments worn by females are as follows:—

Nin thiring: It is a flat piece of silver moulded in circular shape and worn as a bangle. It is made by the local smiths.

Lhaso thiring: This is silver bracelet studded with colourful beads and worn on the wrist. It is purchased from Tawang area.

Jorok: It is a triangular silver ornament studded with beads and worn on the back. Mainly it is used to close up the wide neck of sinkoo and is purchased from Tawang.

Nin-gao: This is a silver ornament of cylindrical shape which is worn over the chest. It is procured from the plains of Assam.

Ma dilee: It is a semi-circular ornament of silver worn over the chest.

Nganker: It is a chain work of silver, worn over the chest.

Nin-gnus: This is made of silver in the shape of bulb and is worn by the women in their ears on ceremonial occasions only.

Besides the above mentioned ornaments, women wear bead necklaces of various colours. These are brought from the markets in the plains. The women belonging to well-to-do families also wear *khujring, sin-gnu* and *Kongra pineur*. Among them, *Khuiring* is a necklace of precious stones procured from Tibet; *sin-gnu* is made of pure gold and the shape is similar to that of *nin-gnus*. It is also procured from Tibetan traders; *Kongba-pinzur* is a gold ornament worn round the neck by females.

The table giving the money value of various ornaments used by the Sherdukpens is furnished below :—

TABLE 7

Money value of various ornaments used by the Sherdukpens

Sl. No.	Name of Ornament	Cost (In Rupees)
1	2	3
1	Mubang Thiring	3·00
2	Khee	150·00
3	Chhudop	2·00
4	Phaun-ney Gao	5·00
5	Nin-thiring	20·00
6	Lhaso Thiring	35·00
7	Jorok	40·00
8	Nin-gao	35·00
9	Ma Dilee	15·00
10	Nganker	50·00
11	Nin-gnus	15·00
12	Khujring	300·00
13	Sin-gnu	200·00
14	Kongba Pinzur	250·00
15	Bead Necklace	0·50

In addition to the above, silver ring *Chhudop* are also used by the females. Their price varies according to the size. The minimum price of a ring is Rs. 2.00 while the rings studded with precious stones may cost upto Rs. 10.00.

Household goods

The household goods of the Sherdukpens are numerous and includes such things as utensils, weapons of chase, agricultural and fishing implements, various type of containers and wooden furniture.

The utensils used by the people are not made in the village except for a few bamboo and cane vessels. They are mostly purchased from markets in the plains, like Rangapara, Udalguri, etc., and also Bomdi-La and Tawang.

For storing maize-beer (phak), a bamboo container called *Kachung* is made in the village itself. A conical bamboo sieve (Khoter) is also made here. A long cane bag called *thok,* which is used for sqeezing the fermented maize is another indigenous product.

In the preparation of Tibetan tea also locally made utensils are used to a considerable extent. For instance for this purpose they use a cylindrical bamboo jar and a piston known as *Jandong.*

The utensils meant for cooking are mostly made of aluminium and imported from out side. The food is cooked in aluminium vessels (deckchies) and served in brass or sometimes in bronze plates. During ceremonial feasts, the food is cooked in big brass vessels called *tao.* Each *tao* costs about Rs. 100.00 and is generally purchased from Udalguri market. When the *taos* are not used for cooking purposes, water is stored in them.

In every household, there is a water carrying pot of brass, known as *midir.* Some rich households possess a costly vessel called *jat,* which is made of an alloy of brass, copper and silver metals. It costs about Rs. 300.00 each and is considered to be a prestige symbol. The wealth of a household is judged by the number of Jats possessed by it. Now-a-days, it is not at all available in the market. In the past there were some smiths in Tawang area who made these alloy vessels; but at present days such smiths are not found there. The *jat* is not used for ordinary purposes; but on ceremonial occasions water is stored in it. Every house is furnished with two fire stands (*han*) made of iron and procured from the plains of Assam or the smiths of the village Gigaon. Its money value is about Rs. 30.00 only.

Silver cups constitute another type of important household article. There are two types of silver cups; the most common is *nin-thuleng* which is meant for serving beer to the guests. The number of *nin-thuleng* in a household depends on its economic status. The other type of silver cup is known as *nin.* It is possessed by very few households. It is a costly and big cup; and on it signs of zodiac are inscribed. It is believed that its presence in the house brings good fortune to the household. It costs about Rs. 200.00 and is procured from Bhutanese traders. In addition to

these silver cups, some cups made of China-clay are also found in most of the houses. These are also purchased from Bhutanese traders.

The main weapons of chase are bows (*lhee*) and arrows (*mit*). They also have quiver, called *jeeh*. Previously, the bows and arrows were used for hunting and war purposes, but now-a-days these are meant for hunting only. There are 12 households in the villages which possess guns (*michen*). Another important weapon used by them is dao or bill-hook. Two kinds of daos are found in a Sherdukpen house; one as called handu, is made of steel and is used for felling small trees and sacrificing sheep or yaks. The other known as tung-handu has silver sheath and handle. It is used for light domestic works.

Besides the above household goods, some furniture is also found in every house. Among the furniture, wall-shelves, racks, floor mats and carpets are common. The wall-shelves and racks are made from planks and fitted inside the house. The floor mats are of either cane or bamboo, but the carpets which are very costly and made of wool are procured from Tawang Monpas or through the Bhutanese traders. The price of these carpets varies according to the size. Being in close touch with plains of Assam many items of consumer goods like mirrors, rugs, soaps, torch light and hurricane lanterns are also used by many of the households. A table giving the distribution of the households with reference to the type of consumer goods obtained from the plains is furnished below :—

TABLE 8

Distribution of households with reference to the type of consumer goods obtained from the plains

Sl. No.	Items of furniture and other goods	No. of house-holds using	Procured from
1	2	3	4
1.	Wall-shelves . . .	60	Locally made
2.	Carpets	52	Tawang and Bhutanese
3.	Cane & Bamboo mats .	41	Locally made
4.	Bedstead . . .	2	Locally made

TABLE 8—*concld.*

1	2	3	4
5.	Benches	3	Locally made
6.	Rugs	44	Plains markets, and from Tibetans
7.	Mirrors	34	Plains markets and Bomdi-La
8.	Soaps	53	Bomdi-La market
9.	Torch light . . .	10	Plains markets
10.	Hurricane Lantern . .	18	Plains markets
11.	Mosquito nets . .	6	Rangapara Bazar
12.	Radio	1	Gauhati
13.	Camera	1	Gauhati

It is interesting to note that six households of the village possess mosquito nets, though there is no need of the same in the village itself. These are very useful in their migration camp, where mosquitoes carrying malaria germs are plenty. One household in the village, possesses a radio and a camera which on the one hand, shows the level of economy of the household, and on the other, the new horizon of material culture that is revealing itself to the villagers. The owner of the radio and the camera is a shopkeeper, named Shri Tsiring. The radio is a "Two band Philips' purchased for Rs. 200.00 from Gauhati in 1960, and the camera is a box type, worth of Rs. 30.00 only.

Hidden treasure

It is worth mentioning here that the villagers keep most of their valuable household goods hidden in the jungle. The hidden treasure includes big brass vessels (tao), jats, costly ornaments, such as khee, khujring, khonga pinzur, costly carpets and extra utensils. Particularly during the migration in the winter every household keeps the household goods which are not required to be taken to the migration camp in the hidden places.

These hidden places are underground cells or caves in the nearby jungle. The motive of selecting the hidden places which are locally known as *michhing khyun* is to protect the valuable

goods from the outbreak of fire in the village and secondly, to keep them secure from thieves when the people go to their migration camp.

The site for *michhing khyun* is selected in the day time but the work of digging the underground cells is undertaken in the night time. Two or three persons including one person of Chhao clan attached to the clan of the family concerned go to the site and dig a big bunker according to the requirement. First, big vesseis are placed inside in *michhing khyun;* the ornaments and small articles wrapped in cloth are kept inside the big vessels like jat and tao. After the entrance articles have been deposited. The entrance is closed by raising a stone wall or placing a big boulder and the covering the same with fallen leaves.

The hidden places are only known to the owner and his Chhao who serves his family on all occasions. The owner seldom visits this place personally. By their code of honour, it is the Chhao who looks after the security of the place. Whenever any thing is required to be placed there or taken out, only the Chhao goes there and does the needful. The son or sons are not allowed to see the *michhing khyun* till the owner becomes very old. In case the owner dies without being able to show the place to his heir. the Chhao takes the person concerned to the hidden place and shows him each and every article inside there. It is necessary to perform a puja called *phounha-pa* before opening the gate or entering of the *michhing khuyan.* The Puja is a very simple one, it requires only burning of incense and offering of bread to the forest deity. It does not require the presence of Lama or any priest.

It is believed that if this puja is not performed before entering the cell, water will leak inside and all the articles will be spoiled.

Food and drink

Though Buddhist by religion, the Sherdukpens are non-vegetarian. They relish the meat of yak, sheep, deer (except spotted deer), wild boar, dove and partridge. But they do not eat dog, monkey, jackal, tiger, rat, snake and insect of any kind.

There is some difference in the food habit depending on whether the person is a Thong or a Chhao. For instance a Thong does not eat beef, goat meat, fowl and egg. But a Chhao

is not required to observe any restriction in respect of these items. Again while a male can eat the meat of mithun (bos fronteles) a female is refrained from eating it.

Normally, the meal in a Sherdukpen household consists of cooked maize or rice, vegetables, local beer and fish. Meat is a rare dish which they take occasionally. Maize is the main staple food of the people. It is grown in the village, while rice is imported from Kacharis villages of Assam; or sometimes it is purchased in the market at Bomdi-La. Fish is caught with bamboo traps in the nearby rivers in the autumn and part of it is dried and preserved for other seasons.

They grow millets, wheat and pulses in addition to vegetables like potatoes, gourds, brinjals, beans, pumpkins, chillies, spinach, etc.

The food is normally prepared by women; sometimes the grown up children of the family assist them. It is the duty of the house-wife to serve the food to all members of the household. First of all the small children are served; then other members dine together irrespective of sex or age.

All the members of the household take their food in *yam-alueng*. Whenever any guest comes, he or she is also served meal alongwith the family members. However, it is the guest who first starts eating the food.

Seasonal variation of food : Maize is the main cereal of the villagers. It is consumed throughout the year. During the winter when they temporarily migrate to Doimara in the foothills, they completely depend on the Kacharis and the markets in the plains for their food. Because of a traditional relation, which will be described later, they get rice free from the Kacharis; and they purchase vegetables and other requirements from the weekly markets of the area. During their temporary migration, they carry with them chillies and *jabrang* to be used as condiments. also they carry beans and dry fish for own consumption as well as exchange. When they return from their winter camp in March, they carry back home the surplus paddy received from the Kacharis. During April-June, they harvest, barley, etc., and the same contribute to the diversification of their cereal dish. Besides they collect honey from the jungle during this season; sometimes they are fond of consuming honey mixed with rice.

By July, harvesting of buck-wheat, millets, etc., starts. Vegetables like potato, brinjal, gourd, etc., also come up in their kitchen gardens. Simultaneously, maize starts ripening. The villagers, particularly the children, relish eating green cobs of maize roasted on fire, July-September is the busiest season and the people are to work hard. The villagers tend to eat more food during this season than ordinarily. Their dish also get more diversified. Sometimes fish are caught from the nearby rivers and cooked with *Jabrang*.

During all seasons meat is taken occasionally. Some rear cow and they take milk. But mostly they sell the same in local shops or to the officials who have come from outside.

Normally, the people take their meals thrice a day, in the morning, at noon and at night. The morning, noon and night meals are known locally as *niru-ha, hatun-ha* and *niawu-ha* respectively.

In the morning *phak* is prepared and taken by all members of the family which is followed by morning meal consisting of *khrangpu*, vegetables and sometimes fish. It is the common meal for all villagers. However, in some rich families Tibetan tea is taken in place of *phak*.

The lunch comprises of *khrangpu* or rice, dal of beans and chillies mixed with *suyuk* grounded into a thick paste. During ceremonial occasions the lunch is supplemented with *pita* which is a rare dish and taken with avidity.

The mid-day meal is normally taken at home but in the working season, particularly during cultivation time, it is carried alongwith them to the fields in a tiffin carrier made of cane locally known as *bangchung*. These tiffin carriers having beautiful designs are procured from Bhutan.

In the evening when, the people return from their daily work, first of all they take *phak*. Afterwards the lady of the house or her grown up daughter prepares dinner. The dinner mainly consists of *Khrangpu* or *bokpi* and vegetables. If it is winter, fish is prepared as an additional item for dinner. They always take dry chillies in the meal.

The villagers prepare different dishes out of the cereals. The following are the common preparations made in the village:—

Khrangpu: First, the maize is ground with the help of grinding stone. Then water is boiled in an aluminium dekchi and the ground maize is mixed in it and allowed to boil again. When the maize is almost half-boiled, it is stirred by wooden spoons till it turns into a thick paste. When finally cooked, it is taken with vegetables and chillies.

Nadop-ha: Paddy is pounded in a wooden mortar with the help of a wooden pestle and is then winnowed nicely. Now, the rice is kept in an aluminium vessel and the required quantity of water is poured into it. The vessel is placed over the fire hearth and rice is boiled, till it is cooked properly. This is supposed to be a rich food.

It is made out of finger-millet or *jumu* (fox-tail). Finger-millet is turned into flour with the help of grinding stones and poured into a pot which is kept over the fire for boiling. The contents are stirred with a wooden spoon, till it becomes doughy. Now the *bokpi* is ready and the whole mass is turned into cakes and served to the family members with vegetables.

Pita: It is a delicious dish which is prepared on special occasions. For preparing *pita*, the flour of maize, barley and *gechin* (Kind of millet) are the required ingredient. The flour is kneaded into a dough by adding water. Then it is put into a wooden device called *pita-hing* which turns the whole dough into the shape of thick and long wire. The wiry substance is cut into small pieces. Then in a sauce-pan, it is first fried with mustard oil and later on boiled by mixing water, salt and chillies. When cooked, it is served in bowls of China clay or plates.

Chomo: It is made out of *jumu* flour which is cooked in oil and onion with the addition of *Jabrang* to make it more tasty.

Drinks

People are very much fond of their local drinks. The most common drink is *phak* (maize beer) which is taken by persons of all ages including the children. It is taken two or three times a day; once in the morning before going to cultivation or other work, then in afternoon with meal and in the evening when they return from work. There are two

other varieties of drinks, i.e., ***phakju*** and ***arah***. These two drinks are generally taken during household ceremonies and festive occasion.

The methods of preparation of different types of drink are as follows :

Phak : It is generally prepared from maize. The pounded maize is first boiled in a big vessel (*tao*) made of copper. When it is half boiled the container is taken out of the oven and allowed to cool down. Rice procured from the market and leaves of *Sangkhya* (a wild hurb) are powdered in a husking machine and then mixed with cooked maize. The whole mass is now stirred and mingled thoroughly. After that it is transferred into a big shallow bamboo basket and kept in a safe place, generally in the second storey of house for a week or two. Since *Sangkhya* is a fermenting agent, it makes the whole substance fermented quickly. Whenever *phak* is to be prepared, the lady of the house takes out a desired quantity of fermented maize in an aluminium *dekchi* and brings it to the hearth. The other accessories required for preparing *phak* consist of *Khotek* (Conical bamboo-sieve) and *thok* (a long cane bag). These accessories are first of all cleaned with hot water then the *khoter* is fitted over *Kachung*. Then the lady of the house fills the *thok* with the fermented maize and squeezes the same firmly with both hands; at this the beer rushes out through the tiny holes and is collected in the *Kachung*. The brewed maize is put into one *dekchi* and hot water is mixed in it. Again this substance is transferred to *thok* and squeezed. In this way same quantity of maize is brewed two or three times.

The beer is poured into cups with the help of *chyok*, a big spoon made of aluminium or brass and is served to all members of the family and guests. This drink is considered to have good nutrition value and contains very low percentage of alcohol.

Arah : It contains high percentage of alcohol. The fermented maize or rice is distilled in a big cylindrical container, made of tin or other metal. The cylinder is filled with the fermented mass and water is poured into it. One cup is kept hanging inside, very close to the upper end and the mouth of the container is closed with a lid. Then it is kept over hearth and boiled, when whole substance inside the container starts boiling the water and alcoholic contents of the mixture evaporate and deposited on the inner surface of the lid by cooling process as the cold

water is placed over the lid of container. As the vapour changes into water drops, the latter naturally fall in the hanging cup due to gravitational force. The matter deposited in the cup is the actual *arah;* later on, it is diluted with water and collected in the bottles.

Phakju : Water is poured in the vessel of fermented maize or rice and kept as it is for some days. During this period it becomes strong and liquid is extracted with the help of a spoon which is filled in empty bottles. Its alcoholic content is more than that of *phak* and its colour is changed from dull to yellow.

Child-birth

Pregnancy is recognised by the cessation of menstruation; but some of the experienced women of the village having one or two issues, can tell the correct date of their conception. According to an informant, Shri Rinchin Dorjee, his wife who is a mother of six children, could tell him about her fourth pregnancy just after one day of her conception. It is said that the woman who has conceived, feels giddiness, pain in chest and is tempted to eat clay from the next morning.

That there cannot be any conception without sex union is well understood; there is no belief that intrusion of ancestral spirit is responsible for conception. But at the same time, it is believed that sex and union by itself cannot cause birth, unless there is god's blessing.

There are no restrictions for the expectant mother for the first three months of her pregnancy. She attends all the routine indoor and outdoor works and takes usual diet alongwith other members of the family. But she refrains from drinking *arah* after one month of pregnancy. After three months, she is not allowed to do hard work either in cultivation or home and is restricted from going to distant places. After about five months of conception, visiting to distant places is completely stopped and her conjugal life is also restricted because of the belief her sexual union from this time onward may be harmful for the foetus. When the expectant mother approaches her advanced stage of pregnancy, she is not allowed to go away from the village for any kind of work; even in home she is given very light works to do, and a great care is taken by the household members to give her maximum comforts.

During the pre-natal period, the woman is prescribed a special diet, which besides, rice *Khrangpu* and vegetables includes honey, ghee of yak and fish. The consumption of alcoholic drinks and chillies is reduced.

There is no restriction for other members of the family during pre-natal period in regard to their diet, work, conjugal life and other matters.

During the third month of the pregnancy, a ceremony called *kharam* is observed. For this purpose on an auspicious day a priest is summoned by the house owner. One cup of mixture of food grains (which includes all varieties of grains grown in the village) is given to the priest, who after chanting some sacred formulae buries the grains in a nearby field. Similarly, one more ceremony is performed after completion of the five months of pregnancy, it is called *lobrang*. On this occasion the image of a human being, made of a maize-flour and one full cup of grains are taken to the jungle by the priest. There the priest chants some sacred formulae and returns to the village, leaving the above things in the jungle. This ceremony is performed for the welfare of the child and the mother.

No special preparations are made for delivery. When the expectant mother feels pains and sensation of child delivery, two elderly women of the village are called upon to perform the duties of indigenous *dai*.

As a custom, one of the women should be an elderly Chhao, whose clan is attached to the clan of this Thong household concerned. She assists the other woman in cleaning the placenta, giving bath to the child and cutting the umbilical cord of the child. If the expectant mother is a Chhao, no Thong woman is called upon for nursing but only women of the same class are summoned. However, rigidity in such matters is slackening now-a-days and it is not necessary for a Chhao woman to nurse the Thong mother during child delivery. For instance, when the sixth child of Rinchin Dorjee was born, his wife was attended by his mother's sister, Peima only and no Chhao woman was called on this occasion.

When the wife of Rinchin Dorjee felt labour pain in the evening, she was confined to a corner of the normal sleeping room as there was no separate room in the house for this purpose. The other members of the household including the expectant

father slept in the same room in the night though a little away from the place of confinement. No bleeding or extra clothes were used during the time of the delivery, except for one cane mat on which she was made to sit on her knees and leaning forward with hands resting on the floor. The labour pain continued for three hours and the delivery was normal.

After the birth of the child, Peima cut the umbilical cord with the help of a knife and kept it along with the placenta on a piece of old cloth. The baby was given a hot water bath in a brass vessel and thereafter was wrapped in a new cloth. The mother, as is the custom did not take bath for two days. The placenta was disposed of by Peima in the courtyard of the house.

By tradition, the umbilical cord is severed and placenta is disposed of by a woman of the attached Chhao clan. In case the expectant mother feels immense pain during the time of delivery, the village priest is asked to perform puja to get rid of evil spirits, which are supposed to have their effect on the mother. By performing such puja, it is said that the delivery becomes normal.

In the confinement corner, fire is lit to warm the child, and the mother as well as for heating water for their bath. Besides, worn out pieces of cloth and rug are kept for cleaning the refuse, etc. The bed of the mother includes one cane mat, one rug and one blanket.

Though the mother remains in the confinement place for ten to fifteen days, her pollution period is only three days, during which, it is a taboo for her to touch the utensils and other articles of the kitchen. However, after three days, she is free to handle any article of the household. During the confinement period she is offered *phak* mixed with butter (Ghee of Yak) and fish, and meat. Ghee and cooked rice are given in good quantity to recoup her health. She is not allowed to take *bokpi, khrangpu* or chillies, which are hard for digestion. This type of diet is served till she recoups her health.

There is a taboo for the mother to eat the head and tail of fish and therefore, only middle portion of the fish is cooked for her. According to Rinchin Dorjee, if the head or tail of the fish is given to the mother, the infant will become dumb and feel severe cold like fish.

The day the child is born, the women of same clan and some other women come to see the child and bring *phak* and offer the same to the mother. The male members of the village are not permitted to see the child until, it is three days old. It is a taboo for the father to touch the new born baby, for the first seven days.

Name giving ceremony

Name giving ceremony is performed on the third day of the birth. On this day, early in the morning, the mother takes her first bath and dresses herself in new clothes. The confinement place is also cleaned and dirty clothes are washed with ash and husk of millets by the woman attending her. The female members of the village, who offered *phak* to the mother on the first day of the child birth, again visit the house and offer *khatas* (ceremonial scarfs) to the child. If the child is male, each woman presents one small bow and arrow to him alongwith the *khata*. The female child is simply offered *khatas*.

On this very day, the head of the household or the father of the baby goes to the village Lama taking one, *thambung* (about one litre in capacity) of *phak* as offer. The Lama after taking into consideration the date and time of the birth and after consulting the holy book *Karchik* gives an appropriate name to the baby.

On the fifth day one more ceremony called *nenui satpa* is performed by the Lama and the child is brought outside on the platform of the house. When the Puja is over, women belonging to the same clan offer scarves to the child and at the conclusion of the ceremony all the participants share a light feast. On this very day, the woman who served the mother during the delivery and the pollution period, is seen off, with offer of drink and food. The total expenditure incurred on occasion of the birth of a child including the performance of the ceremonies is about Rs. 30.00 only.

Child care

As soon as the child is born the place of confinement is made warm by putting fire in the hearth and after a hot water bath, the child is wrapped in thick clothes so that it may not suffer from cold. If the child is unwell the priest is called and asked to perform a Puja. The infant is suckled and washed by the attending woman for the first three days, because it is a taboo for the mother to suckle her child during this period.

There is no fixed time for suckling upto the age of six months and the child is allowed to suckle whenever it cries. But thereafter, restriction commences and the child is fed at certain fixed hours, such as early in the morning, after morning meal, noon, in the evening and in the night, when the mother can attend to the child. The child is allowed to suckle mother's breast upto the age of two years or so. It is daily given hot water bath and massaged with mustard oil during the first three months. As soon as it becomes five to six months old, no special care of washing or cleaning is taken by the parents. The child is allowed to micturite and pass stool in bed till he learns to walk. When the child attains the age of one year, attempt is made by the mother to train the child to pass stool outside the bed and gradually outside the house.

The child is given supplementary food such as cooked rice, local beer only after five months or so but no ceremony is observed on this occasion. The consumption of cooked food goes on increasing alongwith the increase in age. The burden of child care and early training mostly rests on the mother, though sometimes other members of the family also assist her. For a few months after the birth, the child is carried about in arms and afterwards on the back, wrapped in a long piece of cloth, which is fastened to the shoulders. In this manner, the mother takes her child to the fields where she can look after him as well as the work.

A child is constantly looked after upto the age of three years and the responsibility of child care mostly rests upon the mother, though sometimes the father shares the responsibilities. Three to six years is the period in the life of a child because there is no responsibility, no constant vigilence and the time is spent in eating, playing and sleeping. He moves about the village with his play-mates and is found full of fun while jumping here and there, throwing stone, playing with sand on the river banks and singing in chorus. He remains so much busy the whole day, that sometimes he forgets to come home for food and is to be searched and taken home by the parents or elders of the family. When a child attains the age of seven or eight years, his freedom is restricted and he has to assist his parents in economic pursuits.

Girls of this age generally assist in the household chores like cleaning the house, fetching water from water sources, grinding, husking, bringing fuel from jungle and looking after

small sister or brother while the mother is away from home. She usually goes to the fields with her mother or elder sister and to the jungle with her girl age-mates or slightly older ones. The boys generally tend the cattle, assist his father and brothers in cutting and cleaning the jungle for jhum cultivation and in fencing the nearby terraces. If his father is an enlightened person, he may even attend the school.

Due to sexwise division of labour even from the childhood the boys and girls rarely get time for intimate mixing. Though there is no segregation of sexes and they can sleep and play together, yet the girls develop a tendency of avoiding the company of boys after attaining the age of nine or ten, and they mostly remain in the society of girls or women of elder age.

As soon as the girls attain puberty, they avoid the company of boys in public, almost completely. But almost at sometime, they begin the life of private intimacy in the dormitories of the youth (*Khubi nachao Jingba*).

Hair cutting ceremony

When the child (male or female) is one year old, hair cutting ceremony is performed and for this purpose one day is fixed by the village Lama. It is a custom among the Sherdukpens that the hair of the child should be cut only by the maternal grand father or maternal uncle of the child. Therefore, on the appointed day, the maternal grand father or the maternal uncle is invited for cutting the hair. There is no elaborate process in this ceremony. Simply the hair is cut with a pair of scissors and preserved in the house. The man from the maternal side who cuts the hair is offered good quality of drinks and food and seen off the same day. The village Lama does not officiate in this ceremony.

Barrenness

Barrenness is considered to be the result of displeasure of the gods. If a married woman remains childless for many years *Bulam-soba* Puja is performed by the priest (*jiji*). Also during *chhokar* (festival of sacred books) the women who have no issue visit in company of the Lama a place named *kro* about three miles from village, which is the seat of the village deity. There the Lama reads the holy books and the women go round the place thrice, carrying stones on their backs; the stones here symbolise the children desired by them.

Cases of still birth are very rare and there is no magico-religious method of preventing it. Natural abortion is not uncommon, but wilful abortion is rarely practised. According to Rinchin Dorjee, in case of conception out of wedlock, sometimes abortion is wilfully induced by taking a strong mixture of *arah* and *ash* in sufficient quantity.

The people prefer to have more sons than daughters. The reason is that the sons inherit property of parents, stay with them and serve them during their old age whereas the daughters are not given any rights of inheritance and as they have to leave the parents homes sooner or later after their marriage they do not contribute much to the family economy.

The birth of a son is celebrated with great enthusiasm and drink and food are offered to the villagers lavishly, but in the case of a girl, a nominal expenditure is incurred to celebrate the birth.

There is no clan-wise difference in the practices connected with child birth in the village.

Youth dormitories

After they attain their puberty, the boys and girls do not sleep in their respective houses till they marry. They organise dormitories or *Khubi nachao Jingba*, where they sleep. There are no separate dormitory buildings. Generally an abandoned house or a residential house with surplus accommodation serves as a dormitory. There are three such dormitories for three blangs or divisions in the village particulars of which will be furnished later. A boy or a girl can join one of the blangs on free-choice; but once one joins a blang one is expected to continue in that till marriage.

After taking their meals in the night the boys and girls come out of their houses and join the dormitory. The girls assemble in a selected house and carry on gossiping among themselves. In the meantime their boy friends start coming one by one and join them. They all sit around the hearth, cut jokes with each other and enjoy drinks brought by a boy or a girl whose turn had fall on the day. Some from among those present suggest a song or a dance to be performed either individually or in group and others generally agree. Sometimes the merry-making continues till late in the night. Then they retire to

their respective beds in the dormitory; but after sometime the boys sleep to the beds of their respective girl friends and they become men and women.

Early in the morning they disperse, and enter their respective homes unnoticed by their parents and pretend, to sleep on their beds. Though the parents are fully aware of their adventures of the night, it is not good taste to show that they know anything. But if a boy or a girl continuously fails to return homes early in the morning and as a result if the agricultural and other economic pursuits suffer, the parents, sometimes have to become less subtle and scold the boy or the girl concerned.

It is through the dormitories that normally marriage proposals are finalised. Sometimes a boy or a girl may go on changing partners in the dormitory, till he or she finally decides his mind. This institution, therefore, provides an opportunity for trial before marriage, and in a way contributes to the stability of marriage, once it is performed. It is, however, not correct to say that all sex relations in the dormitory always aim at marriage. Some times the girls may have chhao lovers in the dormitory, knowing fully well that the society will not approve their marriage. But while class barrier can be violated in the dormitory, clan barrier can never be. It would be incestuous for a boy and a girl of the same clan to have sex relation even in the dormitory. In the dormitory there are not only offerings of heart and body, but also there are material offerings. A boy would readily offer *bidis,* cigarettes and eatables to his sweet-heart; similarly a girl would look forward for the day when she can complete the weaving of a *gordam-san* with beautiful designs for offering to her beloved. And ultimately, when they decide to marry, they exchange *mukhak;* this is a symbol of their engagement.

Marriage

Marriage is the most important event in the life of a Sherdukpen. Legality of marriage is recognised only when it is performed with certain ceremonies. In this village, girls are married at any age between sixteen to twenty, and boys are married between twenty to twenty five years. The Sherdukpens do not like child marriage and there is no instance where a boy or girl married at an early age. Generally, the bride is younger than the bridegroom.

There are both clan exogamy and class endogamy. But while clan exogamy is strictly adhered to, they are not so rigid about clans endogamy. Ordinarily, of course, Thong and a Chhao cannot intermarry, but if the Thong is a boy and the Chhao is a girl on payment of a fine, the village society acquiesces to their marriage. A man can marry his father's sister's or mother's brother's daughter; he can also marry his mother's sister's daughter; but he can never marry his father's brother's daughter. During the present study, eight cases of consanguineous marriage were recorded in the village. Out of these eight cases, six were with father's sister's daughter and two were with mother's brother's daughter. The villagers explained that there was a preference for marriage with father's sister's daughter. During their marriage the parents present costly ornaments to their daughters; in case of marriage with father's sister's daughter the costly ornaments given by the grand parents of the groom to his father's sister during her marriage, would automatically come back to the family. Otherwise after the death of the father's sister, her husband or son, as the case may be, would return the ornaments to the family.

Though the boys and the girls select their life partners in the dormitories, actual marriage is generally preceded by negotiation among the parents on both sides. If the parents cannot agree among themselves, sometimes marriage may take place through elopement. There are also occasional cases of capture when a suitor does not accept the rebuff and decides to impose his will on the unwilling maid.

Among the Sherdukpens monogamy is the rule; polygamy or polyandry is never practised.

Marriage by negotiation

The proposal for marriage is initiated from the boy's side. When a boy indicates his choice to his parents, and if they do not have serious objection to accept her as daughter-in-law, they make the move. On an appointed day, the boy's father with some of his clan members and one of his Chhao-men goes to the girl's house and catches hold of the girl. As soon as the girl is seized, all the members of the boy's party are asked by the girl's parents to keep their headgears *gordam* in his house as a token of this surprise visit; accordingly as a custom everybody leaves his cap there. These caps are taken away by the clan-members of the girl to their houses. Now, the girl is brought to the boy's house

and kept there for three days. During this period the elderly women, of the boy's clan come and request her to agree to the marriage. She is fed by her clan-members, during these three days, because she is not supposed to take any thing cooked in the house of the would-be-groom. Also there is a taboo against the boy's remaining in his house on the days the girl is kept there. During these days one person called *yam-ohu* from the boy's clan goes to the girl's parents, taking with him home brewn beer and two ceremonial scarves and conveys to them the news of the well-being of their daughter. In the evening of the day the girl is brought, the owners of the caps go to the houses where their respective caps were kept. They take alongwith them one *thambung* of *phak* each and offer to the household concerned in order to get the cap back. On the fourth day the girl is allowed to go to her home.

Since the girl has been earmarked as the would-be-bride. one tactful and elderly man is selected as a go-between (Khiapa) by the boy's parents and after one week or one month he is sent to the girl's house with one *thambung* of *phak* (local beer) and two *Khatas*, to know the mind of the girl's parents about the proposed alliance. In the mean time the friends of the boy and the girl try to make their mutual understanding better, particularly if either of them shows any sign of hesitation about the proposal.

In case the parties do not come to terms, the negotiation is broken and the boy's parents try for some other girl. In such case of break down of negotiation, there is a tradition of the village council imposing a fine on the party which is responsible for the break. In case the girl's parent's do not agree to the proposal, they are supposed to visit the boy's parents and offer one *thambung* of drink and two *khatas* and beg to be excused for their unwillingness. In case, the boy or his parents change the mind, after taking the first step, a heavy fine is required to be paid to the girl's parents. The fine is imposed according to the status of both the households. Generally a family with average economic status has to pay Rs. 7.00 to the girl's parents and a similar amount to her clan members.

If both the parties come to an agreement, further negotiation is started after one month or one year, depending upon a number of circumstances.

In the first week of the month fixed for marriage, the *khiapa* with five or six persons belonging to the clan of the boy, again visits the house of the girl. If the boy's parents belong to the same village, the go-between and his other companions return to his home on the same day. Otherwise they have to stay in a house of their friend or relative. The conversations regarding the marriage go on in between *khiapa* and girl's parents. This second visit is paid to get the final approval of girl's parents for the proposed marriage. The negotiation does not involve any discussions relating to dowry or bride price. According to Sherdukpen custom there are fixed rates of bride price, depending upon the economic status of the households concerned. If the boy belongs to a well to do household, one yak and one sheep are fixed as bride price; in case of a household of average or poor economic status only two sheep are to be given as bride price. The girl's parents and her clan members on their side give presents proportionate to the bride price.

When the girl's parents finally approve the proposal, the *khiapa* conveys the news to boy's parents. After hearing the good news, the boy's father deputes somebody of his clan to buy the yak and the sheep or only sheep according to his status. According to Rinchin Dorjee, his mother (since father had died during his childhood) in consultation with his uncle and other clan members, purchased one yak and one sheep for his marriage. In the mean time one lama is consulted for finding out the auspicious date and time for the marriage.

Khiapa plays a dominant role in a marriage; he is the main organiser of the various ceremonies whereas the village Lama or the priest remains practically aloof from the marriage. The *Khiapa* need not be a member of the boy's clan. Anybody who has vast knowledge of local customs and commands respect in these matters, is selected for this purpose.

The villagers do not observe betrothal ceremony and the marriage takes place in the house of the bride. The most interesting feature of Sherdukpen-marriage is that the bridegroom is always kept out of the picture, and does not participate in any of the rites pertaining to marriage.

The marriage party comprising of groom's father or mother (if father is dead) uncle, all members of clan (men, women and children of all ages who can participate) and *Chhaos* attached to the clan of the groom, start in a procession two or three

days before the day of the marriage. If however the marriage is in the same village the procession starts only on the appointed day. The Chhaos carry a profuse quantity of drink for the party from the house of the groom. The yak and the sheep to be offered as bride price are also taken in the same procession. The adults among the participants in the procession go on drinking, making noise and shouting, and the young boys and girls singing go on singing songs in chorus and dancing throughout the journey.

When the party reaches the outskirts of the village, the go-between with his companions receives the party and leads them to the village. After the arrival of marriage party, the yak and the sheep are handed over to the go-between by the groom's father who immediately takes them to bride's house and hands over to her parents. The bride's father anoints the horns of the yak and the sheep and offers *Khatas* to the animals.

When the party settles down, the go-between makes a formal statement of the discussion he had held with the bride's parents. Then takes place the marriage feast followed by merry-making throughout the night. The boys and girls of both the party sing songs and perform various dances.

On the following day, while the groom's party takes rest, the people of the bride's clan discuss among themselves about the presents to be given to the groom's father. These are collected by the girl's clan members in proportion to the bride price. Generally these consist of pieces of endi-silk, bronze or brass utensils, *tao* (copper or brass vessel) and ceremonial scarves.

The yak and the sheep or only sheep, whatever may be the case. are sacrificed and the meat is enjoyed by the members of the bride's clan on this day. But the bride herself cannot take this meat because according to custom, she is supposed to have been bartered in exchange of the above animals.

Next day, i.e., on the day of the marriage, the groom's party goes to the bride's house and is cordially received by the parents and the clan-members of the bride. They are made to sit inside the house in rows very close to the main entrance door and ceremonial scarves are offered to all members of the party by two or three elderly members of bride's party. The groom's father is, however, offered scarves by bride's father himself. It

is now the turn of the groom's party to offer scarves to the bride's party. At this time, the members of the bride's party sit in rows on the other side of the same hall, facing groom's party and the bride's family members sit in the front line.

On this day the bride does not remain in her house, she stays in a house belonging to one of her clan-members, where she is given bath and dressed in ornaments and new cloths, by two or three of her intimate girl friends. The friends are called *akhyam-Rokma*. When the auspicious moment of the marriage comes, the whole house becomes crowded with men, women and children and the bride is brought to her house by the *akhyam-Rokma*, through the front door. As soon as she enters the house she weep bitterly and immediately falls on the feet of her father.

Now, one man, called *dochao* (orator) from the bride's party stands up and explains to all present, the universal rule of marriage. Similarly, he tells the bride that a grown up girl has to be married with somebody and has to go to his house and stay with him. Then, song sung on this occasion by the women of her party is explained by her father which means that "All sorts of people in this world are required to make the bargain on something or other and in such bargain loss or profit is bound to occur. I have made a bargain today in which I am losing you my dear girl, I pray to God for your long life." The bride approaches her father weeping all the time; and the father offers her one *nin* (a silver cup around which signs of Zodiac are inscribed); then she goes to her brother who offers her one horse and one piece of endi-cloth. Next she moves to her mother weeping loudly. The mother keeps her in close embrace for sometime and then gives her a few bronze and brass utensils and one piece of endi. She prays to God to bless her with nine sons and nine daughters.

After mother, the girl approaches her clan members, who collectively offer her pieces of endi, bronze or brass vessels and taos. After this, the girl is taken to another room of the house (*rapse*) where she is given one bronze jug (*Jonkhlom*) by the parents. She is then taken round the different places inside the house, viz., the mainhall, the hearth, the *zung* and as she stops at each of these places, she is given one bronze vessel by the parents. All these presents are taken by the *Khiapa* who hands over the same to the porters (*Chhaos*

accompanying the party). Also he keeps an account of all the items which he will submit to the groom's father after reaching home.

The bride, before departing for her new home, visits each and every house of her clan, where she is given small amount of money as presents. After visiting all the clan members, they return to their parent's house shortly after that she leaves with the groom's party accompanied by *akhyam-rokma*. On this occasion the bride does not wear any special dress; she wears the dress commonly worn by the women of the tribe. But a new set of the same is given to her by her parents for this occasion.

The marriage party, along with the bride, *akhyam-rokma* and *Khiapa* makes night-halt on the way. Next morning, they reach their village and ultimately the house of groom. The bride is taken inside the house and looked after by women and girls of the village. At this time too, the groom does not stay in the house, though he may come to the house in night time. On this day the guests are offered drinks by the parents of groom and a feast is arranged. In the evening, *khiapa* sits with the groom's parents and submits them the account of presents received at the bride's place. According to Rinchin Dorjee, the following presents were offered by his father-in-law and clan members during his marriage:—

Presented by	Name of presents					
	Endi-Clothes	Horse	Cow	Nin	Tao	Utensil
Clan-members . .	15	..	..	..	3	21
Father-in-law . .	1	..	..	1	..	..
Mother-in-law . .	2	..	..	..	..	5
Brother-in-law . .	2	1	1	..	..	..
Others . . .	..	..	..	..	..	5
Total . .	**20**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**3**	**31**
Approx. Cost Rs.	600.00	300.00	100.00	200.00	300.00	155.00

The *Khiapa* also gives the boy's father an account of the ornaments, worn by the bride or given to her by her parents in his presence. The accounting of ornaments is essential,

because these are required to be returned to the bride's natal relations after her death by her son or heir. These continue to be the property of her parents, but according to one informant if the groom during his life time kills seven wild boars and presents the heads of the same to the family of his father-in-law, his son or heir is exempted from returning the ornaments of bride in recognition of his bravery, which is a matter of pride for the family of his father-in-law.

Three or four days after the marriage, a grand feast is given to the relatives and clan-members of the groom by his parents. On this day the *Khiapa* (go-between) is seen off by the groom's family and is given presents worth about Rs. 150.00 for his services in connection with the marriage. The consummation of the marriage normally takes place, about seven days after the marriage. The *akhyam-rokma* stay in the house of the groom for 15-20 days and give company to the bride. They lay the bridal-bed every night and help the couple to get adjusted with one another. After about 15 to 20 days when the *akhyam-rokma* take leave, each is presented one *nin-thuleng* and one piece of endi-cloth by the groom's father. They also take the bedding of the couple which they used to prepare daily.

Marriage expense

The expenses incurred for entertaining the guests, giving presents and paying bride price varies from family to family, according to the socio-economic status. During marriage, no contribution to any public fund or village council is made in this village.

It is not possible to give the exact data on the expenses incurred by both the parties during the various stages of marriage. However, with the help of Rinchin Dorjee, a chart has been prepared, giving the approximate expenses incurred during his marriage. He as well as his father-in-law, are considered to be well-to-do by the standard of the Sherdukpens.

A. Nooey value of expenses incurred by the groom's family

	Rs.
1. Bpide Price	550·00
2. Presonte	350·00
3. entertainment of guests and Clam members including Chhaos	400·00
Total . .	**1,300·00**

B. Money value of the expenses incurred by the bride's family

	Rs.
1. Presents/Dowry excluding Clan members	800·00
2. Other presents	200·00
3. Entertainment of guests.	500·00
Total .	1,500·00

Both the parties met the above expenses from their savings, and none of them either sold any property or took any loan from any source to meet the expenses.

Marriage by elopement

Elopement takes place if the boy and girl decide to marry but the parents of either or both of them do not give their consent. Generally, such cases arise when the boy and the girl belong to two different classes, viz., Thong and Chhao.

When a Thong boy wants to marry a Chhao girl, whatever may be their personal inclination, the parents have to withhold their permission, as a matter of conformity to the society's attitude in this matter. Frequently in these cases the boy elopes with the girl; later on the parents acquiesce to the union and regularise the same. For this purpose the father of the boy pays a fine of Rs. 7.00 to the members of the girl's clan and an equal amount to the girl's father. Such traditional fine is called *sit-zyon*. If during the course of the negotiation, the boy's parents ever use abusive language, an additional amount of Rs. 18.00 is required to be paid as fine. After this unpleasant part of the alliance is over, the boy's parents visit the girl's parents and offer ceremonial scarves and have brewn beer. This is followed by a feast to the clan members.

If a Thong girl elopes with a Chhao boy, the case takes a serious turn; as it hurts the variety of the entire Thong Section. Tension mounts high, and the boy's father tries to appease the girl's father. He secures the services of a tactful person as *Khiapa* to start negotiation with the girl's father. But the parents on both the sides cannot decide the case by themselves. After they reach an understanding, it is referred to the village council (Zumba) which considers all the circumstances of the case, and imposes a fine on the father of the boy. Usually, it

is a heavy amount; on an average it is to the tune of Rs. 250.00. After the payment of the fine, the boy and the girl are allowed to live as husband and wife; but no marriage rites are performed.

Widow marriage

Widow marriage is prevalent in the village. Though one can marry one's classificatory elder brother's widow, one cannot marry one's uterine brother's widow. If somebody wishes to marry a widow, he has to put up his proposal with the consent of the widow before the village council for its formal approval. When he is permitted to marry, on the day of the marriage, he gives a feast to all the villagers. No religious rite is performed on this occasion.

Divorce

Divorce is rare among the Sherdukpens. If, however, the pair finds it impossible to pull on together, divorce may take place. But it is not easy to give effect to it. If for instance, the husband wants to initiate the divorce against the will of his wife, the people of his father-in-law's clan, raid his house and carry away all the goods leaving it empty. The matter is then automatically taken to village council. If the intention of the divorce on the part of the husband is found to be justified, a nominal fine is imposed on him and his property taken away by the other party, is returned to him. Otherwise the husband is fined heavily, and the amount is given to his wife's parents as compensation. After this, the divorced woman is free to marry any other suitable person of the tribe.

Where the divorce is initiated by the wife, it is easy to bring about separation; but she cannot marry any other person so long as the husband is alive or the divorce is formally accepted by the husband after getting some compensation.

While there is a great deal of laxity so far as pre-marital sex-relations are concerned, extra-marital sex-relations are not tolerated. The guilty persons are subjected to severe punishment and suffer from great loss of face in the village community.

Death and funeral rites

As soon as a death takes place, all the adult persons of the village gather in the house of the deceased to console the bereaved family and share its sorrow. Besides all the male members

of the clan of the deceased remove their headgears and all the female members of the same category undo the buns of their hair and remove their ornaments. A messanger is, at the same time, sent to inform the family of the father-in-law of the deceased. While other kins may or may not come, the clansmen, the maternal uncle, father-in-law and mother-in-law and members of the attached Chhao family are expected to be present.

A Lama is also summoned, who after consulting the holy book *Thambu,* and taking into consideration the various circumstances of the death, indicates the date, time, place and manner of disposal (Cremation or burial) of the dead body. If the dead body is to be disposed of by burial, the Chhaos attached to the family, dig a grave according to size with the help of hoe and pick-axe. When the corpse is placed inside the grave, it is covered with banana leaves and earth. If the disposal is to be by cremation, the pyre is made by the Chhaos at a place pointed out by the Lama before the dead body is taken there.

If the disposal is to take place after a few days, the dead body is kept inside the house and during this period the Lama performs a worship daily in the house.

The Thongs do not touch the dead body. All preparations for the preservation or disposal of the dead body are done by the attached Chhaos. Generally, the rich cremate their dead, while the poor people bury the same. But irrespective of the economic status of their families the young children are buried.

On the fixed date, two persons belonging to the attached Chhao clan are sent to the jungle to bring poles for the bier (*hingstu*). At the same time a few person undress the dead body and wash it with water inside the house. The face is smeared with ghee or butter, then it is draped with a piece of cloth or ceremonial scarf. Now the corpse is draped in a red shroud about 3 yards in length and taken out of the house through the main door. It is then placed on the bier kept on the platform of the house. In the meantime one Chhao woman prepares food and drink for deceased and herself. The share of the deceased is taken to cremation or burial ground. The Chhao woman takes her meal in the utensils used by deceased before the death which are afterwards presented to the woman. At the time of taking out the corpse from the house, the Lama chants some hymns for the peace of the departed soul. The corpse is kept on the bier and tied nicely by the Chhaos. Mustard oil, home brewn beer, *til* (linseed) and

barley seeds, incense (posh), *ribang*, wild fruits and *tarmus* are collected by a Chhao from the house of the deceased for performance of the funeral rites.

The corpse is lifted by four pall-bearers, belonging to Chhao class, on their shoulders and a big funeral procession follows the corpse. The procession is led by a Lama and the maternal uncle of the deceased. The maternal uncle wearing white turban, holding a dao in his hand, shouts HI: HI: and HO: HO: throughout the way. He is followed in order, by a Chhao male, holding a dao in his hand, the pall-bearers with the corpse on their shoulder, the widow and the grown up children of the deceased and lastly the clan-members and the father-in-law of the deceased. When the corpse is taken to the cremation ground, it is immediately kept over the pyre, as it is a taboo to keep the corpse on the earth.

Now, Lama sitting in a tent slightly away from pyre, recites pieces from his book and offers food, drink and other articles to the dead. When instructed by the Lama, oil and incense are sprinkled over the corpse and the widow and the children go round the pyre thrice. Then the widow lits the fire followed by her children.

When the corpse catches fire, all persons belonging to Thong clans including the widow and her children return home, leaving there the Lama and Chhao people. When the corpse is completely burnt to ashes, the Chhaos collect some ash, go to nearest river and throw the same into the water. Afterwards they take bath in the river and return to deceased's house. There, before entering the house, they again wash their face and hands, and go to a place, where incense is kept burning and allow their faces to be touched by the perfumes. They enter the house, where the family members of the deceased offer them rice and chillies; but vegetables and salt are not given on this day. After that, the pall-bearers are given Rs. 10.00 each and other Chhaos Rs. 5·00 each. The Lama is given Rs. 35.00 in cash or the articles of equivalent value in kind and offered drink. This completes the funeral of a rich Thong male.

The pollution period for the family of the deceased lasts for seven days and during this period food fried in oil or ghee and meat are not taken by any member of the family. Even after the pollution period is over the family concerned observes ceremonial mourning for 21 days during which it refrains from various types of economic activities. The other members of the clan refrain from such activities for three days.

The clothes of the deceased are kept for six days inside the house where he died. On the seventh day, the clothes are taken to the Gompa by the woman who served the deceased. There, all the persons who participated in funeral, including the father-in-law and the maternal uncle of the deceased assemble and after that *Khro* puja is performed. The Lama reads a holy book inside the main temple where butter lamps are lit by the widow and her children. In the mean time, outside the Gompa, a big feast is arranged by the family of the deceased. One flag post is also erected on this day outside the Gompa.

On this day, the Chhao woman who served the deceased is presented one endi-cloth worth about Rs. 30·00, also she takes the cloth used by deceased during his life time. The father-in-law and the mother-in-law who brought one white *chadar* and one silver cup for the deceased, are seen off by presenting one small silver *dao* and one *Khata* each. The maternal uncle also leaves on the same day.

Again the flag posts are erected on the 14th day and the 21st day in various religious shrines and monuments. For each such post the Lama is given Rs. 3·00 and drink called *gewa-phak* is offered to the people present. Afterwards if the family of the deceased is rich, pujas are performed in various Gompas (e.g., Lagyala Gompa, Lagma Gompa, in Kameng Frontier Division), where the Lamas are entertained with food and drink Lagyala Gompa one bag rice, one silver cup and one cow or horse are offered in the name of the deceased. This offering is known as *ngayju-gewa.* Yesi Dorjee who belongs to a respectable *Thong* family visited Lagyala, Phudung and Bomdi-La Gompas to offer *ngayju-gewa* when his father died recently and spent about Rs. 400.00 on account of the various pujas at these places. If the expenses incurred for ceremonies in his village are included altogether, about Rs. 650.00 was spent by him.

The poor people either bury or cremate their dead body, incurring a little expenditure. They simply observe *Khro* ceremony. The Chhaos prepare and bury their dead body themselves though Thongs may participate in the funeral.

The corpse of a child is not taken on bier to the burial ground; a Chhao male carries it in arms or on the back and buries in the grave. He is paid Rs. 3·00 for this service. The village Lama also accompanies the dead body.

There is a common belief among the villagers that there is rebirth after death. A person who does good and virtuous work goes to Chumgba Sangze, the creator of the universe. He is received there with great honour and then sent back to the earth as a human being. A man who committed sins during his life time, is taken by demons before Chhan Gepu, the God of death who according to the deeds done by the person concerned, punishes and kills him with tortures. Such man cannot take re-birth as a human being, but is born as an animal or insect. There is no practice of calling back the soul in this village.

If a family is very rich, it can construct some religious shrines like *manes* and *dungzurs* in the name of deceased. There is no megalith in the village, but one *dungzur* is in existence which was constructed about 80 years back by the villagers in honour of a *gaon-burah*, named Dorjidok Khrimey who was a rich and influential man of the village. It is said that with the increase in his influence, he became a tyrant and started harassing the people. He used to oppress them by taking away their fertile cultivation fields and good horses. He never went outside of the village without riding a horse; and while going the markets in the plains of Assam from Doimara, he used to ride an elephant. Moreover, whenever, he brought the Posa (traditional quit money introduced by the Ahom rulers) he only distributed 1/3rd of the amount among villagers, keeping the remaining 2/3rd for himself.

After some time, he became seriously ill and through his sufferings realised that it was due to his past misdeed. He summoned all the villagers to his death bed and begged their pardon. He returned all the movable and immovable properties of the villagers which were misappropriated by him and asked them to swear before a piece of stone that they would not give any trouble to his children and construct one in his honour shrine. The villagers accordingly took the oath and the piece of stone was thrown at the confluence of Ziging Kho and Dunik Kho. When Dorjidok died, the villagers took out that piece of stone from the river and kept it in the village. Afterwards one shrine called *Dungzur* was constructed at this place in his memory. It is still in existence and the people sacrifice here one sheep every year.

CHAPTER III

ECONOMIC LIFE

Economic resources

The total land under cultivation during a particular year is about 320.5 acres. This includes land under permanent and *Jhum* Cultivation. The total land under permanent cultivation is about 45 acres which is mostly around the main village; the remaining 275·5 acres of land is under *Jhum* Cultivation and is spread in different parts of the forest closer to the hamlets.

The village is rich in forest wealth. The wooden poles, planks, cane, bamboo for house construction and fencing for cultivation fields are obtained from there. The people collect and eat many types of wild fruits and extract a good quantity of honey from bee-hives in the jungle. They use the latter for their own consumption as well as for sale in the near by markets. In the vicinity of the village, a wild thorny bush locally known as *Shevin* (an aromatic pungent spice) and more commonly known all over Western Kameng Division as *Jabrang* is found in abundance. It is an important plant from the economic point of view. Its seeds or fruits are sold in the plains villages of Assam and bring ready cash to them. It is used as a medicine, as well as spice with vegetables and fish. Jabrang grows wild in the waste land of the village. It is a coniferous plant with innumerable thorns and grows upto the height of 8 to 10 feet. The main branches separate right from the ground level, and later on the twigs and its leaves grow in such a way that the plant looks like a green cone. It starts bearing fruits from the month of July-August and is ready for harvesting in the month of October. The small grey-coloured fruits are collected by children and women after harvesting the summer crops. It is dried and stored inside the house till the villagers go to Doimara.

There is no cultivable waste or current waste land in the village. The cattle graze in jungle and no pastures are there. About 15 acres of land is lying waste where nothing can be grown. The total acreage of land under homesteads including those in the hamlets is about 8 acres.

Land tenure

There has been no cadastral survey of the village. However, the ownership of land can in a general way be considered under three categories.

(1) Land owned by individual

(2) Clan land

(3) Common village land

Land under permanent cultivation is known in the village as *rekjen* and is owned by individuals; it can be purchased on payment in cash or kind. The individual land under *rekjen* is well demarcated by erecting stones or stone-walls in the field. When a plot of land is purchased, one sheep or fowl, according to the term decided, is sacrificed in the field and the blood of the animal is sprinkled on the demarcating line. After that either a stone wall is built or stone pillars are erected over it. The kitchen gardens (Janbi) are also owned by individuals.

A system of limited individual ownership exists in respect of jhum land as well. Once an individual brings a jhum plot under cultivation, he has the prerogative of cultivating the same plot, on completion of the jhum cycle after a number of years; but unlike land under permanent cultivation he cannot sell the jhum plot under any circumstances. He can, however, allow others to cultivate on the plot, if for any reason he cannot do it, in a particular jhum cycle.

The various clans in the village have their own clan lands. Such lands include distant forest areas, and steep rocky forest where honey can be found. There are also clan-wise demarcation of areas in the rivers for fishing purposes.

The remaining land, within the territory of the village, which has not been demarcated as clan land or individual land, is considered as the common village land. It includes dense forests, (which are not put under cultivation) being the source of firewood, bamboo and timber as well as distant pastures and waste lands.

Livestock

The most important livestock reared by the villagers are cow, bullock, horse, mule and goat but they do not rear sheep, mithun, yak and pig. These animals are of great use in strengthening their economy. The cows are milched and either the milk

is sold to the government officials stationed in the village or ghee is prepared from the same. The bullocks are used for ploughing the fields and the horses and the mules carry their harvested crops from the jhum fields to the village. They are also used for riding and carrying the loads of the visiting officials from one place to another, for which the owner gets cash money. The villagers also rear fowl for sale. Mostly the goats and fowls are sold in near-by markets where they purchase their necessities.

Besides the above sources, they earn money by carrying loads from one village to another, working on roads during the winter season and constructing the houses for the institutions established by the administration. The villagers catch fish from nearby streams and barter the same with the Kacharis of the Plains of Assam from whom they get rice and betelnut in exchange. In most of the households, weaving and basket making are practised as subsidiary economic activities.

FACTOR INFLUENCING ECONOMIC LIFE IN THE VILLAGE

Land reforms

So long, no land reform scheme has been extended to this part of the country. However, three Jhum Land Regulations formulated by NEFA Administration were promulgated in 1947-48. These regulations give the tribal population absolute rights over their Jhum land which has been defined as all lands which any member or members of a village or community have a customary right to cultivate by means of shifting cultivation or to utilize by clearing jungle or grazing livestock provided that such village or community is in permanent location.

Under these regulations, the villagers exercise their full rights and no restrictions have been imposed by Administration so far as the cutting of jungle for Jhum land is concerned.

Land improvement

Recently, the village has been covered by the 'Kalaktang Community Development Block' but the scheme of land improvement has not been taken up so far. However, in the past few years some agricultural activities were initiated by the Department of Agriculture, NEFA. During 1957-58 about 2 acres of land particularly lying near the bank of river Ziging Kho was brought under wet rice cultivation and only once the paddy was harvested. Next year onward the plot was abandoned completely because of very

poor yield. The people say that land is sandy and infertile and the yield is very low in comparison to the labour required. Some improvement was achieved by making dry terraces in the village which still exist and are utilized by the owners. The villagers were taught to grow various types of vegetables by the V.L.W. for which seeds were distributed to them free of cost. The improved quality of seeds of maize, etc., were also given to the villagers.

Ownership of economic resources

Individual ownership of land is prevalent in the village. Most of the households own, besides the *Jhum* land, permanent cultivate-land in the village. There are a few households who do not have permanent cultivation land, but there is none which does not cultivate any piece of *Jhum* land.

A table giving the distribution of the households according to the size group of the holding (permanent cultivation land and jhum land combined) as in the year 1961 is furnished below :—

TABLE 9

Distribution of households according to size group of holdings

Sl. No.	Size of land holding (Acres)	No. of families	Population	Land under occupation in acres	Average land holding per family	Average land per person
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	0.1—2.49	16	60	29	1.72	0.48
2	2.50—4.99	27	146	101	3.74	0.68
3	5.00—7.49	25	167	139	5.56	0.83
4	7.50—9.99	5	39	41.5	8.30	1.06
5	10.00—12.49	1	10	10	10.00	1.00
	Total .	**74**	**422**	**320·5**	**4·33**	**0·76**

The table shows that not only there is a wide range of difference in the size of the holding, but also that there is a wide range of differences in the *per capita* of occupation of lands. The smaller holdings have also smaller *per capita* land under occupation. In other words, the size of the holding does not depend on the volume of man power available for a household; it depends on

other factors. This is an index that with reference to the possession of the main economic resource, viz., land, the tribal community in this village is fairly highly stratified.

Industrial activity

There is much scope for small scale industries in the village. Two households are engaged in silver-smithy which is their main source of livelihood. In many households, weaving is practised, though it does not provide them even the bare necessities of life. Weaving is mostly done by women and most of them are good weavers though they cannot produce enough even for their own consumption, due to non-availability of raw materials. In recent years the village industries are being given some support by the Administration and a number of persons have been given training in various industries at the Craft Centre at Bomdi-La. But there is hardly any follow-up action to ensure that after completing their course, the trainees can set up production units of their own or get jobs in the line.

Improvement of communication

As already mentioned the village has been linked with improved bridle paths, muleable tracks and roads during the last one decade. Now the people can easily go to the plains of Assam and to the district headquarters Bomdi-La by vehicle. The old foot-tracks have now been abandoned and motorable roads are being used for communication and transport and they feel proud about it.

Marketing facilities

With the coming up of Bomdi-La, as a township there has been almost a revolutionary change in the marketing situation. Previously, they had to procure every little necessities of life like salt, bidi, cloth, etc., directly from the shops in the plains of Assam. Now all these are available in several shops, which have come into existence at Bomdi-La. Besides, on the initiative of the NEFA Administration, a cooperative store has also been established at Bomdi-La. Through it, attempts are made to extend marketing facilities to the tribal population of the region without exposing them to exploitation by unscrupulous traders.

On every Sunday a weekly market is held at Bomdi-La. The villagers take their fowl, eggs, chillies, etc., for sale. In exchange

they procure salt, soap, oil and small bits of household requirements. But for major purchases like endi-cloth, utensils etc., they still visit the market in the plains of Assam.

Workers and non-workers

The workers include all persons who are engaged in seasonal work like cultivation, livestock, dairying, household industry or regular employment in any trade, profession, service, business or commerce. The whole time students, infants, retired persons, disabled persons and persons performing household duties or personal services for other members in the family form the group of non-workers. Out of 422 persons in the village 251 (59·5%) persons are workers and 171 (40·5%) are non-workers. The following table gives the distribution of workers and non-workers by sex and age group:—

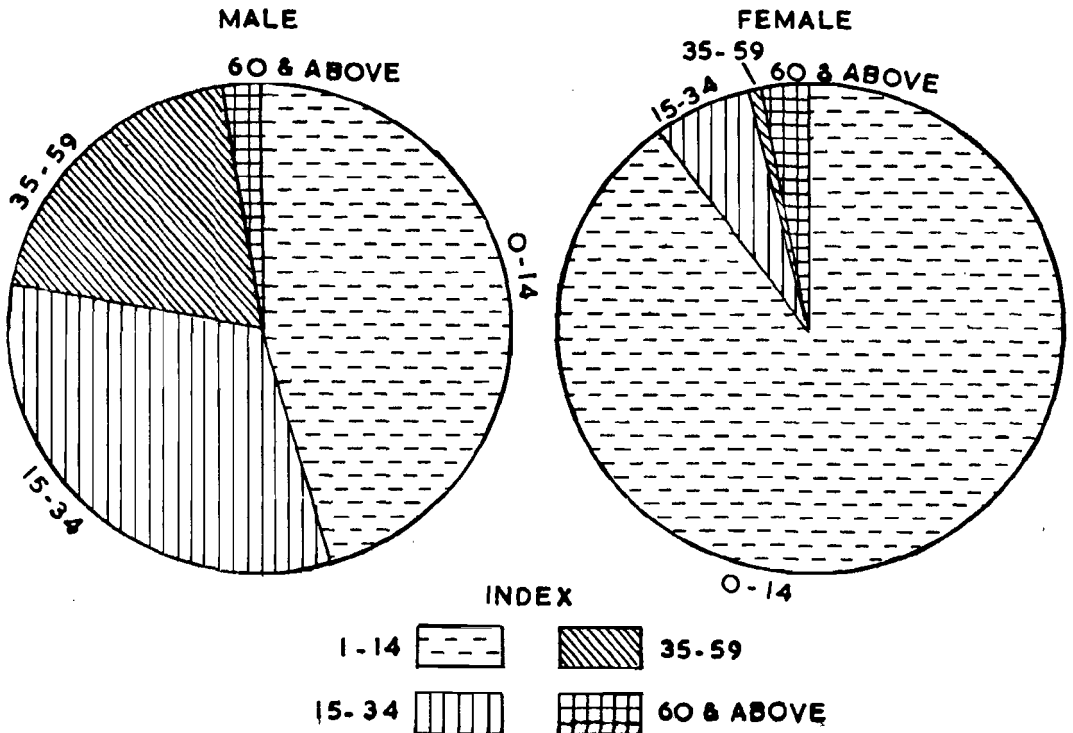
TABLE 10

Workers and non-workers by sex and broad age group

Age group	Males			Females			Total		
	Workers	Non-workers	Total	Workers	Non-workers	Total	Workers	Non-workers	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0—14 . .	8	85	93	20	69	89	28	154	182
15—34 . .	56	10	66	72	1	73	128	11	139
35—59 . .	40	..	40	41	1	42	81	1	82
60 and above .	3	2	5	11	3	14	14	5	19
Total .	**107**	**97**	**204**	**144**	**74**	**218**	**251**	**171**	**422**
Percentage of Total	**42·2**			**57.8**			**59.5**	**40.5**	**100%**

Among the workers, the males constitute only 42·2% whereas the females constitute 57·8%. The difference is caused mainly because of the fact that in the age groups 0-14 and 15-34, there are proportionately more non-workers among the males than among the females. This again reflects another fact, namely that, in the age-groups 0-14 and 15-34, more boys from girls are whole time students.

WORKERS NON-WORKERS
BY SEX AND BROAD AGE GROUP



A noticeable feature brought out by the table is that 28 children (8 males and 20 females) or about 11% of total workers belong to the age-group 0—14. This is an index of the prevalence of child labour in household enterprises.

A statement giving the distribution of the non-workers by nature of activities is furnished below :—

TABLE 11

Non-workers by age, sex and nature of activity

Age-group	Total Non-workers			Infants and dependent children not attending school	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1	2	3	4	5	6
0—14 . . .	85	69	154	63	64
15—34 . . .	10	1	11	..	..
35—59 . . .	..	1	1	..	..
60 and above . .	2	3	5	..	..
Total .	**97**	**74**	**171**	**63**	**64**

TABLE 11 —concld.

Age-group	Full time students		Old and disabled persons		Persons engaged in household duties		Others
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
1	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
0—14 . .	22	5	..	..	..	..	..
15—34 . .	8	1	2	..	..	..	..
35—59 . .	..	..	..	1	..	..	..
60 and above	..	..	2	3	..	..	..
Total	**30**	**6**	**4**	**4**	..	..	..

The table shows the bulk of the non-workers (64.95% among the males and 86.48% among the females) are infants and dependent children not attending school only 30.92% non-workers among the males and 9.46% non-workers among the females are full-time students. It is interesting to note that there is no non-worker whose main activity is household duty. In other words, all the housewives also participate in active economic life.

Occupation structure

A table giving the distribution of the workers by main occupation is furnished below :—

TABLE 12

Distribution of the workers by age, sex and primary occupation

Occupation	Males					Females					Total				
	0—14	15—34	35—59	60 & above	Total	0—14	15—34	35—59	60 & above	Total	0—14	15—34	35—59	60 & above	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Owner Cultivator	8	44	39	2	93	20	72	41	11	144	28	116	80	13	237
Agricultural Labourer	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Service	..	9	..	..	9	..	..	..	..	..	..	9	..	..	9
Trader	..	1	..	..	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	..	..	1
Artisan (smiths)	..	1	1	1	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	1	1	3
Others (Priest)	..	1	..	..	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	..	..	1
Total	**8**	**56**	**40**	**3**	**107**	**20**	**72**	**41**	**11**	**144**	**28**	**128**	**81**	**14**	**251**

The table shows that the bulk of the workers (94:41) are owner cultivators. There is none in the categories of agricultural labourer. It is reported that there are some persons who have leased in lands of others and cultivating the same. But during the formal enquiry this was not admitted by anybody. There are three persons working as craftsmen; they are all—silversmiths. Among the persons engaged in services, three are teachers, two are medical attendants, two are forest guards, one is a political interpreter and one who is a handimen at Tezpur is sojourning in the village.

Subsidiary economic activities

Out of the 251 workers in the village 117 are having subsidiary economic activities; in all these cases the primary occupation is agriculture. The distribution of the subsidiary activities is as follows :—

Trade	Basketry	Weaving	Carpenter	Priesthood	Total
2	38	63	5	9	117

In the above statement special mention to be made of the two persons engaged in trade. They are husband and wife running a small shop of miscellaneous articles. Their main work is, however, cultivation.

Occupational mobility

If the primary occupations only are considered, it was found during 1961 Census that 11 persons had shifted from the occupation of their parent's to new occupations. In all these cases, the occupation in the parent's generation was agriculture. The new occupations adopted by them were as follows:—

Service — 9

Trade — 1

Smithy — 1

Out of these 11, ten namely service and trade are the non-traditional sector of the economy and one namely smithy is in the traditional sector of economy of the village. The shift from agriculture to silversmithy in one case deserves special mention, in the context of the fact that traditional economy is undergoing rapid change. In recent years, the craft centre at Bomdi-La is giving considerable encouragement to the traditional crafts by providing training and marketing facilities. One person has availed of this opportunity and adopted silversmithy as his main occupation.

If the subsidiary activities are taken into consideration, seven persons have been involved in partial occupational mobility. Their distribution is as follows:—

Priest — 3
Carpenter — 2
Trader — 2

In all these cases, these subsidiary occupations were not practised in their parent's generation. It is interesting that even though partial, the attraction of the calling of priesthood has won those of carpentry and trade. It seems that the community is trying to meet to the severe challenge of modern life, both materially and metaphysically. There are more carpenters, more smiths, more persons in new type of services requiring modern skill on modern knowledge, but at the same time there are more priests to supplement the efforts to tackle the physical and human environment by efforts to tackle the supernatural environment.

A general view of agriculture in the village

Agriculture, though the predominant activity in this village, is by no means easy and simple. It is on the contrary an arduous task. The hilly tracts, with deep ravine and high mountain ridges, and the rocky soil, force the villagers to practise cultivation mainly on the steep slopes. The comparatively flat land available at the foot of the hills and on the river beds is sandy and infertile. Thus the population has to adapt itself to an inhospitable environment. The height of the slopes determine the area which will be cultivated. If the slope of the hill is gentle and near the village, it is brought under terrace or permanent type of cultivation; if the slope is steep and far away from the village, it is cultivated by means of "slash and burn" method which is commonly known as *Jhuming*.

Thus cultivation is carried out in two ways here. The first type is done on the hill slopes called Jhuming or shifting cultivation, which is the traditional system practised by the hill tribes of NEFA. Jhuming consists of clearing the forest slopes, burning the fallen trees and bushes and dibbling or broadcasting the seeds on the ash covered soil. A man can bring the forest land under Jhum as much as he desires. Particularly the people residing in the *Pams* absolutely depend on Jhuming. The villagers never till the Jhum land, as they know that if the land is unturned all the fertile soil and ash will be washed away by rains.

These people are not efficient woodmen; they not only cut the forest but destroy it. The harmful aspect of their "slash and burn" method is that, it checks the natural reproduction of the forests and thus deprives the soil of the protective covering, which prevented its denudation.

The second type of cultivation is done in permanent fields, adjacent to the main village and to the courtyards of houses situated in the pams. The permanent fields in the main village are terraced, but the courtyards of the houses in the pam are not. The permanent fields are cultivated every year, unlike the Jhum fields and are sown with dry crops, as irrigation is impossible due to the fact that the fields lie at a high level from the river course and the soil has no capacity of retaining the water.

Details of agriculture

Since the villagers carry on cultivation in two types of land, they mostly remain busy throughout the year in agriculture. The sowing of seeds is not done simultaneously in both types of fields. The Jhum fields are sown earlier than the terrace or permanent fields. The main crops grown in the village are maize (phen-dang), finger-millet (gecham), wheat (bukhu), barley (phu), fox-tail (nachhak), cock's-comb, (nakhu) pahseolus radiatus (*Sakpi*), Fagopyrum Himalayenese (gechin), beans (phampia), chillies (mau) and *jumu*. Vegetables, such as potato, radish, gourd, brinjal, french bean and spinach are also grown in kitchen gardens on a very small scale.

The common crops grown in Jhum as well as terrace fields are maize, finger-millet, cock's-comb, phaseolus radiatus, *fagopyrum himalayenese, jumu,* beans and *nachhak* where as wheat and barley only are grown in jhum fields during winter. These are the only two cereals which are Rabi crops, the rest are Kharif crops.

Maize, millet pulse (Sakpi) and beans are sown in Jhum fields in the month of *Khikda* (April-May), whereas the same items are sown in the terrace fields in the month of *Phakda* (May-June) i.e., after almost one month, but they are harvested simultaneously in the month of *Yosida* (September-October). This difference is due to the climate. Since the Jhum fields are always located in higher altitudes than the terrace fields, these crops require more time for ripening. *Jumu* and *Gechin* are harvested twice in a year due to their quick growing capacity. They are first sown in the middle of April, then in August and harvested in the months of August and November respectively.

Wheat and barley are sown in the Jhum fields in the month of *Brui-da* (November-December) and harvested in the early part of *Khik-da* (April-May). The vegetables are sown in the month of *Jai-da* (March-April) as soon as the people return to the village from their Winter Camp, Doimara, and get ready for consumption in July-August.

The following chart gives the calendar of various agricultural activities in the village :

Name of local month	English equivalent	Nature of activities
1	2	3
1 *Langeda*	July-August	1. Weeding continues in the field of maize, millets (finger-millet) and fox-tail. 2. *Jumu* and *Gechin* of Jhum and terrace fields are harvested.
2 *Tak-da*	August-September	1. *Jumu* and *Gechin* are sown again in both fields. 2. Standing crops are guarded against wild animals and birds.
3 *Yosi-da*	September-October	Maize, millets, pulses and beans are harvested.
4 *Bruk-da*	October-November	1. *Jumu* and *Gechin* are harvested. 2. Jhum plots are cut for next cultivation. 3. *Hongchong* plants are cut and fibre is extracted.
5 *Brui-da*	November-December	1. Barley and Wheat are sown in Jhum plots in the place of maize. 2. Potatoes are also sown.
6 *Tai-da*	December-January	People remain at Doimara, the Winter Migration Camp. Weaving and marketing is done.
7 *Lug-da*	January-February	
8 *Prui-da*	February-March	
9 *Jai-da*	March-April	1. Return from Doimara. 2. Vegetable seeds and some maize are sown in kitchen gardens.

1	2	3
		3. Jhum fields are burnt and prepared for sowing seeds.
10 *Khik-da*	April-May .	. 1. Barley and wheat is harvested.
		2. *Jumu* and *gechin* are sown in Jhum fields.
		3. Maize, millets, pulses and bean are sown in Jhum plot.
		4. Terrace or permanent fields in the village are tilled for sowing.
11 *Phak-da* .	May-June .	. 1. *Jumu* and *gechin* are sown in terrace fields.
		2. Maize, beans, millets and pulses are sown in terrace fields.
		3. Seeds of *hongchongs* plant are also sown in Jhum as well as in terrace fields.
12 *Jug-da* .	June-July .	. Weeding in maize and millet fields is done.

It is to be noted that paddy is not grown by the people of this village.

Production by type of crops

Inspite of hard labour, because of the infertile nature of the soil, the yield of the various types of crops is rather low. A statement giving the acreage of land under various types of crops and the yield rate is furnished below:

Production by type of crops

Sl. No.	Crops grown	Total produce	Total acreage	Produce per acre	Number of families producing
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Wheat . . .	25 Md.	7	3·57 Md.	13
2	Maize . .	911 Md.	154	5·92 Md.	74

Production by type of crops—concld.

1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Pulses . .	407 Sr.	28	14·05 Sr.	22
4	Barley . .	109 Md.	30	3·63 Md.	38
5	Vegetables . .	56 Md.	5	11·20 Md.	37
6	Chillies . .	69·25 Md.	40	1·73 Md.	65
7	Millets (*gechin Jumu, nachhak etc.*)	384 Md.	120	2·90 Md.	65
8	Onion . .	10 Sr.	0·10	100 Md.	1
			384·10		

The statement shows that maize is the most important crop of the village, followed by millets and barley in terms of the bulk of the produce. But in terms of the number of households undertaking cultivation, maize is followed by millets and chillies.

The statement further shows that, the yield per acre is rather low. As already mentioned the rocky nature of the soil is the main reason for the low yield. The ravages caused by wild animals, birds and pigs are also responsible for the low yield to a considerable extent.

If the terrace fields and other fields under permanent cultivation are considered separately, the yield rate is much higher. A statement giving the particulars is furnished below:

Crop	Seeds sown per acre	Yield per acre
1	2	3
Maize	10 seers	13 Mds.
Finger-millet	6 Seers	10 Mds.
Jumu	10 Seers	8 Mds.
Gechin	5 Seers	2 Mds.
Nachhak (fox-tail) . . .	8 Seers	10 Mds.
Chillies	1 Seer	2½ Mds.

Details of shifting cultivation (Jhum)

Jhum, locally known as rek-fuwan, involves two phases of agricultural activities. The first phase begins with the selection of site and cutting of jungle. A plot of forest, mostly situated on gentle slope of hill or fallow jhum plot is selected for swidden cultivation. If the site is quite new, permission for cultivation is sought from the village council, which is generally accorded provided that there is no other claimant for the same plot. However, in case of an abandoned jhum-plot the permission of the council is not necessary.

A plot can be cut for jhuming, when its plants or trees have attained the height of 8 to 10 feet and the bushes and the under growth become mature.

Generally, three or four households select their jhum plots in a single cluster, though each plot is demarcated by stone and wooden piles. Such clustering of plots makes it possible to clear the patch of forest through mutual co-operation. After reaping the summer crop, one day in the month of Bruk-da (October-November) is selected for clearing the newly selected forest patch. On the fixed day, early in the morning, the members of the household including the grown-up children, go to the site and start the cutting operation. It is a tiresome job which requires hard labour. The trees are cut always by males with a jagged section using big axes (*jao-flu*). The bushes and the under-growth are cut by women and grown-up children with the help of bill-hooks (*dao* or *handu*).

The fallen trees are stripped of all branches and left at their original place. There is no system of piling the trees and bushes at one place or cutting the trunk and strewing the same on the different parts of the sloping fields to prevent soil erosion. The common species of trees found in Jhum plot are *hingpu, hingma, bachihing, khandak, hengri hing* and *sakching-ma.*

Normally a plot of two acres in size requires eight days for completing the cutting operation by 2 males and 2 females working daily from morning to evening (about 9 hours). After completion of the cutting operation, the plot is left as it is, for five months till the household returns from Doimara. During this period, the fallen trees and the under-growth get dried completely. One day is selected in the first week of April for burning the dried tress, under-growths etc. The selection of the day depends

on the weather. The rainy or cloudy day is never liked but a bright and sunny day with slight wind is always suitable. On this day, early in the morning, one male member of the family along with some friends or relatives who may be having their plots close to him, start for the field. He carries along with him pack lunch, which will be required in the day time. As soon as they reach the field they lit the fire, either with the help of match sticks or with fire carried by them from home. The litting of fire is started from the down side of the slope; this helps in burning the jungle. The persons stay there for the whole day, watch the fire and ensure that it is well spread all over the plot.

The plot is allowed to burn for two or three days. After 5 or 6 days, all the members of family including grown-up children go to the field, for preparing it for sowing. The male members remove the small tree trunks and branches to one side of the field and the females and the children collect unburnt bushes or branches of the trees at one place and burn the same on the same day. The big logs or trees are left at their original places and no efforts are made to cut and pile them at the boundary of the field. The villagers do not fence their jhum field properly. For namesake a few logs and unburnt branches of trees lying near by the boundary of the field are removed to the fencing site and the viscera of fish is kept over the log which according to the cultivators is a protection against the inroads of wild animals. When the fields are made ready for sowing, it completes the first phase of jhuming. The whole area represents a dreary and depressing spectacle of ash, charred stumps and dry skeleton of trees, strewn over the hill side.

The second phase begins with the sowing of seeds. The seeds of maize, finger-millet, fox-tail, cock's-comb, jumu, *gechin,* pulses and beans are sown in the month of *Khik-da.* The seeds sown in the fields, are all local. These are preserved after harvesting of crops every year. However, some of the households sow hybrid maize procured from the Agricultural Department, Bomdi-La.

Before sowing of seeds one Puja called *Rek-happa* is performed which is done by the priest (jiji). A pig is sacrificed on this occasion in the village. It is killed by a man belonging to the *Chhao* class. The *jiji,* taking the twig of a tree in his hand, goes round the village boundary and from house to house, chanting sacred formulae. He gives blessings to all the people of the village, so that they may have more produce from the crops that they would sow in the fields.

After one or two days of the above Puja, the sowing of seeds is started. The first seeds sown in *jhum* for summer crops are of *jumu* and *gechin.* The seeds are strewn broadcast in the field by a male member of the household; afterwards the soil is upturned with the help of *chhigiya* and *chhampho* (hoe), the latter operation is mostly done by females. The two crops are sown in two parts of the separate field. Next to be sown are the millets. This takes place in the last week of April. They are sown by broadcasting method or by upturning the top layer of the soil with hoes. Sometimes spade (*kor*) is used for upturning the soil, in case the soil is very hard. Along with finger-millet and cock's-comb (nakhu) are sown; but the other millets are sown in separate fields In the first week of May (or last part of Rhik-da) maize, pulses, chillies and beans are sown. Among them, pulses, beans and maize are sown by insertion in holes made by dibbling in the same field. This operation is performed jointly by the male and the female members of the household. For sowing maize, the distance maintained from one hole to another is about 2 feet. It is not that the distance is always only systematically maintained, but the cultivator is careful that the seeds are sown sufficiently away from one another. While the pulses are sown on one side of the maize field, the beans are sown on another side. Two persons (one male and one female) carrying on sowing operations in a maize field, approximately 1 acre in size, require one full day, if they work from 07.00 hours to 16.00 hours to complete the task.

In the month of June when the maize, millets and pulses have come up, one more puja called—Zangalhapsang is performed. This is done to appease the forest deity, which is responsible for timely rains and growing better crops. The village Lama officiates at the Puja and offers cereals, ghee and fish to the deity. As soon as the fields get full of weeds, people hurry up, to remove the same. Weeding is done only in the fields of maize, finger-millet and fox-tail. This operation mostly starts in the last part of June. The first weeding operation is done in the fields of maize, then in the fields of millets. The weeding of maize fields is done twice, first in the month of June and then in the month of August. But weeding of millets and chillies is done only once mostly in the months of July-August. The weeds are extracted from the field with the help of *Chhamp-hak* and *Chhigiya* (weeder). The *Brachok* (sickle) is used for removing the under growth beneath the tree trunks. By the beginning of August most of crops particularly *jumu* and *gechin* start bearing fruits. At this stage, it becomes necessary to watch the fields and guard the crops against

wild animals and birds. For this purpose, three to four households having their cultivation fields close to one other make a common watch house; and one male person from each household by rotation stays in the watch house to protect the crops.

The watch house is locally known as *rekbiang*. It is generally constructed in the field in the month of April, just after the completion of the burning operation. A raised portion of land, situated in the centre of the field is selected for this purpose. It is an ordinary hut, made of wooden logs and bamboo-mattings. If three or four households have a common meeting point for their respective plots, they construct the house jointly at that point. Inside the house one hearth is made, which is utilized for cooking meal during the stay of the watchman. The construction of a watch-house normally requires 9 man-days. The watchman starts staying in the house from the month of August. He takes with him cooking utensils, some cereals, a bedding and a gun or bow and arrows. Generally the wild animal try to trespass into the field in the night; he therefore keeps watch the whole night and sleeps in the day time. But even in the day time, he cannot have complete rest, because there are the birds and the monkeys to cause mischief and he must chase them away by throwing snares, or shooting arrow or making noises. In most fields, they fit rattles of bamboo slits with attached long ropes; these can be tied to poles situated at a considerable distance and even when there are birds at the other end of the field, the watchman can scare them away by causing the bamboo slips to rattle by pulling the rope.

When the watchman feels bored, he sometimes goes into the deep forest with his gun or bow and arrow and hunts games like wild boar, porcupine and deer. Sometimes if luck favours him, he may find them prowling about his field itself. Occasionally he visits his home to replenish stock of foodstuff or to meet other members of the family.

The watchman however is ineffective against pests like *chhuphun* (leaf hopper), stem borers, and *fee* (a kind of reptile, that damages the roots of the plants). Also, they can hardly do anything to prevent the damage caused by rats. There are no indigenous pesticides or insecticides known to the people; the administration also does not appear to have been particularly quick to supply the same, which would be specially suited to the conditions prevailing in the area.

Among the crops, maize is most liable to be damaged by pests, birds and animals; on the other hand millets attract wild animals to a much lesser extent. Maize is damaged by pests like fee and stem borers and birds like crows, *ke-ke* and *huri* and rodents such as rats, porcupine and animals like wild boar, bear and monkey, The millets (finger-millet, fox-tail, *jumu* and *gechin*) are rarely ravaged by animals except rats, but suffer minor damages from pests (leaf hopper and fee) and birds (sparrows and huri). Wheat and barley require less watch though they too have many natural enemies. There is therefore a tendency to grow them in distant fields.

Jhum cycle : Ordinarily cultivation is carried on, on the same plots of land for two years at a stretch. After that the cultivator moves on to another plot. Rarely more than two successive crops are harvested from the same patch of land, for by this time the soil loses its fertility and humus content. In fact the yield declines sharply after the first year. Therefore, a plot of land after being cultivated two years is left fallow for three to five years, depending on the growth of the forest. If the soil is fertile, the under-growth comes up rapidly, and the plot becomes dense with jungle with 3-4 years. This is a process of natural regeneration, but the people do not plant any quick growing species to accelerate the process. When the under-growth rises to about 5-6 feet height, the owner can cut the plot for the next swidden cultivation. Most of the households in the village practise swidden as well as terrace cultivation to support the family and every household undertakes shifting cultivation upto the maximum capacity. Those households who do not possess any terrace land, depend fully on shifting cultivation. According to Jom Norbu, a family of 5 members having three adult working hands, can normally cultivate 4 acres of Jhum land. The effect or swidden cultivation is undoubtedly destructive of both forest and soil. This fact is recognised by the villagers also, and some of them realise that swidden cultivation causes wide spread destruction of timber, denudes the hill slopes and causes soil erosion. However, according to them, there is no alternative to it; they do not have sufficient permanent or terrace land in the village.

There has been no move in this area to control or improve the swidden cultivation. The people are still using their age old indigenous methods.

Permanent or terrace cultivation

Excepting a few, the existing terrace fields around the main village are believed to be centuries old. Some new fields were constructed in 1958 with the help of Administration.

Terracing is done in two simultaneous operations. With hoes and picks, they try to give terrace form to the selected plot. In the process as and when, they come across big stones, they dig up the same and arrange in such a way as to form a loose retaining wall, at the lower edge of the slope and then the newly broken soil, consisting chiefly of coarse gravels, is thrown and dumped against the stone wall. Thus, it levels down the upper portion of the strip and levels up the lower portion, producing in the process a plain surface. The villagers do not do hard labour in building the terrace fields. Sometimes the fields are left without extracting the stones and the coarse gravels. Whenever big stones or boulders stand on the way of making a field, they are kept standing. Once the terrace field is built, no special care is taken to maintain or repair it. Only before ploughing, the shrubs and wild grass are cleared. If the fields are on the plain land or near a river bed, they are levelled and stone walls around the same are built.

The terraces existing in the village do not face a particular direction they have been built wherever suitable land could be found. These terraces do not go up to a great height, on mountain slopes. At the head of the valley, the terraces are partly dug out of hill side and partly built up by making retaining walls. As the valley broadens they grow in size and the differences in their levels dwindle to one or even half of a foot.

Fencing : Before ploughing, the fields are fenced with wooden posts and bamboo-mattings brought from the jungle. This operation starts in the month of May. Some well-to-do households fence their fields by erecting stone walls which serve as permanent protection against the domestic animals which generally damage the crops. The procedure of making stone walls is very simple. Stones lying in or around the field are extracted and heaped on the boundary of the field, keeping some provision for an entrance to the field. When the crops grow up it is closed by fixing a few poles across the walls.

Sowing : The terrace fields are ploughed immediately after sowing the Jhum plots in the second week of May. The people do not perform any separate Puja for ploughing or sowing the terrace fields as they earlier perform a puja at the time of similar operations on jhum plots. The terrace fields are tilled twice with

the help of an indigenous plough, driven by bullocks. After the first ploughing, the fields are left as they are for 10—15 days, so that the under growths may die out and removed by women and children. The second ploughing and sowing of seeds take place together.

As in case of jhum fields, the terrace fields of *jumu* and *gechin* are harvested twice in a year and hence they are sown first. The seeds are sown broadcast in the tilled fields, which are later on levelled with hoes by the women workers. After harvesting of *jumu* and *gechin* seeds, fields of millets, chillies and pulses are sown by broadcast method. This time again these fields are ploughed to let the seeds go deep into the earth; no levelling is done after sowing. The sowing of maize takes place last. This time also ploughing takes place twice. After the second ploughing, seeds are placed one by one on the furrows by a woman and afterwards the whole field is levelled with the help of plough.

As in case of *Jhum*, weeding is done only in the fields of maize, finger-millet, fox-tail and chillies. First weeding in the maize field takes place in June; in the last part of July, the weeding of millets and chillies starts, this continues till the middle of August. In this very month second weeding is done in the maize field *jumu* and *gechin* which become ready for reaping by now are also harvested. In the last part of August *jumu* and *gechin* are sown for the second time to be harvested in the month of October. When the crops start ripening, no special care for guarding is taken as the fields are well-fenced and there is no fear of damage by domestic animals. Wild animals, such as monkey, deer, wild boar and porcupine cannot attack these fields, as they are very close to the habitation. However, birds do damage the crops, though the children are engaged to scare them away in the day time. The crops become ready for harvesting in the month of *Yosi-da* (September-October). At present winter crops like wheat or barley are not grown on terrace fields. But it is said that about 20 years back winter crops were sown in these fields as well. But due to the depletion of the fertility of the soil, this was given up.

Kitchen gardening

Every household in the village maintains a kitchen garden of its own. It is the main source of supply of vegetables for domestic consumption as well as for sale. Due to scarcity of plain land, the kitchen garden is generally very small. When the villagers return from Doimara, in the month of March, their

attention first goes to the kitchen gardens. The plot is immediately fenced with bamboo strips and prepared for growing vegetables, by upturning the soil with hoe. As soon as the plot is ready, potato and small quantity of maize are sown on it. After one month, the remaining portion of the plot is covered with bean, spinach, gourd and radish. For chillies and brinjals, seed beds are prepared and at the appropriate stage seedlings are transplanted. By the end of July, brinjal, radish, beans, spinach and green chillies are ready for consumption. The potatoes get ready by the middle of August.

Manure : Manures are added to the terrace fields for maintaining the fertility of the soil. Farm yard manure, consisting of animal excreta and urine, domestic and farm refuse, and general waste materials, are used for this purpose. Cattle dung and urine absorbed in straw bedding are taken out occasionally from the courtyard and spread on the fields, when the plants grow up. The domestic refuse collected at one place throughout the year, is also carried to fields and spread there. Households having good number of cattle, bring leaves of oak and pine from the jungle and heap the same in the basements of their houses from time to time these leaves are spread on the place where the cattle are kept. After the harvesting of the crops, most of the households pen their cattle in the nearby terrace fields, and at that time transfer the rotten leaves along with the animal wastes to the fields to be used as manure. Though the village has been included within C.D. Block, chemical fertiliser is still not in use.

Harvesting

Harvesting of Jhum as well as terrace fields is done simultaneously in the month of *Yosi-da* (September-October). Once the harvesting has commenced, the villagers have little time for any thing but cutting and carrying, as they are afraid of rains which may spoil the crops. This is the most critical period, because they must complete the harvesting within a very short time. If there is delay, the crops standing in the fields without being reaped, may deteriorate. Harvesting is done both by males and females. The crops grown in the jhum fields are harvested first; then are harvested the crops grown in the terrace fields. The households residing in the pams and having only Jhum fields, complete their operations much before others.

Harvesting of maize is done by bare hands, without help of any tool. The fruits are just picked up and left on the field. In the pams, generally they are kept around the watch house, so that the watchman may take care of them. When maize is dried,

the outer sheath cover is removed and brought home. Those who have larger holdings, and cannot bring home the harvested crops alone, obtain the help of their clan members. Sometimes, they seek help of intimate personal friends, belonging to other clans as well. When transportation of harvested crops is done with the help of relations and friends, normally it is done in the night, so that the persons rendering assistance can finish the collection of their own harvested crops in the daytime, to be able to be free to help others. It is an impressive sight to see to group of people moving in the night, with lighted pine wood torches in hand and baskets (*Yang*) or gunny bags, full of harvested crops on back.

In case of finger-millet, fox-tail, barley and wheat the ears are cut with sickles (*brachok*) or small daos and collected in baskets but the stalks are left standing in the fields. *Jumu, gechin* and cock's comb are cut at the middle of the stalk and kept in the field till they get dry. The pulses are uprooted and brought to the courtyard, where they are kept for drying.

When harvesting of crops is over, threshing and winnowing is done. In case of maize, the grains of dried cobs are extracted by the household members with hands and stored in *dimnis* (big cylindrical bamboo-vessels). For seeds, the dried cobs of good quality are collected and kept hanging from the ceiling of the second storey, till the next sowing season. Finger-millet, fox-tail, barley and wheat are dried in the courtyard in cane or bamboo-mats, till they become ready for threshing. They are threshed out with the help of stocks. As there is no threshing floor, it is normally done in front of the house (*zung*) kept in mats. However, in case of *jumu, gechin* and cock's comb, it is threshed in mats, in the fields and the produce is brought to the house in baskets.

Winnowing is also done on mats with the help of winnowing scoops called *khaos*. Grains mixed with chaff are lifted over the head in sitting position and slowly allowed to fall on the mat. This operation is done, when there is mild breeze. The heavy grains fall straight on the mat, while the chaff is blown to a little distance, so that two distinct heaps are formed. The grains are again lifted in scoops and husked so that the same may be finally cleaned.

The chillies are harvested by picking the red fruits which are dried on the roof of the house and stored in gunny bags.

Tools and implements and techniques of operation

The tools and implements used in connection with agriculture are mostly indigenous, excepting a few which are procured

from the markets in plains or which have been received through the Agricultural Department, N.E.F.A. Administration. The indigenous tools are made in the village itself. Though crude in workmanship, these are well adapted to the local environment.

1. PLOUGH (Ganga)

Plough locally known as *ganga* is made of wood. The only tool used to make it is bill-hook or dao and no carpenter's plane is used. The wooden beam of the plough, known as *kit*, measures about 8 feet in length. On one end of the beam notches are made, for the convenience of being fastened to the wooden yoke (*pharua*), the other end is fixed to the body of the plough (*ganga*) at the middle making, an angle of about 120°. The upper end of the body is slightly curved to serve as handle; at the shoe shaped lower end is fixed an iron blade called *phaun*.

The plough is drawn by two bullocks. Normally two men are required to handle it. One holds the handle and keeps the plough in position; the other stands near the yoke and guides the bullocks.

2. AXE (Flu)

Two types of axes are used in this village. One is bigger in size and is called *Jao-flu*, the other is smaller in size and known as *flu*. These are similar to the axes found in the plains of Assam. These constitute the important tools for cutting trees in Jhum fields and for making planks and timber for construction of houses.

3. DAO (Handu)

It is made of a long iron blade, which is sharp at one edge, while other is blunt. It is locally made by iron smiths and is used for felling undergrowths of Jhum plot as well as for other domestic purposes. It is the only implement used for sacrificing the animals.

4. SICKLE (Brachok)

It consists of a wooden handle and a curved blade. The lower end of the blade is thin and pointed with an extensive for being inserted into the handle. The sickle is used for harvesting the crops and cutting the grass or undergrowths in the fields. It is locally made; sometimes it is procured from the plains also.

5. HOE (Kor)

This implement is procured from the plains. Occasionally the villagers get these as presents from their friends in the plains.

Now-a-days, the Administration is also distributing these on subsidy basis for encouragement of agriculture.

6. SPADE (Chhigi)

It consists of a smooth wooden handle and an iron blade with a hole at one end. The handle is made of a hard wood and smoothened with a small dao. At one end a bent iron piece is fixed. It is used for digging the soil and sometimes for weeding.

7. RAKE (Breksing)

It is bamboo-piece with three or four natural prongs at one end. Sometimes it is made from hard wood.

8. WEED (Chhampao)

It is made of two wooden pieces. The main piece of wood is roller like in shape, having one end bent at an angle of 45°. The bent portion is fitted with a long pointed piece of hard wood, tied with thin ropes.

9. BASKET (Yang)

Various type of baskets are used by the villagers. The most durable and important one is known as *yang*. It is conical in shape and made of bamboo strips. It is used in carrying harvested crops, i.e. maize, millets or barley, fuel or vegetables. Generally the female folk carry it on their back.

10. KHAO

It is a winnowing scoop of circular shape and is made with bamboo strips. These are of various sizes. The grains are separated from the chaff by this equipment. Also it is used for husking of grains.

11. MORTAR AND PESTLE (Chem-chhanke)

It is used for pounding paddy, maize and other grains. Both mortar (*chem*) the pestle (*Chhanke*) are made of wood. *Chem* is rough and is a rough wooden cylindrical in shape with diameter at one end of it, of about one and a half foot. From one end a conical cavity is carved out, which provides space for pounding the grains. *Chhanke* is a long wooden piece, about five feet in length and three to four inches in diameter. The middle portion where it is grasped, is a little narrower and the lower end is made round. The mortar is made of pine wood whereas the pestle is made of oak.

In the cavity of the mortar, paddy, maize or millets are heaped and pounded with the pestle by grown up girls or women of the household. Almost every household possesses it.

12. GRINDING STONE (Ranthok)

Like mortar and pestle, it is also found in most of the Sherdukpen houses. It is an essential item as it is required for making the flours of wheat, maize and finger-millet etc. It contains mainly two thin mill-stones (circular discs of stone). These two parts are connected with an iron or wooden rod, through the central holes. The upper part is having a big hole, used for rushing the grains inside the mill, and there is one handle fixed on the upper stone. The handle is meant to make the upper mill stone run while lower one remains fixed.

The grinding stones are kept over a big and fat wooden vase called *rathok-bleng* before the operation starts. Grinding, like hulling is a female job. The woman operating the device puts some quantity of grain inside the mill with the left hand and rotates the upper disc, by the right hand with the help of the handle. In this manner the flour comes out of the stones and is collected in the wooden vase.

Organisation of manpower

Co-operation and mutual help in the various aspects of life is a marked feature of the village, and such assistance is essential so far agricultural work is concerned. Cutting or clearing of Jhum plots, weeding and watching the crops or harvesting are so tough and time consuming jobs that no one can do it alone. There is therefore good deal of group activities and mutual co-operation.

Mutual Co-operation covers several aspects. For instance if a household has a pair of bullocks, but not the manpower to operate the same, it finds out a household without bullock but with manpower and then they mutually co-operate. For such mutual assistance no payment is made; but the household in whose field the work is done a particular day, is to feed.

The males, females and the children in a household undertake various operations connected with agriculture according to their capacity. Generally the adult males take up tasks requiring more physical strength and sustained labour and the lighter tasks devolve on the females and the children. For instance felling the

trees in the jhum plots, and burning the same, removing big logs, carrying cane and bamboo for construction of watch houses, fencing of fields are exclusively male jobs; on the other hand clearing of undergrowths in jhum fields and weeding are mostly women's job. Children also assist them. Sowing is done by males and females together; but the children are never allowed to broadcast the seeds. Harvesting is a joint operation where adult males and females and children work side by side. In terrace cultivation repairing of terrace, fencing them with bamboo-mattings or stone walls and ploughing all done by males whereas sowing, weeding and manuring are done by females.

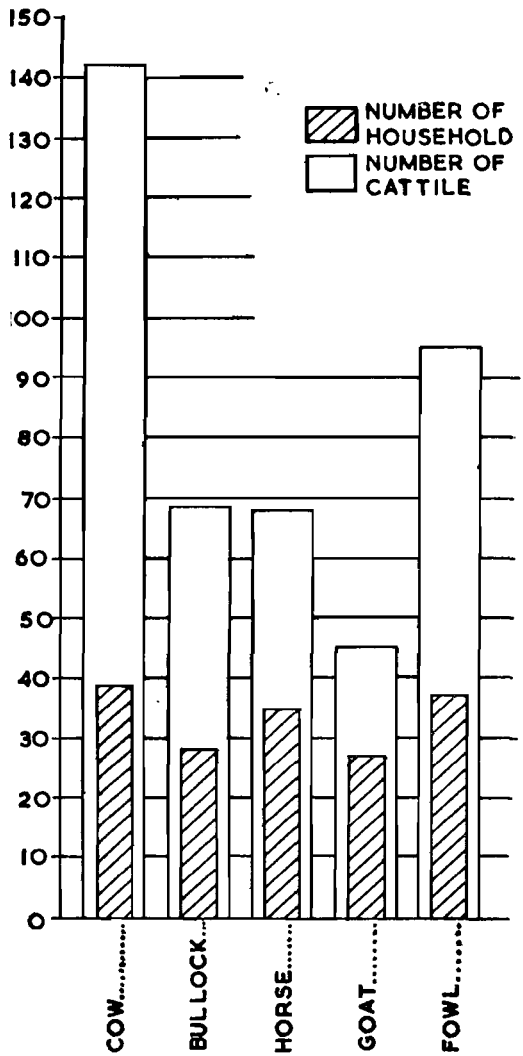
Sex-wise division of labour outside agriculture

Gathering of honey, bringing bamboo and cane from distant jungles, damming the rivers for catching fish, handling axe for making fire wood and planks, tool making, basketry marketing and hunting are exclusively men's work. Spinning, weaving of clothes and all household works, from processing of crops to preparation of food including brewing of beer, cleaning and sweeping the house, drawing water and fetching fire wood, are women's work. Construction of house is predominantly a man's work. Cutting and shaping poles, making planks, collecting stones for building walls are done by males only. Women however help in carrying mud and water to serve as mortar. In day-to-day life, the items of work for females are more than those for males. The children help their parents in minor domestic work, like fetching of water from river, hulling the grains and grazing the cattle in the jungle.

Livestock and animal husbandry

Livestock is very important for the villagers, both for economic and social reasons. It is reared for trade, cultivation and sacrifice on occasion of various religious ceremonies. The livestock found in the village consist of cow, bullock, horse, goat and fowl is reared for obtaining help for domestic consumption as well as for sale. The bullocks are used for ploughing the hard and rocky soil. The most important and prized animal is however the horse or pony which are used for carrying articles belonging to themselves and these belonging to government officials and other visitors. Here it is to be mentioned that porterage is a good source of income for the villagers. The goats and fowl are reared for trade and sacrifice in worshipping the local deities of the villagers. Though the villagers sacrifice pigs during some festivals, they do not rear the pig as it makes the whole courtyard filthy.

DISTRIBUTION OF LIVE STOCK AND NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS



The majority of the bovine in the village are of the Himalayan type with mixed blood due to indiscriminate breeding. They are of short stature and their physique and stamina are very poor. Though some of the households possess cows and bullocks of good breed purchased from the plains of Assam, their health goes down quickly due to malnutrition and improper care. There is no pedigree bull in the village, and artificial insemination is out of question, as there is no such centre in this area. However, efforts are being made by the Department of Agriculture to supply hybrid bulls to the villagers for improving the breed. There is one Veterinary Centre at Salary, about 32 Kms. from Rupa, which carries on mass vaccination against cattle epidemic and this renders a very useful service to the villagers. The horses and mules are procured from Tibetans and Tawang Monpas, these are well adjusted to local conditions and always kept fit.

The fowl reared by the villagers are small in size, and are mostly cross of domestic and wild fowl. As mentioned earlier, recently one poultry farm has been opened in the village by "Adim Jati Sewak Sangh" with the help of the Agricultural Department here a small number of birds of improved breed like Red Rhods Islands are reared and their eggs are supplied to the villagers for hatching.

A table giving the distribution of the livestock including the poultry birds, as owned by the villagers is furnished below:—

TABLE 13

Distribution of households by ownership of livestock as well as the number of livestock owned

Sl. No.	Name of Livestock	Observed situation	Number owned				
			1—3	4—6	7—10	11 & above	Total
1	Cow	(a) Household owning cow	22	14	Nil	3	39
		(b) Cows owned	42	62	..	38	142
2	Bullock	(a) Household owning bullock	22	5	1	..	28
		(b) Bullocks owned	37	25	7	..	69
3	Horse	(a) Household owning horse	32	3	..	..	35
		(b) Horses owned	56	12	..	..	68
4	Goat	(a) Household owning goats	12	4	..	..	17
		(b) Goats owned	24	21	..	..	45
5	Fowl	(a) Household owning fowls	29	6	2	..	37
		(b) Fows owned	46	32	17	..	95

It is significant that there are three households in the village, which have 11 and above cows each. It is obvious that they are rearing cow primarily for sale of milk. The fact that there are the households with 4-6 cows each, is also quite revealing, as this also brings out the importance of sale of milk in the economy of the village. It is interesting that there are five households with 4-6 bullocks each and one household with seven bullocks. If these figures are seen in the context of the pattern of distribution of the households by size-group of holdings, it becomes obvious that some persons are rearing more bullocks than his need for cultivating their own fields. It seems that rearing of bullocks has also taken the form of investment of capital in these households and that by lending the same to the needs of households the owners earn profit. The comparative unimportance of goat and fowl is also noteworthy; the presence of officials from outside and the growth of Bomdi-La as a township could be expected to provide incentive for rearing of goat and fowl on wider scale. It seems that there are some inhibiting factors which the villagers have failed to overcome.

During the Chinese invasion of 1962, the villagers had evacuated the place for safety; at that time they sustained a heavy loss of livestock. After the vacation of the invasion, when the villagers returned home, the N.E.F.A. Administration distributed horse and cow to them as a rehabilitation measure. Besides, some rich villagers themselves purchased a few cows from the plains. From five rich households, information was collected about the comparative livestock position in 1961 and 1964. A statement giving the same is furnished below :

Name of Livestock	Year	
	1961	1964
Cow	24	52
Bullock	12	5
Horse	6	14
Goat	Nil	3
Fowl	15	17

It is interesting that even after the loss during the invasion, the livestock position of these five households was much better in 1964, compared to 1961.

As mentioned earlier, except for poultry birds and goat, the villagers do not generally keep their livestock in home. These are generally allowed to graze in the jungle; this practice allows them to avoid the cost and labour of stall feeding; secondly, the chances of damage of crops in the terrace fields are reduced. The milch cattle, however, are reared at home and kept tethered. After the harvesting, the cattle are allowed to graze on the terrace field.

In the jungle the cattle and the horses, are allowed to move about unwatched. Once in a week, they are collected at a place and given salt.

When the cattle are allowed to graze on the terrace fields after harvest, some body is to keep watch that they do not go far away in search of grass. The villagers do not engage paid cowherds. Young children from different households look after the cattle by rotation.

Animal

Milk and milk product : For milking the cow, villagers use one cylindrical wooden vessel, known as **loja.** Some people have recently started using small cans procured from the plains of Assam. But **loja** is a more durable vessel; it is generally procurred from Tawang or Dirang area. The milk is given to the children in the household; the surplus is stored in a bigger wooden vessel called **jipu** without boiling. On **Jipu** normally has the capacity of containing 4 to 5 litres of milk. When kept for a few days in this vessel the milk is changed into curd. Now, to extract butter, one churner is placed inside the **jipu;** and moved to and fro continuously for about 10 minutes after closing the mouth of the **jipu** with a lid. After this the lid is opened and the content is tasted to ascertain whether butter has been extracted or not. After the butter has been formed, requisite quantity of cold water is added in the **jipu** and the butter slowly starts to float on the upper surface; it is then separated and kept in a clean vessel for consumption in the household or for sale.

On ceremonial occasions, one delicious item, called **frum** is prepared out of milk. For this purpose, boiled milk is mixed with some curd, which causes a precipitation in the milk. The same is collected in an aluminium vessel and dried on fire for a while till it gets doughy. Afterwards at the time of feast or puja it is cut into small pieces with the help of a small dao and offered to the guests or the people present. Some of the house-

holds producing good quantity of milk, sell it in village shop or to the government officials stationed in the village. In 1964 there were six households who sold milk to village shopkeeper and the officials, whereas in 1961 there were only two households who are engaged in this as a part-time business.

In 1961, one person of the village named Rinchin Dorji, who was also a member of the village council, started a small dairy farm at Dukhumpani, about 5 kms. north of the village. He had about 30 cows, out of which 12 belonged to him and the remaining 18 he had collected from five households of his village, whom he paid at the rate of Rs. 15.00 per month, per milch cow. To look after the cows, he employed two Bhutanese refugees and paid them Rs. 20.00 per month, in addition to free food. He used to sell the milk, to the nearby army and Tusker (Border Road Organisation) camps at the rate of Re. 1.00 per seer. The average monthly income was Rs. 300.00. He continued this business for a few months; later on, due to some family trouble, he had to discontinue it. At present no such dairy farm is run by any villager.

Fishing

Fishing is both a subsidiary means of livelihood and a part-time occupation for the villagers. Individual fishing can be practised in all seasons and for this purpose there is no restriction in regard to place or time. But, community fishing is done only in winter, when the people of the village are free from agricultural activities. This operation is done by the co-operation labour of various families.

There are three rivers in the vicinity of the village, where fishing is done. Community fishing is done in the rivers Ziging Kho and Dunik Kho whereas, clanwise fishing is practised only in the river Duphla Kho. In community fishing all households inhabiting the village take part; but to get its share of fish one member from each household must join in constructing the dam and catching the fish. A similar system prevails in clanwise fishing also.

The clanwise distribution of fishing places in river Duphla Kho is as follows :

(1) Thongdaukchung . Chha Thuingsi

(2) Thongdok . . . Thuchiang

(3) Thonga . . . Dublogsi

(4) Masohi . . .	Sigmu
(5) Khrimey . . .	Chillegsi
(6) Thongchi . . .	Sargya Khro (Now this clan does own this place, because of the fact that many decades ago persons from this clan committed adultery in the village. Since neither the person concerned nor his clan people could pay the fine imposed by the village council, their fishing place was seized and included in common fishing place of the whole village. Therefore the fish of this place are shared by all households in the village.)
(7) Giging . . .	Mige Ji and Monoji.

The Duingla clan shares fishing right with Khrimey which has a bigger fishing place than others. People of the Mijui Ji and Sinchhaji clans do not have any fishing place of their own, instead they have given chhak (place for collection of honey, which is also divided according to clans).

Community fishing

After harvesting the crops in the month of September, the villagers hold a meeting for fixing a day when they would construct a dam in the river for catching the fish. On the fixed day, one person from each household, including the pams goes to the selected site, at the confluence of Ziging Kho and Dunik Kho. From there some persons are sent to the jungle for bringing bamboo and wooden pegs, and the rest start the work of damming the river. The dam is constructed by arranging the stones in a line across the river and simultaneously grass and fallen leaves gathered from the nearby forest are pushed against the stone wall. These help in retaining the wall and closing the big holes in between the stones. At one side of the dam some gap of three or four feet is left, which enables the water to pass through a long bamboo knitted channel. This channel is so made, that water passing through it subsides after covering a few yards and thus leaving the fish on the dry land, where they are caught by hand.

When the dam along with the bamboo knitted outlet is constructed, the households taking part in the community fishing are divided in the batches of four or five. Everyday one batch of

people goes to the fishing place and stays there in day as well as at night. The fish collected during the whole day and the night are divided equally among the participants. Similarly, next morning, another batch comes there and collect the fish during the 24 hours that follow. In this manner every household which participated in constructing the dam gets its share. This operation continues for three months and each family shares the huge catch, which besides meeting daily consumption is dried and kept for other seasons. In a similar way the people of each clan catch fish from their respective places of fishing.

Trap : Individual fishing is done by traps, nets and angling. The traps made of bamboo are used in all the seasons, preferably during winter and summer. These are conical in shape and closed from one end when in use. They are generally placed in the mid stream where water is divested by damming it so that fish flowing down the stream may directly enter the trap. The trap is fixed in the stream, with the help of stones facing the mouth against the current. The trap is removed after a few hours and the fish entrapped are collected. Sometimes it may be left there for the whole day or night.

The traps though having the same conical shape are of various size. Each is a bamboo woven cone--one end of which is open and fitted with a conical valve. This conical valve is fitted in such a manner that fish once entrapped cannot get out. The other end is very narrow which is closed before placing the trap in stream and is opened when required.

Net : The fishing net used by the villagers resemble the common nets of the plains villages. At the open end, pockets are provided with the help of oblong iron pellets which are stitched all around the border. A long but strong rope is fastened, with the other end, which is useful in casting and pulling the net. The net is made of cotton thread procured from the markets in the plains. Fishing by nets is done mostly during the rainy season, especially when the river is flooded. Also it can be used in other season.

Angles : For angling one strong bamboo rod having a string at one end is used. The free end of the string is looped into a noose and bait is kept hanging a few inches below the knot of the noose. When the noose and bait are placed into the water, the fish coming to take the bait is caught by the noose and immediately the fisherman pulls the rod and catches the fish.

Forestry

Out of approximately 11,000 acres area within the effective control of the village, about, 10,000 acres are under forest. The general aspect of the forests in this area is that they are of mixed monsoon type. As mentioned earlier, the common species found in the village are pine, oak, deodar, walnut, rhododendron, cane, bamboo, citrus fruit trees and many edible and medicinal plants.

Honey is available in good quantity from these forests. There is no reserved forest area in the village. The villagers jointly enjoy virtually absolute rights over their forests and there is no restrictions imposed by the Administration. They are free to cut the forests for Jhumming, timber or firewood wherever they like and in the absence of any activities pertaining to aforestation, villagers neither give any royalty to the Administration nor do they receive any.

The main forest products are timber for making houses, firewood, bamboo, cane, honey and edible plants or herbs. The timber is generally extracted from pine trees which is used for the construction of house. The season for collecting timber, bamboo and cane is winter, when the people get some leisure time. Since there is no sawer in the village, the planks and wooden beams are made in the indigenous manner with the help of big axes. Therefore, if any person of the village requires timber for the construction of house, he seeks the help of other people. For this purpose a number of persons are together sent to the jungle who fell the trees and make the timber; they are not given any wages for their work; only they are given daily food and drink. There is no separate establishment in the village which is engaged in forestry for industrial or commercial purposes. The only tool used by villagers for making timber is axe, which is procured from the markets in the plains.

Similarly, cane and bamboo for construction of house are carried by the mutual understanding of the villagers.

Collection of honey

Though the villagers do not practise apiary as an industry, they collect a good quantity of honey known as **chhi** from their respective forest areas. As noted earlier the whole area is demarcated into distinct clanwise territories for the collection of honey; the bees make their hives on inaccessible rocky slopes; if a person

of one clan is to pass into the territory of another clan for collection of honey, a serious notice is taken of this offence by the village council and he is made to pay a heavy fine. Honey is obtained twice a year from one bee-hive first in the month of April and then in November. The honey collected in April is known as **khandak-chhi** while that collected in November is known as **jar-chhi.** According to the villagers, the former is much better in taste.

When the people return from their winter camp, one day in the month of April is selected for collecting the **khandak-chhi.** On the fixed day, all the members of a clan go together to the territory ear-marked for them. There they are divided into batches of 4 to 5, and each batch visits separate bee-hives, scattered over a vast area of the forests.

They use their own indigenous method for collecting honey. As the bee-hives are located in steep rocky slopes, first one person goes to the top of the slope; from there he lowers down a rope ladder and a fine knit bamboo basket. The rope ladder almost reaches the ground where other people are standing, but the basket is hung in such a manner that it just reaches below the bee-hive. Now a thick smoke produced by burning worn out clothes or pine leaves is directed towards the hive which drives away all the bees staying in and around the hive. A man, covering his entire body with thick clothes climbs the ladder and cuts the comb with the help of a bamboo knife in such a manner that the comb falls directly into the basket. The basket is brought down and then honey is extracted by squeezing the hive with both hands.

The honey thus obtained is taken home and is filtered through a thin piece of cloth for removing foreign materials. Then the purified honey is divided equally among the participants and kept in a vessel, for being taken with food occasionally. Each household preserves some honey for being bartered in Kachari villages.

Village industries

Though household manufacturing activities do not occupy an important place in the occupational structure of the village, to some extent these help the villagers in strengthening their economic resources. Many persons in the village are skilled men in basketry, weaving and silversmithy and the articles produced by them have a good market in the plains and the nearby villages;

but due to non-availability of raw materials and lack of entrepreneural experience, they have not been able to take advantage of the same. Weaving, basketry, carpentry and silversmithy are the traditional industries found in this village. There are 63 weavers, 38 basket-makers, 5 carpenters and 3 silversmiths. The weavers and basketmakers work on a small scale, adequate for meeting their domestic requirements; they do not work on commercial scale. The carpenters mainly work in connection with construction of houses; also they make crude furniture for the villagers; but they do not operate on a large scale. The silversmiths produce ornaments and other silver wares which besides meeting the requirements of the villagers, are sold in neighbouring villages of the Akas, Mijis and Khowas. There are customary payments in kind for such articles and by and large, they stick to the custom even now.

Weaving: Weaving is practised in almost all households of the village. This, however, hardly meets even their own limited requirements. But whatever they produce, is quite durable. They weave only textiles of cotton and plant fibres; weaving of woollen goods is not in their tradition.

Bogre: A rectangular piece of cloth worn by males, is one of their main produce. It is woven with fibres of **hongchong** plant which grows in the cultivation fields. Sometimes, **hongchong** plants wildly grown in the jungle, are also used for this purpose. Its bark is soaked in boiling water and washed in the river several times. The fibre is then extracted and dried in the sunshine. When completely dried up, it is spun in spindles. Weaving is mostly done on the platform of the house where the structure of loin loom is fixed permanently. **Bogre** is woven in a simple indigenous loom, possessed by most of the households. It consists of beautiful designs made by using various coloured cotton threads and generally a Swastika figure is designed in the centre of the cloth.

Daun: A colourful Sherdukpen bag, is made of cotton threads procured from the plains or Bomdi-La market. It is also woven in a loin loom; locally known as **daun-thobrang.** This loom has a warp of maximum four yards by fifteen inches and one wooden sword is used to beat up the weft. The actual weaving is done with a shuttle. This cloth has generally geometrical designs, with beautiful combinations of different colours. **Daun** is the only textile article produced for commercial purpose. It is sold to the Kacharis of Assam as well as the neighbouring tribes, the Khowas and the Akas. The Kacharis are very fond of these bags, which they procure in exchange of paddy and endi-cloth.

Stakes are the colourful narrow strips, made of cotton thread. These are woven on a tiny loin loom and used by the villagers for tying the shoes and decorating the male head-gear.

Basket making

The villagers make baskets, beer-bottle and mats of various sizes with cane and bamboo strips. Except a few, all the households engaged in this industry produce for their own consumption. Those families which do not have skilled workers of own, get such items of their necessity, from others on payment, in cash or kind. The main raw material, bamboo, is available in the village itself, though in remote places. The subsidiary but equally important raw material, cane, is obtained from the Khowas as the same is not available in the village itself.

The baskets are made of bamboo which are used for carrying firewood and crops as well as for storing grains. The basket used for carrying firewood, is conical in shape. It is meant to render strenous and hard service and can stand the roughest handling. **Yung,** is a basket with square base and four legs. It gradually becomes circular towards the open end. From the middle, two loops are provided on two sides. One plaited cane or bamboo strap passes through these loops, and is used in carrying the basket. The technique of weaving the strap is simple twilling.

The basket used for storing the harvested crops is known as **dimni,** it is cylindrical in shape and huge in size. It is made of bamboo and always kept in the second storey of the house.

Beer-bottle, made of cane are the beautiful specimens of their cane and bamboo work. It is like a glass bottle, having the main body of square shape and neck considerably narrow. The mats meant for drying and threshing the harvested crops are made of bamboo; though very few households practise this craft. All the cane and bamboo products are exclusively made for their own use.

Carpentry : All the household furniture required by a family are made in the village, by the indigenous carpenters. They can make doors, wall shelves, benches, wooden saddles and small tables called **tek** for serving beer to the guests. In the absence of modern tools and equipment the finished products are crude in shape and workmanship. However, two of the carpenters in the

village known the use of saw and carpenter's plane. Hence, besides doors and wall shelves they can make boxes, tables and chairs as these two persons took training in the carpentry in the Craft Centre Bomdi-La. Though they are trained in this craft their services are utilized only at the time of construction of house and they do not work on commercial scale. The main tools and implements used by the carpenters are, axe, saw, carpenter's plane and adge all of these are procured from the plains of Assam.

Silversmithy : Silversmithy is not an old industry for the villagers; it was started only three generations back when one person belonging to this village learnt the craft from Bhutani silversmith and established a workshop here. He passed on the skill to his only son in his old age who in turn relayed to his two sons. These two sons are still engaged in this industry. Though the two brothers have left their parental home after marriage, and live in separate households they work together in a common workshop. A few years ago one establishment came into existence by the son of one of the brothers who has set up a separate workshop, but all the raw materials, tools and equipment silversmithy are purchased jointly with the parent establishments; the profit is also shared equally.

The main items produced by the artisans are odaos, cups of various sizes, ornaments and pins, except for odaos, all the above articles are made of pure silver the odaos are generally made of German silver; this particular item yields good profit to the craftsmen.

German silver is procured from the markets in the plains and sometimes from the Bhutani traders who visit the village annually. These traders themselves procure these objects from Kalimpong (a trade centre in West Bengal). Pure silver is purchased either from these traders or from Tawang or Dirang area, in the form of old ornaments and silver coins. Betang, a Tibetan silver coin is commonly used for making ornaments which is readily available in the Monpa area of Kameng Division. One Betang is equated with half of an Indian rupee.

If the raw material is readily available, normally one silversmith can produce 10 big or small odaos, 5 bangles, 3 cups and 30 pins in one year.

The main tools and equipment required for silversmithy are anvil, scissors, iron files, tongs, hammers, iron gauze, compass.

iron bars and implements for engraving and making various designs, small balance for weighing the raw material and leather bellows. All these tools and equipment except hammers made of iron or wood and leather bellows are procured from the markets in the plains. The following chart gives the names of tools and equipment found in the establishments of the silversmith, and the present market values of the same.

Sl. No.	Tools and equipment	Local Name	Price (Rs.)
1	Anvil	Odao	10·00
2	Scissors	Jamche	25·00
3	Iron File	Sedar	5·00
4	Tong	Kampa	4·00
5	Hammer (Iron)	Shen Thung	5·00
6	Iron Gauze	Nam Kyormi	3·00
7	Compass	Thikjong	3·00
8	Iron Bar	Wakchuk	1·00
9	Engraving St	Jombi	2·00
10	Balance	Turjcy	6·00
11	Bellow	Bigpa	8·00

Besides the tools and equipment, the artisans use charcoal and certain minerals for making crucibles and solution for washing the finished products. Charcoal is made by incomplete combustion of firewood, which is cut in the jungle, piled in a heap and covered with mud and soil so that excessive Oxygen of atmosphere may not burn the wood into ash. But some Oxygen is allowed to pass inside the hearth through a small hole. Annually the smiths prepare about five maunds of charcoal. They are not required to pay any royalty to the village council or to the Administration.

Crucibles used for melting the raw silver are made from a whitish soil locally known as **Kaura.** The soil is mixed with water and when it becomes doughy, it is moulded in the form of cups. These indigenous crucibles can stand a high temperature. For washing the silver ornaments, etc., they use the solution of a material known as **chhure,** which has the properties of citric acid. These minerals are found in enough quantity around the village Jigaon. **Chhure** is of two kinds, one is red and the other is black in appearance.

The preparation of charcoal and collection of minerals is done jointly by all the artisans.

For making silver ornaments and cups, the raw material is melted in the indigenous crucibles which are kept over the fire hearth. When the raw material is melted, it is cooled down and afterwards the solid mass is beaten by hammers into required shape and size. For instance, if a bangle is to be made, whole mass is flattened into rectangular shape and the required size is cut with the help of scissors or thick iron blade. Now the piece is engraved for making beautiful designs with the help of pointed iron implements and wooden hammer, and afterwards moulded into circular shape. The finished product is lastly washed many times in the solution of *chhure.*

The produce is sold in the villages of the Akas, Mijis and Khowas as there are no silversmiths in their villages, and besides, their women are very fond of Sherdukpen ornaments. Whenever required, these people visit the smiths and purchase the desired things on payment of money or in exchange of maize and millet. Sometimes, the smiths also visit the neighbouring villages for sale of surplus silver produce.

Commerce : There are four retail shops in the village, owned by the local residents. As it has alrealy been mentioned, formerly the shop now run by Wangdi, belonged to one Nepali named Jog Bahadur. During the Chinese Aggression Jog Bahadur had evacuated along with the local people, but he did not come back with the return of normalcy. His wife and children, however, returned to the village and stayed in the shop abandoned by her husband. Later on, Wangdi started this shop with his own capital; but he feels that the children of Jog Bahadur are the owners.

A table giving the particulars of the four shops is furnished below :—

TABLE 14

Particulars about shops and their approximate annual transactions

Name of clan of Shop-keeper	When the shop was established	Name of the main commodities	Approx. Annual transac-tions
Sarva Shri			Rs.
1 Wangdi Thongdok	March '63	M/Oil, K/Oil, Cigarette, bidi, matches, biscuit, chillies, tea, etc.	2,500
2 Tsiring Thona	Nov., '63	M/Oil, ghee, vegetables, biri, cigarette, matches, biscuit, soap, dry batteries, tea & oil, etc.	3,000
3 Khandu .	Oct., '63	Cigarettes, biri, matches, vegetables, chillies & soap, etc.	1,500
4 Pem Dorjee Thonga	April, '63	Soap, cigarette, biri, matches, and M/Oil, etc.	1,000
Total .			**8,000**

These all commodities are mostly purchased by the people of Rupa and the nearby villages. The sale generally is on cash payment. It is evident that a fairly good amount of money transaction is carried on through these shops.

The main commodities sold in these shops are vegetables, mustard oil, kerosine oil, biscuit, cigarettes, matches, chillies and tea. In some of the shops rice, dry batteries and scented oil are also available. The shops get supply of commodities, mostly from Rangapara Bazar in the plains, and these are transported through the private vehicles of the contractors working at Bomdi-La.

Tsering, the oldest shopkeeper of the village, sometimes also takes contracts of construction of building as a side business.

Weight and Measurement

For measuring the food grains the villagers generally use *bray* which is a cylindrical cup having the capacity of 1 litre. All the food grains are sold or bartered in term of *bray*.

The local unit for measuring size is **Makham,** which is equivalent to the length of two stretches; there are also smaller units, **gor** and **kung,** which are equivalent to one hand and one **balista** respectively.

Other Occupations

Besides, the above occupations the villagers engage themselves in porterage work by carrying the loads of touring officers of the government and others who pass through the village. As a system regulated by the local Administration, people of one village have to carry the loads of the touring staff to the next village, and for this they are paid in cash. In case of Rupa, the people normally carry the loads to Bomdi-La, Jigaon or Shergaon and Sinchong. For carrying the load to any of these places, the porter is paid Rs. 2.00 per load. Mostly such loads are carried by the ponies owned by the villagers. The arrangement of porters is done by the **gaon-burah** with the help of the village chowkidar. The chowkidar informs the households of the concerned **chhikak** (a term used for one of the group of households supposed to work voluntarily for the welfare of the village) whose turn had come for porterage work according to the rotation of such services. In 1963-64, 98 ponies and 77 persons of the village were engaged in porterage work, which brought to the villagers, cash remuneration of Rs. 350.00.

Also during the winter months of 1963-64, some of the villagers worked on road construction, very near their village. On average from November, 1963 to February 1964, about 25 men and 12 women worked on the road daily from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. on the basis of daily wages. The adult males and females were paid Rs. 2.50 per day, whereas the minor ones (not less than 14 years of age) were paid Rs. 2.00 per day.

Indebtedness: The villagers run into debt either for meeting day to day domestic expenditure or for performing some pujas. There are only 3 families in the village, which are in debt. One of them borrowed Rs. 20.00 from a village member in 1960 for purchasing clothes from the plains market. The second person borrowed Rs. 20.00 to purchase one pig for sacrificial purpose, from the first **gaon-burah** of the village and the third person took Rs. 25.00 from the first **gaon-burah** for performing a puja to which his son fell ill.

There is no professional money lender and the persons lending money do not charge any interest. It is a matter of good form for those who can afford to render short-term financial assistance to friends and relations. This is more of the nature of social investment than economic investment.

House-tax In Kameng district house-tax only is paid by the Monpas and the Sherdukpens. It is said that prior to the consolidation of the administration in this area, some Tibetans used to extort heavy tributes from the Monpas and the Sherdukpens. These tributes were in the form of foodgrains, clothes and livestock. It is reported that to avoid such extortion, sometimes the people even ran away to Bhutan.

In 1938, when Captain Lightfoot, the then Political Officer of Balipara Frontier Tract, led an expedition to Tawang area, he suggested to the then Indian Government that steps should be taken to enable the persons who had run away to Bhutan to return home. His proposal was as follows :—

"In place of the present haphazard and the inequitable tribute in kind, I beg to propose that tribute in cash at the rate of Rs. 5.00 a house be paid to the Govt. of India throughout the Control Area, the establishment of which is proposed below. This rate of tax may seem high as an initial rate, but I am of the opinion that it is not excessive. I think, indeed, that in a few years this rate might even be increased. Such a fixed and properly distributed tax would be a boon to the villagers in that it would do away the greater part of the forced labour now being inflicted on them."

The proposal was in course of time approved by the Government and brought into force in 1940. But after a short period, the Administration reduced the amount to Rs. 2.00 per house or family in Kalaktang area only, in which the village Rupa falls. Since then villagers of Rupa are paying house-tax of Rs. 2.00 per family per annum. This rule was further amended, to the effect that the poor families who were not in a position to pay even this nominal amount, could be exempted from house-tax. Out of the 74 surveyed households of the village, four have been exempted from house-tax; It is collected by the **gaon-burahs** who deposit the money with the Political Officer, and receive 12½% of the total deposited amount, as honorarium.

Posa

Posa is a kind of stipend which is being given to some sections of the hill people, since the Ahom period to check their frequent raids on plains villages. The Sherdukpens have been receiving the Posa payment in lieu of the goods which they used to obtain by black-mailing the plains people, particularly the Kacharis of Darrang district of Assam.

According to "A collection of Treaties, Engagement and Sanads relating to India and neighbouring countries" compiled by C. U. Aitchison, the brief history of Posa payment to Sherdukpens is as follows :—

"The Sherdukpens of Shergaon and Rupa originally received an annual allowance of Rs. 2526·70 from the East India Company. This was withheld for misconduct in 1839, but on the signature of the agreement of 1844 it was resorted in part, a monthly allowance of Rs. 145·00, or Rs. 1740·00 per annum being granted. In 1852 this was raised to the original amount of Rs. 2526·70."

There has been no further change in the amount of Posa payment to the Sherdukpens; and they are still given the original amount of Rs. 2526·00 annually at Bomdi-La, on 26th January every year. Formerly, when the headquarters of the Political Officer was at Charduar, they used to receive it there. According to the custom, the Posa payment is received by seven persons from among the Sherdukpens, who represent the legendary seven Rajas or Sat Rajas.

On the day of Posa payment the seven Sherdukpens (One person each from Thongdok, Thondokchung, Khrimey and Lama clan and 2 persons from Thonga clan) dressed in royal clothes (as it has been mentioned earlier), riding on the horses accompanied by eight Kacharis (3 drum beaters from Romari, 2 flute players from Nalbari, 2 Political Interpreters from Baligaon and I. G. B. from Jargaon) come to Bomdi-La. At the time of the Posa payment, the seven Rajas of the Sherdukpens, offer two blankets, five Kilogram of chillies, two yaktails and three colourful bags to the Political Officer and in turn receive the Posa, amounting to Rs. 2526·00. Five persons from the village Rupa and two persons from the village Shergaon represent the Seven Rajas. The amount distributed among the different clans is as follows :—

	Name of Clan	Person representing the village	Amount received (Rupees)
1	Thongdok	Rupa	300·00
2	Thonga	Rupa	240·00
3	Thondokchung	Rupa	240·00
4	Khrimey	Rupa	240·00
5	Thongchi	Rupa	240·00
6	Lama	Shergaon	240·00
7	Thonga	Shergaon	240·00
		Total	**1,740·00**

In adoption to the above a lump-sum amount of Rs. 1740.00 is paid to.

The above amount is distributed among the Thongs only as and the Chhaos are not entitled to any share of Posa. On an appointed day all the Thongs of both the villages assemble at Rupa and the Posa amount of the respective clans are equitably distributed among the families belonging to them. The lump-sum amount of Rs. 786.00 is equally divided among all the above mentioned clans excepting the Thongdok; which gets a slightly large-amount.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL LIFE

Social and cultural life

During the survey, the population of Rupa was found to be 422 persons, consisting of 205 males and 217 females.

The following table gives the distribution of the population by age groups:—

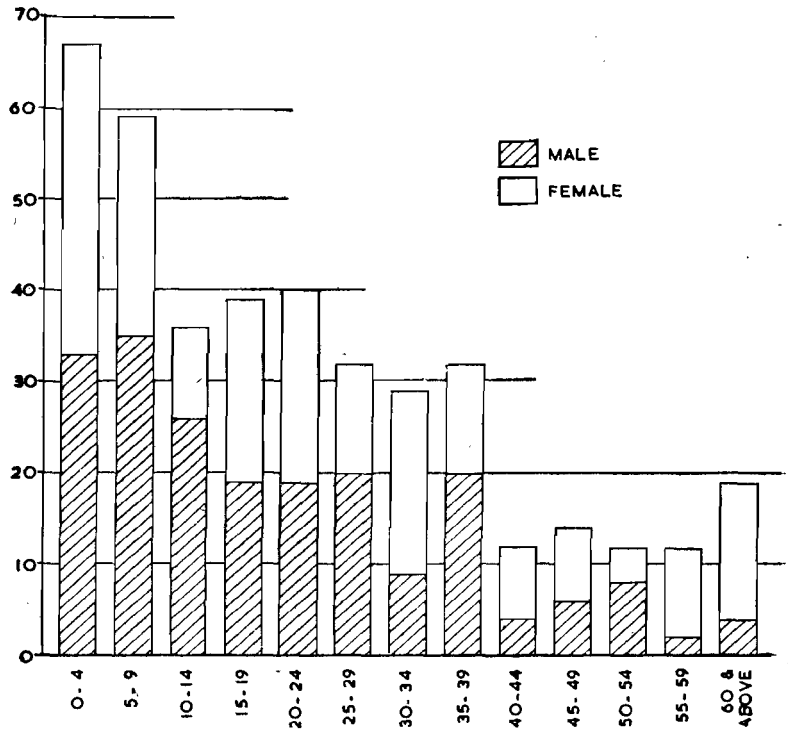
TABLE 15

Classification of Population according to age group

Sl. No.	Age Group	Population			Remarks
		Total	Males	Females	
1	0—4	67	33	34	
2	5— 9	59	35	24	
3	10—14	36	26	30	
4	15—19	39	19	20	
5	20—24	40	19	21	
6	25—29	32	20	12	
7	30—34	28	9	19	
8	35—39	32	20	12	
9	40—44	12	4	8	
10	45—49	14	6	8	
11	50—54	12	8	4	
12	55—59	12	2	10	
13	60 & above	19	4	15	
	Total	**422**	**205**	**217**	

The table shows that per 1000 males there are 1058 females. But interestingly enough upto the age of 39, the males out number females; it is only in the age-groups above 40, that the female out number the males. In the age group 60 and above, the disparity is rather startling. As against 4 males there are 15 females in this age-group. It appears that the sex ratio in this village is the function of higher longivity among the females. The factors contributing to this, or rather to the lower longivity of the males require to be studied in depth with particular reference to the food and work habits and other aspects of the way of life of the males and females respectively. Though some information was collected about these aspects, it was not possible to relate the same to the vital events of the community during the present rapid survey.

CLASSIFICATION OF POPULATION
ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP



Vital Statistics

The vital statistics of the village as collected from the households in regard to their respective household is furnished below:—

TABLE 16

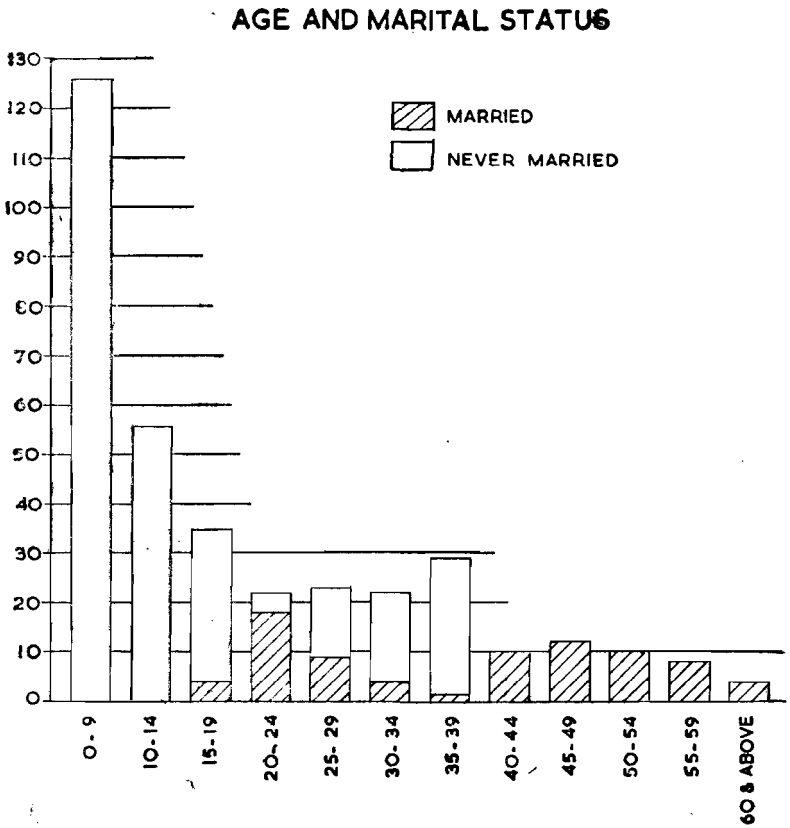
Number of children born to ever married women by period of marriage

Sl. No.	Time span after marriage (years)	No. of married women		Children born alive			Children born alive (still alive)			Children born alive (since dead)		
		Those who delivered child	To whom no child was born	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	0— 1	..	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
2	2— 5	11	3	8	8	16	7	7	14	1	1	2
3	6—10	9	..	8	12	20	8	11	19	..	1	1
4	11—15	15	1	27	26	53	23	23	46	4	3	7
5	16—20	11	..	31	20	51	30	18	48	1	2	3
6	21—25	8	..	15	17	32	13	16	29	2	1	3
7	26—30	7	..	21	16	37	17	14	31	4	2	6
8	31—35	3	..	6	14	20	6	5	11	..	9	9
9	36—40	1	..	8	4	12	2	2	4	6	2	8
10	41 & above	1	..	3	1	4	3	1	4	..	..	..
	Total	**66**	**6**	**127**	**118**	**245**	**109**	**97**	**206**	**18**	**21**	**39**

The table shows that except from one, there was no case, where a woman married for more than five years has remained without a child. The solitary exception is a case where a woman married for 11-15 years and had remained issueless. On average a married woman gave birth to 3.40 children, (1.76 males and 1.64 females). The mortality rate among the males and females upto the age of 30 did not show very usual differences, but in the age-group 30-35, of the mothers, whereas 9 female children born to them died, no male child had died. The exact implications of these statistics, however, are not clearly known.

Marital status

Out of 205 males and 217 females in the village, 70 males, and 70 females are married and 132 males and 123 females are unmarried. In total the unmarried persons are 60.4% of total population.


AGE AND MARITAL STATUS
MARRIED
NEVER MARRIED
130
120
110
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
0-9
10-14
15-19
20-24
25-29
30-34
35-39
40-44
45-49
50-54
55-59
60 & ABOVE

The following table gives the marital status of the population in the age-groups :—

TABLE 17

Age and marital status

Sl. No.	Age-group	Total population			Never married			Married			Widowed			Separated			Remarks
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1	0—9	68	58	126	68	58	126	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	
2	10—14	26	30	56	26	30	56	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	
3	15—19	19	20	39	19	16	35	..	4	4	..	..	..	..	..	..	
4	20—24	19	21	40	12	10	22	7	11	18	..	..	..	..	..	..	
5	25—29	20	12	32	5	4	9	15	8	23	..	..	..	..	..	..	
6	30—34	9	19	28	2	2	4	7	15	22	..	1	1	..	1	1	
7	35—39	20	12	32	..	1	1	19	10	29	1	1	2	..	..	..	
8	40—44	4	8	12	..	..	..	4	6	10	..	2	2	..	..	..	
9	45—49	6	8	14	..	..	..	6	6	12	..	2	2	..	..	..	
10	50—54	8	4	12	..	..	..	7	3	10	1	1	2	..	..	..	
11	55—59	2	10	12	..	..	..	2	6	8	..	4	4	..	..	..	
12	60 & above	4	15	19	..	2	2	3	1	4	1	12	13	..	..	..	
	Total	205	217	422	132	123	255	70	70	140	3	23	26	..	1	1	

The table shows that the earliest age-group where any male found married is 20-24 and the earliest age-group where any female found married is 15-19. But in this age-group out of 26 females, only 4 are married. In the next age-group, viz., 20-24, out of 21 females 11 are married. The highest age-group where a male is found unmarried is 30-34. In this age group out of 19 males, 2 are unmarried. In the same age-group out of 19 females 2 are unmarried. The highest age-group where a female is found unmarried is 35-39. One female, out of 12, is unmarried in this age group. Obviously, it is a very exceptional case, and there is hardly any possibility of the particular female being married later on. It is also, at the same time clear from the table, that child marriage is not in vogue among the villagers. Another interesting indication of the table which is worth noticing is that the number of married males is exactly same as the number of the married females. These statistics support the assertion that neither polygamy nor polyandry is practised by the Sherdukpens. The other important demographic facts which came out from the table are as follows :—

(a) The earliest age in which any widowed person found is 30-34; one woman in this age-group is a widow. In the next age group, 35-39, there is one widowed male along with one widowed female. Altogether there are 3 widowed males and 23 widowed females. This wide sex wise disparity may be because of higher longivity of females, and higher rate of remarriage of widowers even in older age-groups.

(b) The only one separated person in the village is a female in the age-group 30-34.

Health, sanitation and medical facilities

Since the village is situated in hilly area, the climate is salubrious and the general health of the people is good. Besides, their active work habit has made them sturdy in constitution. They go for performing agricultural duties in far off jungles, carry fuel and timber from distant hills and walk long distances with heavy loads without any sign of exhaustion. The women actually do more work than men. Except on ceremonial occasions they are supposed to be at work either at home or in the fields and they have little time for gossiping or for recreation whereas not infrequently men remain at home spending their time in gossiping and settling the disputes of each other. For a minor incident, there may be a meeting of the village council which will

continue for days together. The effects of these differences on the work habits can not exactly ascertained because of the difficulty of isolating other factors : it can, however, be stated in a general way that the females look healthier than the males.

The sanitary and hygienic conditions of the villagers are not, however, satisfactory. Though there is no paucity of water, the people do not take bath frequently. Even there are people who take bath hardly once or twice a year; such cases are common in the poorer section of the population. Similarly, washing of clothes is also done rarely. The clothes are changed and washed with ash and husk occasionally. Early in the morning they get up from bed, wash the face and go for nature's call in the nearby fields or jungles, but they never use water after excretion. When the people return home, from the field they may wash their hands only. In recent years, however, a considerable change has been found in the village concerning the hygienic conditions. Some people, specially young boys and girls, have started using soaps for cleaning the body and washing the clothes. They also use hair oil and comb their hair. In 1961, there were only 53 households in the village where soap was found to be used; now-a-days it is found in all the households, though the actual use may be confined to the young people only of those households.

But, their dwellings are still, not neat and clean. Animal excreta, domestic refuse, etc., are found scattered here and there, in the court-yards of the houses. Inside the house is also dark and everywhere it is full of black soot. Though in every house there are a few windows, the people rarely utilise them. All family members sleep huddled together in the same room in un-hygienic and unhealthy manner. The beddings are too dirty and seldom dried in the Sun. There is no cot in the house, and everybody sleeps on the wooden floor. Except a few houses belonging to the well-to-do families, the other houses are not swept by brooms regularly.

The most common diseases found in the village are influenza, diarrhoea, dysentery and respiratory troubles. Water brought from the river is neither boiled nor treated chemically and is, therefore, the source of water borne diseases. Cases of tuberculosis, goitre, fever and skin disease, are also not infrequent in the village. For many years, one man of Rupa has been suffering from tuberculosis but he is still alive. But there is no incidence of smallpox, malaria or leprosy.

Before the modern medical facilities were extended to the area, the villagers used only indigenous medicine, when the disease took a serious term, they used to supplement the indigenous medicines, by propitiation of deities. For this purpose they took assistance of the *Jiji* (or medicine-man). Even now they have not completely given up these practices. The chief priest in the village is called *Rao-ma;* To drive away the disease, the *Rao-ma* accompanied by one assistant priest and a few villagers goes to the out-skirt of the village, and performs a puja. The place is covered from three sides with colourful new clothes and is decorated with various ornaments and puja articles, i.e., sliver-cups containing rice, barley and local drinks; butter lamps, water pot several ornaments and three or four silver odaos. *Rao-ma* dressed in female ornaments and facing the cloth partition, sits on a cushion with woollen cover. On the cushion one figure of Swastika is made by using barley-grains. Now he recites mantras and invokes all the gods and asks them about the cause of the disease. At various intervals he announces the name of the deity or spirit which might have caused the disease and asks the head of the household concerned to perform a puja in honour of the said deity or spirit.

The medicinal herbs used in case of some diseases are as follows :

1. *Diarrhoea, Dysentery*:—*Bey*, a root of the species of ginger is chewed to recover from Diarrhoea or Dysentery.

2. *Eye Disease*:— The juice of a herb locally known as *sharin* is applied to the corners of the eyes.

3. *Injury*:— *Bey* is chewed and then applied over the injured place; then paste of elephant tusk and blood of chicken is applied.

In 1943, one dispensary was opened at Rupa. This was the first dispensary in the whole of the Kameng Frontier Division. It is still in existence and one Civil Assistant Surgeon (I) is the incharge of it. A table giving the number of the cases of various

types, treated in this hospital during different years is furnished below :—

TABLE 18

Incidence of different diseases treated in the dispensary

Name of Disease	YEAR			
	1960	1961	1962	1963
1	2	3	4	5
1. Amoebic Dysentery . .	2	16	67	70
2. Bachillary Dysentery . .	180	187	115	216
3. Diarrhoea	280	327	260	316
4. Influenza	397	405	477	366
5. Pyrexia	101	157	30	30
6. Goitre	54	51	64	9
7. Diseases due to deficiency .	180	239	103	245
8. Skin Diseases . . .	24	104	201	304
9. Injury	270	199	150	397
10. Disease of respiratory system	344	740	336	1,008
11. Disease of digestive system	364	128	306	326
12. Other Diseases . . .	817	490	266	623
Total .	**3,013**	**3,044**	**2,375**	**3,910**

The table includes cases belonging to the adjoining villages and the road labourers, in addition to those belonging to Rupa. It is interesting to note that the incidence of certain diseases, like skin disease, disease of the respiratory system, Bachillary dysentery etc., have shown a persistent upward trend, if the year 1962 is left out of consideration, when there was a temporary evacuation of the villagers due to the Chinese aggression. It is difficult to say how much these figures reflect actual increase in the incidence of these diseases and how much these reflect increasing tendency of the people to report the cases for treatment. A detailed study in five families in 1963, showed that out of 33 individuals 8 (5 males and 3 females) had fallen ill

during the year. Three suffered from stomach pain, three from influenza, one from dysentery and one from eye trouble. All of them reported to the dispensary for medicine.

There are two buildings with wooden frame, and bamboo roof and plank floor in the dispensary. The walls are plastered with mud and white washed. In one building, there is provision for keeping three indoor patients while the other is used as dispensary and office. The latter one consists of two rooms. Just behind the main building there is one kitchen consisting of two rooms. Also in the premises of hospital, there is one hutment for the patients suffering from infectious diseases.

The Medical Officer, is assisted by a compounder and three Medical Attendants. The following statement gives the position of the medical and para-medical personnel in 1964:—

Sl. No.	Designation	Post sanctioned	Post existing
1	Civil Assistant Surgeon (I)	1	1
2	Compounder	1	1
3	Medical Attendant	3	3
4	Peon	1	..

Education

Before independence, there was no modern educational institution in the village. But there was a system of traditional education in the region. At Tawang monastery, at a distance of about 195 kms. from the village, instructions were and still are imparted in Tibetan Buddhist scriptures. The students learn the two forms of writing of Tibetan alphabets and reading of religious literature. One person from Rupa had received such education. On his return to the village he became Lama.

After independence, the primary school was set up in the village. Facilities were also provided for higher education of the students who had completed primary education in the village. In 1964 there were four persons, all males, who had passed middle English; five persons (4 males and 1 female), who had passed lower primary and there were 21 persons (19 males and 2 females) who were literate without standard. A table

Giving the distribution of the persons by education and age-group and sex is furnished below :—

TABLE 19

Distribution of persons by education, age and sex

Age-group	Total Population	Illiterate		Literate		L. P. Pass		M. E. Pass		Remarks
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
0—9	126	68	58	..	..	..	..	..	..	
10—14	56	20	30	6	..	..	..	..	..	
15—19	39	12	18	4	2	2	..	1	..	
20—24	40	13	20	4	..	1	1	1	..	
25—29	32	13	12	4	..	1	..	2	..	
30—34	38	8	19	1	..	..	..	..	..	
35—39	32	20	12	..	..	..	..	..	..	
40—44	12	4	8	..	..	..	..	..	..	
45—49	14	6	8	..	..	..	..	..	..	
50—54	12	8	4	..	..	..	..	..	..	
55—59	12	2	10	..	..	..	..	..	..	
60 & above	19	4	15	..	..	..	..	..	..	
Total	422	178	214	19	2	4	1	4	..	

Schools

The Lower Primary School in the village was established on 9th April, 1949. It is run by the Education Department of NEFA. There are three teachers. The senior teacher and two female teachers are Assamese, while the other two are tribals. In 1963 one "Purba Buniyadi Pathshala" (Pre-basic School) has been started by the Women Welfare Association, Tezpur. It is looked after by two lady teachers. A table giving the particulars of the teachers of these two schools is furnished below :—

TABLE 20

Particulars of teachers

Sl. No.	Name	Community	Mother Tongue	Other languages known
1.	Shri Chandra Kanta Gogal	Assamese	Assamese	Hindi, English & Sherdukpen
2.	Shri Pem Dakpa-Monpa	Monpa	Monpa	Hindi, Tibetan and Sherdukpen
3.	Shri Yesi Dorjee .	Sherdukpen	Sherdukpen	Hindi, Assamese & Monpa
4.	Miss Nimoli Keot .	Assamese	Assamese	——— ———
5.	Miss Nauni Sharma	Assamese	Assamese	——— ———

The two lady teachers of the pre-basic school besides their normal routine school work, go to the village and perform social service by teaching and giving practical demonstration to the villagers regarding the cleanliness of body particularly of the children and the surroundings.

Only the children of main village attend the schools, none comes from the hamlets. There are 50 students (47 boys and 3 girls) at present (1964), in the Primary School. In 1961, there were 29 students (24 boys and 5 girls). In the pre-basic

school there are 31 students (13 boys and 18 girls). The distribution of the students of these two schools by community (including clang among the Sherdukpens) is as follows:

TABLE 21

Distribution of Students by class, clan and community

Clan and community	Pre-basic	Class A	Class B	Class I	Class II	Class III	Total
Sherdukpens							
1. Thongdok	7	8	2	..	1	..	18
2. Khrimey .	11	8	6	1	1	1	28
3. Thonga .	3	4	..	..	..	1	8
4. Masobi .	2	..	1	..	1	2	6
5. Thongohi.	..	..	..	1	..	..	1
6. Migeji .	3	1	2	3	..	..	9
7. Duingla .	2	1	..	..		..	4
8. Mijuiji .	1	..				..	2
9. Sinchhai .	1	..	..		..	..	2
10. Nepali .	1	2	..	..	..	..	3
Total	**31**	**24**	**11**	**7**	**4**	**4**	**81**

The three Nepali students reading in the school are the children of the officials posted at Rupa.

The school daily opens at 09.00 hours and closes at 15.00 hours, except on Sundays and holidays. The medium of instructions is Assamese and the languages taught to the students are Tibetan, Assamese and Hindi. The average attendance of the students in the primary school is 70% and in the pre-basic school 55%. During the time of cultivation and community festivals the attendance comes down. The primary school remains closed during the winter vacation for 45 days from 1st February to 15th March every year.

Besides the normal studies in the school, the students play games twice a week during the school hours and daily during

the interval period and after the school hours. Their favourite games are football and tennicoid. They also play their own local games like *Sin-Kirti-Kriti-Loba.*

There are three buildings of the primary school at Rupa and prior to the establishment of the pre-basic school all the three buildings were used only for the primary school. When the pre-basic school was set up, one of the building was transferred to its control.

All the three buildings were constructed in the year 1949. One of these is made of wooden frame with tinned roof and cemented floor, while the others are made of wooden frame having roof of split bamboo and floor of mud.

The following is the list of text books for various classes as prescribed by the Education Department of NEFA :

Class A	1. Assamiya Adi Path I
Class B	1. Assamiya Adi Path II 2. Patigonit I
Class I	1. Sonali Path I 2. Patigonit I 3. Sadharangyan Aru Swasthya Path I 4. Adi Path I & II for boys who passed A & B in dialect.
Class II	1. Sonali Path I 2. Sadharangyan Aru Swasthya Path 3. Patigonit II 4. NEFA Geography
Class III	1. Sonali Path 2. Assamiya Byakaran 3. Rachanapath I 4. NEFA Geography 5. Sadharangyan Aru Swasthya Path 6. Nabin Basic Reader I 7. Patigonit II

There is no hostel arrangement for the students. At the time of the survey two boys, however, were staying in the Rupa Welfare Centre.

The people of the village are on the whole conscious of the importance of education. One man whose son was studying in the high school at Bomdi-La said that he was proud

that his son was having higher education. But most of the people want higher education only for male children, though they send their girls also to the primary school. Out of the 74 households, 65 are ready to send their children to the village school and remaining 9 want to send only those children to school who are unable to do any work at home or in fields. They think that it is essential for the grown up children to participate in the economic pursuits of their households.

For further studies, the students are sent to Bomdi-La High School where they are provided with free lodging and boarding facilities. At present three boys of this village are reading in the high school, at Bomdi-La. One boy, named Rinchin Dorji, who passed his matriculation examination in 1962, is studying in the pre-medical course in medical college, in New Delhi. He is also working as a part time news announcer in the All India Radio, New Delhi.

In-and out-migration

There is only one household which permanently settled in this village after migrating from outside during the last fifty years. It came from Dirang, a village situated 58 Kilometers away from Rupa. The head of the household, came to this village with his wife and one son in the year 1937. According to him, he had a quarrel with his brother, and was forced to leave his home. He settled at Rupa with the permission of the village council. Later on, he was included in the Thongdok clan of the Sherdukpens and was accepted as permanent resident of the village.

A table giving the classification of the permanent population of the village according to the place of birth is furnished below :—

TABLE 22

Classification of the permanent population of the village according to place of birth

Sl. No.	Place of Birth	PERSONS		
		Male	Female	Total
1.	Born in the village	202	200	402
2	Born outside the village within NEFA .	3	17	20
3	Born outside NEFA	..	..	..
	Total	**205**	**217**	**422**

Out of the 422 persons, 402 (202 males and 200 females) persons or 95.2% were born in the village whereas 20 persons (3 males and 17 females) or 4.8% were born outside the village but not a single person was born outside the NEFA. Out of the three males born outside the village, two came from Dirang and one from Shergaon after marrying a widow living at Rupa. Most of the females born outside the village, migrated here on marriage. No information about any case of out migration from the village could be obtained, though information was available about the persons belonging to different households who were so journing outside.

Winter migration

One of the most interesting aspects of the life of the Sherdukpens is their annual migration to Doimara during the winter months. All the villages belonging to Sherdukpen community take part in this seasonal migration. Formerly the villagers used to start for Doimara in December and return to their respective villages by the middle of April, thus staying there for complete four months. But since the last five years they have been staying there only for three months as they were advised by the Administration to cut short their period of stay at Doimara. Now a days, they commence the exodus for Doimara in the middle of December and come back to the village by middle of March. According to the book "Sherdukpens" by Shri R. R. P. Sharma (1961) their tradition of migration is as follows :

"He (JAPTANG BORAH) afterwards shifted his capital from *But* to Rupa and, while there, he once went out hunting, in the course of which he chased a wild pig and overtook it near Doimara. There he met the Kacharis from whom he came to know about his maternal grandfather, the Ahom King, who was then ruling from Sibsagar. Japtang Bura went there to meet the king who was so happy to see him that he ceded him all the land between Dhansiri and Gabru (Belsiri) rivers and its revenue. The Sherdukpen tradition of going to Doimara every winter is held to have started from this date."

Whatever may be its origin, the Sherdukpens had been collecting tributes from the Kachari villages till recently, in cash and kind. Such collection of tributes has been formally stopped after the extension of effective administration in NEFA. However, the Sherdukpens still go to Doimara and visit the Kacharis and the latter offer paddy and betel-nut in good quantity in conformity with the tradition.

Between December and March, the winter is severe in the area and is accompanied by thick frost. The vegetation cannot stand this cold, hence cultivation is not possible and even villagers find it hard to feed their cattle. This very reason forces their neighbouring tribe, the Monpas, also to migrate to the foot-hill areas during the winter.

At Doimara, besides enjoying a pleasant climate the Sherdukpen expect some prospects of trade and inexpensive living. There they never waste their time in idleness. They engage in things like weaving, basketry, etc., besides carrying on trade in fowl, chillies, jabrang and other local articles.

Doimara lies in Foot-hills area of Kameng on the left handside of the river Belgiri at an altitude of about 1,000 feet. The Foot-hills-Bomdi-La roads passes by its side. It is full of dense and luxuriant vegetation. Rain in this area falls in excess during the monsoon. Due to its situation in low altitude, it is sufficiently warm even during the winter months. The climate, though malarious, is not unhealthy during the dry months (October to April).

The villagers vacate their houses in the month of December, after performing their biggest festival Khiksaba, meant for appeasing the forest deities. Besides the villagers, it is attended by the Kacharis and Khowas. After this festival, the people enjoy a few days in the village drinking and feasting and discussing about their coming visit to the plains and the prospects of trade. When the time of winter exodus approaches one day the whole village assembles at the *Gompa* and fixes a date for beginning the journey to Doimara, in consultation with the village Lama.

Preparations are made for the commencement of the journey some four or five days in advance. Each household arranges all the household goods which are to be taken; the remaining items not required in the winter camp are kept in safe places of the house. The costly goods are taken to the jungle and kept in a safe place known as *Michhing Khyun*, the particulars of which have already been furnished.

In the olden days, the villagers migrated to their winter camps in one group, but now-a-days they do not leave for Doimara together. Instead they go in batches. The people of the main village may march together in one party while the

people of the Pams go separately in different parties. Sometimes, a few households of the main village may join the people of the Pams who usually commence their journey a few days after the people of the main village. Besides, some households, particularly belonging to the Pams, do not migrate to Doimara at all; they continue to stay in the village. However, those among these household which have able bodied males, may send the same temporarily to the visit Kachari villages for trade and getting their share of paddy and endi clothes as they had been receiving in the past. They do not construct any huts for their stay at Doimara during their temporary visits; they put up with some of their relations who have constructed huts for themselves.

Before leaving the house for winter exodus, every household performs a puja called *Shekhim-Chhongba.* This puja is performed either by the Lama or the *jiji* to appease the forest deity for protection against any kind of sufferings. The Lama or the *jiji* sitting inside the house, offers indigenous beer and rice or barley in the name of the forest deity and afterwards the same offerings are made out sidé the house.

On the day of the march, all the males and the females of the party get up early in the morning and some portion of the food prepared on the previous night is eaten; the rest is carried in a vessel. After taking light drink and meal, they dress themselves in new or clean clothes and pack up all the luggages required for the journey. The objects of trade are loaded on ponies, and the articles like utensils, cooked food and indigenous drinks, are kept in bamboo baskets which are carried by themselves. Before noon, all the people of the village get ready and start their journey. The whole village looks deserted when the people have gone away. During the march, certain patterned behaviour can be observed. For example, the women are seen carrying the babies in baskets or driving the cattle which, also march along with the party. The males follow the loaded ponies on foot though some may be riding on the ponies. There is no system of *pardah;* so the men and women go together, chit-chatting and joking with each other. The grown up boys and girls are seen going in groups, talking and singing songs, carrying loads on their back. Each family is fully equipped with all the necessary requirements for the journey and is self sufficient. Some times no meals are prepared during way side halts, as enough cooked food is brought from the home.

It takes them four days to reach Doimara. On the first day, the villagers halt at Jabrang about 8 miles from village in the south. As soon as the people reach the place of halt, they start preparation for the night. The place is cleared and separate camp fires are made for the different households, around which the members of the households concerned keep all their baggages. While the male members keep busy in un-loading the ponies and tethering the cattle, the women lit the fire and start preparing food. Those households which possess tents pitch the same, others may stay in the open space without any cover. However, the young-folk particularly adolescent boys and girls stay in bamboo huts known as *gebrang* made by themselves every year before starting the winter exodus.

After taking meals with their parents, all the young-folks gather in their respective staging huts and pass a good time chit-chatting, drinking, smoking and singing songs. It can also be safely assumed that cupid does not remain idle on such occasion. They sleep late in the night and get up early in the morning for onward journey. In the morning, after taking meals they dismantle the camp, untie the cattle and roll their bedding. The horses are packed with loads and the journey is resumed. In this manner, the villagers reach Doimara on the fourth day.

Doimara Camp—As soon as Doimara is reached, all the people rush to their ancestral clearings where they have been staying for generations. If seen out of the season, the place looks like an abandoned village, with many old huts but without any inhabitant. In the camp area a few huts are found undamaged and fit for habitation; while the others are completely damaged or dismantled either by wild animals or by labourers working on the near-by road. But the temple, *chhorten* and the *manes* are found intact without any damage. As mentioned earlier, the other villages of the Sherdukpen tribe also migrate to this place, but each village has its separate site for camping.

In 1963, there were only 39 huts in the camp area of the village Rupa. These were constructed in 1962; in the winter months of 1963, no household stayed there, due to the Chinese Aggression in this region. Besides these 39 huts, there was one big house, made by the villagers for the V.I.Ps. who stayed there during their visits to this place.

The houses are like ordinary huts made of wooden poles and bamboo-mattings readily available in the nearby jungle. In every house, one stone hearth and wooden pestle and mortar are always found which can be used for a few years.

In the south of Rupa camp, there is one *chhorten* made by the villagers many decades ago, in honour of a Tibetan trader Jangpo. It is said that Jangpo, a resident of Tsona Dzong used to visit the plains of Assam, crossing the Sherdukpen territory for the trade of silver, borax and other costly things brought from Tibet. Afterwards due to his business of silver, he was popularly known as *Chhompon Norbu Jangpo.* He frequently met the Sherdukpens at Doimara and taught them the advantages of trade, and persuaded them to start the trade of their local goods in the villages of the plains. Therefore, he helped them in promoting their means of subsistence. He once stayed at Doimara and passed there one night with the villagers but was never seen afterwards. Therefore, all the Sherdukpen people constructed one *chhorten* (shrine) in his honour, where he spent the night. The stones used by him as fire stand are still preserved in the *chhorten* and the people perform puja at this place as soon as they reach Doimara.

Besides the *chhorten,* there is a temple in the north-east of the camp, where the Lama performs various pujas during their stay at Doimara. Opposite to the temple, there is one *mane* (a stone wall fitted with stone tablets inscribed in Tibetan alphabets) which is considered to be contemporary to the *chhorten.* In the south-east, one stone tablet having carved image of Buddha and in the north-west the words "Om Mani Padme Hum" inscribed on a stone tablet are affixed to the *mane.* There is no such tablet on the other two sides of the *mane.* According to the Lama, a very large number of prayer tablets should be installed on every *mane* but in this case, the villagers could not get a few more as these are required to be procured from Tawang monastery where some monks do such inscription work. Around the *mane* five flag-poles were in existence which were erected in honour of the person who died in the camp. As mentioned earlier, whenever any person dies, at each shrine one flag-pole is erected in his name.

On the day the villagers reach Doimara, every household rushes to its respective old hut and those who have no shelter share the same with other households till they construct their own. For, the next few days every household remains busy either in repairing the old huts or in constructing new one. When they get settled, finally, one Puja called *Smau-phanba*

is performed at a place named *Ruchong Chhong* about 5 kms. from Doimara. The *jiji* officiates at the puja and only elderly persons of all the three villages take part in it. This puja is performed to appease the forest deity who is responsible for epidemic and the various other diseases which normally prevail in the plains. On this occasion one sheep is killed by a village Chowkidar (*Kachung*) belonging to the Chhao section. The priest chanting some sacred formulae offers local beer and blood of sheep to the deity. On the next day, the same puja is performed on the foot-track leading to Kachari villages. The place is about 3 kms. away from the camp. There instead of one sheep, four fowls are sacrificed and the head of each fowl is hung on a bamboo pole, which is smeared with the blood of the sacrificed fowls. The villagers visit the markets in the plain and the Kachari villages only after performing this puja so that they may not meet with any untoward event. After completing the above worship, one more puja called *Yangdam* is performed at the *chhorten* in honour of Jangpo. In this puja all persons present in the camp are expected to participate. Firstly, the young boys and girls go round the camp, carrying religious scriptures with them; lastly, they come to the *chhorten* where the Lama reads his book, and offers water, indigenous beer and food grains. After the puja, all the people enjoy the local drinks collected by themselves for the occasion.

In the month of January every year, all the able bodied Sherdukpens present at Doimara go in a procession with their seven Rajas, to visit the following Kachari villages, situated in between the rivers Dhansiri and Belsiri from where they used to collect tribute in the past and are still getting a good quantity of food grains and endi chadars.

1. Jargaon
2. Romari
3. Bergaon
4. Baligaon
5. Nering
6. Manmaru
7. Phobong Sibri
8. Nalbari
9. Posla
10. Simulguri

11. Panbari
12. Hirguri
13. Toap Grir
14. Slowjiromari
15. Bandarmari

The ancestors of these seven Rajas, might in the olden time be the founders of the important clans or lineages of Thongs. Accompanied by the various functionaries of the Sherdukpen community, they used to visit their Kachari tenants for collecting taxes in the past wearing Tibetan dress and mounting spirited horses. Though the collection of taxes has been stopped and their supremacy over the Kacharis is no longer recognised, they continue to visit their old subjects in a friendly manner and still command respect from the Kacharis.

During the ceremonial reception of the Sherdukpens, by the Kacharis, different clans are represented as follows :—

1. Thongdok	1 Person
2. Thongdokchung	1 Person
3. Khrimey	1 Person
4. Thongchi	1 Person
5. Thonga	2 Persons

(one from Rupa and one from Shergaon).

Besides one Lama also remains present.

The dress of the rajas consists of one long coat called *gochin chpo, Jacket (pinga),* fur cap *(chhogjo),* silver belt *(korki),* shoes *(changong)* and one small box of silver hung on one side across the shoulder. The long coat and the jacket made of Chinese silk, having dazzling yellow colour are procured from Bhutan.

The date of their visit to each Kachari village is communicated through messengers who go in advance. Every year they first visit to Jargaon, where the seven *rajas* and other Sherdukpens are received cordially by the villagers; and given a feast. The next day a Puja is performed jointly by the Kacharis and the Sherdukpens. A Kachari priest presides over the ceremoney and the expenditure incurred in this puja is mainly borne by the Kacharis though some contribution in the form of chillies,

jabrang spices, etc., is made by the Sherdukpens also. On this occasion the Sherdukpens and the Kacharis revive their old friendship. The Sherdukpens stay there for a few days and each Thong household collects some paddy from its respective Kachari household free of cost, as a traditional obligation. It is said that the quantity of paddy collected now a days, from the villages by one household of Thong, is many times less than what their fore-fathers used to collect. The households belonging to Chhac community do not have any right of collecting such gifts, as they did not have this privilege even in the remote past. However, the Chhaos may also receive some quantity as a matter of grace, if they go to the Kacharis along with their respective masters Thong. In a fixed sequence the Sherdukpens visit other villages and are received in the same manner and given paddy and other gifts. The collected food grains are then carried to Doimara on ponies; those who have no ponies carry the same on their backs. Later on the villagers visit the Kachari villages from time to time taking with them chillies, jabrang spice, hides and skins, dried fish and woollen goods. There they exchange such things with paddy and endi clothes. Besides some people who possess the above items of trade in good quantity, visit the nearby weekly markets like Udalguri, Dhekiajuli, Missamari and Rangapara, where they sell them and purchase their own requirements. In this manner, the villagers gather food grains and other consumer goods, part of which is consumed at the winter camp for three months, and the surplus is carried to their villages and stored in the houses for ceremonial occasions.

Formerly, Thongs collected food grains etc. from every Kachari household but with the increase in population and proliferation of families claiming to be Thong blood, separate clusters of households were attached to each Sherdukpen household for the collection of tributes. In recent years this sort of allocation has been further reduced. On an average a Thong household gets 10-15 mds. of paddy from the Kacharis as gift. As a result. for some Sherdukpen households, the attached Kachari households are found in one set of villages, for some others in another set of villages, and so on. They visit the Kachari villages accordingly.

It is said that in the remote past, the Sherdukpens did not do much trade as they could get most of their consumer goods in the form of presents either as an obligation or by force. In the latter case, these people sometimes killed the people exposed to depredation by them. Later on they enterned into an agreement with the then Government to stop their depredation and

in lieu of that receive annual *posa* (quit money-*cum*-compensation) of Rs. 2500/-; but this did not stop their receiving tribute from the Kacharis as a matter of ceremonial obligation. With the extension of the British rule in the region, the Sherdukpen found that the amount received by them as ceremonial obligation were progressively coming down and on the other hand carrying an depredation had become an impossible task. They, therefore, were forced to take to trade and commerce.

At Doimara, the Sherdukpen women who normally do not take part in visiting the Kachari villages, remain busy in weaving clothes like *bogre, daun* and *stak*. These are made of cotton thread, procured from the nearby weekly markets. They also extract fibre from a wild plant called *hongchong* which is used for making fishing nets and *bogre*. The old men with the help of children bring cane and bamboo from the nearby jungle and make various kinds of baskets, ropes and mats. The textile goods and the basketry products are sold or exchanged in the market, for grains and other commodities required by them.

The able bodied men, when they get time after gathering the food grains, go for hunting in the jungle and kill wild boar, deer and fowl.

In the month of February, the surplus food grains collected from the Kachari villages along with other articles purchased from the nearby markets are carried to the village by young folk. This task is left with the adolescent boys and girls who go to the village in groups; no grown up male or female joins them. This is obviously a great occasion for the youth, a period of dream earned with the sweat of the back. For this journey, youths of each village fix their own day; on the selected day after taking their morning meal and packing some food for the journey, they leave the camp carrying loads on the back of ponies. When they get out of the sight of their parents, every boy joins his girl friend and throughout the journey they remain together. By the evening, they reach the camp, where they halt for the night. In the transit camp, the youths of Rupa village gather in three groups according to their respective *blangs*. Each *blang* has a separate hut of its own in transit camps; and the boys and girls of the different *blangs*, pass night together in their respective *blangs*. On the fourth day, they reach the village, deposit their goods and then start their return journey to Doimara. Till all the accumulated goods at Doimara, are carried to Rupa, they go on repeating their to and fro journeys.

In the last part of February, one big puja called *nausan* is held at Doimara. The puja is performed to appease Aurang Deo and Bhaurdeo, the two Kachari deities. In this puja too the expenditure is borne by Kacharis. It is stated that prior to the introduction of Posa payment, the Kacharis used to pay taxes and presents to the Sherdukpens on this occasion, at Doimara. Now a days no taxes are paid, but the Kacharis bring some presents in the form of food grains, betel leaves and nuts, *laopani* (indigenous rice beer brewn by the Kacharis) and a few *endi chadars*. On this occasion about 20 to 21 persons including one goanbura of Jargaon, 3 drum beaters of Romari, 2 flute players of Nalbari and 2 Political Interpreters of Baligaon, come to Doimara, bringing the presents. These are offered to the seven Rajas of Rupa and Shergaon who afterwards distribute the same among themselves. For the purpose of the Puja, the Kacharis bring offerings separately. The Puja is performed by a Kachari priest and is witnessed by all Sherdukpens. The seven Rajas attend the Puja in their royal dress. The priest offers *laopani*, betel-nuts and one goat to the deities. At the end of the puja *laopani* and betel-nut are offered to all, but no food is offered.

After the completion of the puja, the Sherdukpens visit the nearby bazars again and purchase clothes, utensils and other amenities of day-to-day life. A few days afterwards, they complete their preparation for their return journey to the village. A few days before their departure some Kacharis again visit Doimara and collect money or fowl from each Sherdukpen household as offerings for a puja called Jargaon Lho, which is performed at the village Jargaon, by the Kacharis. It is believed that if this puja is not performed some of the Kacharis may become mad and trouble their neighbours.

Family and kinship

Out of the 74 households studied, only 3 are joint families, where the head of the households and his wife are living with married sons or married brothers and their spouses; 36 households are pure nuclear families consisting of married couples and their children. The rest are nuclear households with adhesions or additions. Out of them in seven households married couples are living with their unmarried brothers and sisters as well as one of the widowed parents of the male head. In 25 households either various categories of relations, like widowed grand-mother, mother-in-law, sister's son or brother's son, etc., are living with

the married couples. In the three households there are attached servants. There is no slave in this village; the servants are free to leave anytime they like. But so long as they stay with their masters, they are entitled to free lodging, boarding and clothing.

From the foregoing data as well from the discussions with the villagers, the pattern that emerges out is briefly as follows. Extended family in the sense of co-residence of married siblings or sons along with the parents is not the ideal type. Soon after marriage, the sons are expected to set up their separate households. But this separation of residence does not necessarily mean sundering of economic, and other obligations. Frequently the same continue. In case of death of one of the parents, the surviving parent is expected to live with one of the married sons. When the parents become very old, both may live with one of the sons.

Normally the male head has the dominant voice over the affairs of the village; but in the household chores the wife's prerogative is respected. A newly married girl is expected to maintain respectful demeanour towards the elders, among the husband's kins; she is also expected to be a-bit reserved with regard to her husband in the public. But as days pass on, the wall of shyness wears off and she mixes more freely with her husband in the public. Her behaviour towards the elders and other kins of the husband also depends more and more on the personal equations and not merely on the expected norms.

Inheritance of property

Inheritance.—For the purpose of inheritance, the property is divided into two categories — movable and immovable. The movable property consists of foodgrain, livestock, agricultural tools and equipment, weapons, clothings, ornaments, and cash money. The immovable property consists the dwelling house and land. In the inheritance of property, the following general principles are observed.

(a) Only sons are entitled to property; under no circumstances, a daughter can inherit property though she is entitled to maintenance.

(b) The movable property is not divided equally among the sons, the eldest son gets the largest share. The youngest son, gets a smaller share; it is slightly larger than those of the other sons. The remaining sons share the property equally. Thus, if there are four sons, the property would be distributed according

to the following ratios 5:3:3:4. The eldest son is expected to perform the death rites of parents and hence he has a claim to a larger share; the youngest son if unmarried requires a larger share to meet his marriage expenses; and if married is expected to take responsibility of looking after the parents in their life time. It is reported that these considerations provide the rationale for the larger shares of these two sons. It was however not possible to verify the different aspects of the question through case studies.

(c) The lands under permanent cultivation as well as shifting cultivation are divided equally among all the sons.

(d) If a person does not have a male child, he can adopt a boy belonging to his clan, as a son. After his death the adopted son will inherit his property. But this son will not be entitled to any share from his real father's property.

(e) If a person dies without any male heir, the movable property can be retained for the maintenance of the wife and unmarried daughters. The movable property is inherited by brothers of the deceased; in the absence of the same, the property passes on to the closest male agnate. In every case, however, the widow and unmarried daughters of the deceased have right of maintenance.

Leisure and recreation

Except for the religious festivals, there is no organised recreational activity at the community level. There are also no institutional facilities for the same, like clubs, libraries, theatres etc. The children, however, have their games and occasionally the grown up males, go for hunting and fishing in groups. For the old and the women, the most favourite pastime is gossiping, while enjoying drink and smoking tobacco. These gossip groups provide important channels for the circulation of information as well as village scandals.

Games.—The games more commonly prevailing among the children and the youths of the village are as follows.

Sinkriti-Ninkriti.—It is graceful favourite game of the children. The meaning of "Sinkriti-Ninkriti" is moving gold and silver. For this game two boys stand facing each other

One boy bends forward and holds the waist band of the other. The second boy lies on the bent back of the first and holds his waist band tightly. Now the boys thumping their foot rotate uttering the words Sinkriti-Ninkriti.

Ek-Jumba.—Two boys facing each other join their hands. Now one boy who challenges the other to the game gives his hand to the other who grips it with his both hands. The challenger tries to free his hand by twisting and manipulating his arm. If the challenger could free his hand, he wins the contest, otherwise he loses.

Modern games.—Besides the above indigenous games, the boys who attend the school, play football and, tennyquiet. During the winter when the people are free from the harvesting of crops, the grown up boys of the village organise football teams and participate in the same with great enthusiasm.

Folk Songs

The folk songs with dances are locally known as *brou.* Some of them depict the origin of dances and their importance. There are many other songs sung during various ceremonies; they are known by the name of *hun.* The *brou* and *hun* are not their original songs but are believed to have been adopted from the Tibetans.

There are limited number of songs which are thought to be their own. These are most sung individually.

The following is a marriage song sung by the parents and relatives of the bride when she attends the marriage ceremony :-

Nima sarku chhong pan, man chhong pan;
Mande chhongraon nina ma pham oh;
Nima loku chhong pan, Ngaya chhong pam;
Ngaya de chhongraon nina ma pham oh;
Loskar gyan la tese phamdur oh;
Nima napko chhang pan, ba chhong pan;
Ba de chhongraon nina ma pham oh;
Te de chhongraon nina ma phamdur on;
Te de raple tese phamdur oh;
Nima uku chhong pan manchin chhong;
Manchin chhongraon nina Ma pham oh;
Manchin dungla tese phamdur oh;

When the bride starts weeping for her separation from parents, the above song is sung to console her. The meaning of the song is as follows—

As the mithun owner of the east did not like to sell his mithun due to its beautiful horns but he sold it for the good price.

And the owner of *Ngaya* (a big silver cup where signs of Zodiac are inscribed) from the South did not like to sell, because of the good it augurs, but had to sell it for the sake of money.

And the owner of *Japya* (a tree the root of which emits light in night) did not like to sell it due to its light but, had to sell it, as it was the only item of his trade.

And the horse dealer of the North did not like to sell the horse because of its beautiful golden bridle, but had to sell it for the sake of his livelihood.

So, the parents did not like to part from their dearest daughter but by seeing her marriageable age and as a custom they have to give their daughter to somebody in marriage.

The following is a love song sung by the young folk:—

Gugmu yamu ninge thadur na,

Daring grogyo nina sam na ta,

Khanchap bayup bangse bry thakla,

Bragmu gu somkye dink kyo,

Bragmu semba rikyo rawang mo.

"We the both young lovers gave birth to a love, the rest of which were very strong but the storms came and completely up-rooted our love. Thus we both were separated from each other."

Folk dances

Though there are many types of dances among the Sherdukpens, one type, namely Aji-lami, is found to be most commonly practised by the villagers of Rupa.

The dance is performed by 5 men, two represent demons by putting on mask with ferocious faces, one represents the king and is dressed as such, the other two represent two queens. Two more persons are there, one for beating the drum and the other for clattering the cymbals.

This pantomine is associated with a story which runs as follows :—

Once upon a time, Chaje-nurjan, the king of Lhasa had two wives, Lumu and Lame. These two queens were very beautiful. One day they went to take bath in a river. In the meantime two demons Nyapa and Nyare happened to pass through this place and saw the beautiful women and carried them away to their homes. When the king found that his queens had disappeared, he went in search of them. He learnt that they were imprisoned in Nyapa's house. Therefore, he went there and saw his queens in the custody of the demons. He sung there a song asking the queens about how they came to this place; then queens replied and narrated the whole story.

When Nyapa and Nyare came to know of the arrival of the king they got frightened and begged of him, to forgive them. The king magnanimously let them off. There they danced together with the queens.

Sherdukpen calendar

The Sherdukpen calendar consists of 12 months and the names of the months are given according to the signs of Zodiac. The names of the first and last months of their calendar are Lang and Jug. They do not have any names in their own dialect for days of a week, instead they use Tibetan names. To calculate the age of a person they use Tibetan mehtod of *losakar* which is of 12 years. The following are the names of months and week days:—

MONTHS

Local Names	English Equivalent
Lang	July—August
Tak	August—September
Yesi	September—October
Bruk	October—November

LOCAL NAMES	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT
Brui	November—December
Tai	December—January
Lug	January—February
Prui	February—March
Jai	March—April
Khik	April—May
Phak	May—June
Jug	June—July

WEEK DAYS

Nima	Sunday
Dawa	Monday
Makmar	Tuesday
Lakpa	Wednesday
Phunpu	Thursday
Penpa	Friday
Pasang	Saturday

Sherdukpens count the natural numbers only upto twenty. But for the purpose of counting dates, they go upto thirty and with each word for the twenty natural numbers they prefix a word *cha* which means date. The appropriate words for counting the dates are as follows :—

COUNTING

LOCAL	ENGLISH
Cha Han	One
Cha Ni	Two
Cha Ung	Three
Cha Psi	Four
Cha Khu	Five
Cha Khui	Six
Cha Sit	Seven
Sargyat	Eight
Duikhiya	Nine
Saun	Ten
Saun Han	Eleven

LOCAL	ENGLISH
Saun Ni	Twelve
Cha Saun Ung	Thirteen
Cha Saun Psi	Fourteen
Cha Saun Khu	Fifteen
Cha Saun Khui	Sixteen
Cha Saun Sit	Seventeen
Cha Saun Sargyat	Eighteen
Cha Saun Duikhiya	Nineteen
Cha Khain or Nisaun	Twenty
Nisaun Han	Twenty One
Nisaun Ni	Twenty Two
Nisaun Ung	Twenty Three
Nisaun Psi	Twenty Four
Nisaun Khu	Twenty Five
Nisaun Khui	Twenty Six
Nisaun Sit	Twenty Seven
Gyestong	Twenty Eight
Gyustong	Twenty Nine
Tongchin	Thirty

The villagers observe three holidays in every month. On holidays they do not go to the fields for cultivation. On these days the village Lama performs puja in the *gompa*. The three holidays in a month are as follows:—

Sargyat	8th day of a month
Saunkhu	15th day of a month
Tongchin	30th day of a month

People wish each other, by folding their both hands and uttering the words, "*Sungya Changpia*".

Religion

Sherdukpen religion is a mixture of Buddhism and local folk beliefs and folk practices. It appears that Gelukpa sect of Mahayana school of Tibetan Buddhism was introduced in the area, by one Bhutanese monk, Mera Lama, a few generations ago. The same *Lama* is believed to have persuaded the Monpas also to adopt his faith. It appears that Buddhism and the folk practices exist among the Sherdukpens in two tiers. Some of

them are vaguely conscious of the teachings of Buddha about the salvation of the soul and the existential sufferings. They worship Buddha and the great teachers of Buddhism in their syncretic form, as prevailing in *lamaism;* but when confronted with mundane matters of life, like illness, death, barrenness, crop failure etc., they think of the local deities and evil spirits, who are required to be propitiated or managed, for getting immediate relief. This two tier approach to religion is, however, not unique to the Sherdukpen alone. Religion everywhere represents a quest for meaning as well as technique of management of the phenomena, the exact nature of which is not known to a particular society. In the present level of technology of Sherdukpens, it is natural that, the second aspect would predominate in their religion.

A brief account is furnished here of the gods and godly beings worshipped by the Sherdukpens.

Kochhosum (a Tibetan name, said to represent Lord Buddha) is regarded as the godly person, who taught righteousness to the mankind. But he is not the supreme being. The supreme being is *Shunkhi,* who resides within the territory of Rupa and who is worshipped by the villagers in the month of December, every year. This is a big occasion when the aid of the supreme being is invoked, to keep in check the malevolent spirits from causing natural calamities, disease and ill-luck to the villagers. There are a number of godly beings of Tibetan Buddhism who are also benefactors of mankind and who are ready to extend their aid in thwarting the evil designs of unfriendly spirits. Among them mention may be made of Phakwa Chandra Ji, Gepu Namse, Gambu Chhadakpa and Jamu Wang Siang.

The local deities who are not particularly malevolent are Shroki, Jergi Gambs and Zyanmu.

Besides the above, there are a number of village deities. The particulars in respect of some among them are furnished here.

1. *Jongkhlong.*—It is a spirit which causes harm to the crops and keeps the rain off.

2. *Snura.*—This is said to be the servant of Jong Khilong which is mainly worshipped to keep the local drink *Phak* sweet and thus maintain the health of the villagers.

3. *Hinyam.*—This spirit makes the people deaf, dumb and lame. Therefore, it is propitiated with the sacrifice of one fowl.

4. *Jeyma.*—It appears in dream, vomitting out fire from its mouth.

5. *Mising.*—This spirit comes to the sick person just four days prior to his death. Sometimes it is seen in the night, wearing white cloth, uttering Ha, Ha, and resembling a human being.

6. *Jouden.*—Though not harmful to anybody, it roams about the village in the night and is seen in different forms, i.e., woman, man, tree and sometimes in the form of a big storm.

7. *Gren-Mu.*—It is a fairy found in the high hills of Rupa and if any person happens to see it, she will kill the person and take out eyes, tongue and liver. In order to get rid of this fairy, people erect a prayer flag on the hill top, where it is supposed to visit frequently.

8. *Gyapu Medeng.*—It is a water spirit which causes dysentery or other water borne diseases. Whenever any person suffers from above disease, the *Lama* ties a string of flags across a stream in his honour.

Details of the gompa

As mentioned earlier, it is situated in the heart of the main village. Locally it is known as Lhagang. It is a three storeyed stone building, made by the villagers about 160 years ago. The foundation is rectangular in shape, the roof is two sloped and is made of wooden beams and slabs. It is believed that a few decades after the introduction of Buddhism in the Sherdukpen area, the then abbot of Tawang monastery, persuaded the villagers to construct one *gompa,* so that there might not be any food scarcity and out break of epidemics. The people of Rupa with the help of other Sherdukpens and Monpas had built up this *gompa.*

The first storey consists of only one room.

The second story is divided into two rooms, one is bigger than the other. The bigger room is meant for the villagers who generally sit there during various pujas in the temple. In the

smaller room a big image of Lord Buddha along with the images of a number of images of dignitaries of Tibetan Buddhism is installed. All these images are placed on a decorated wooden altar called *Jho* which covers almost the half portion of the room. The image of Buddha is installed in the middle of the *Jho;* and on the left side of his image, there are the images of Charenji, Chhambeyang, Drema, Dorsing, and Tsana Dorji; on the right side there are the images known of Drema, Dorji, Tanjing Tupto Thaong, Tombe and Tsana Dorji. Again on left side in front of the above images, there are another twenty images of smaller size including one bronze cast image of *kon chhosum.* This particular image is known as *chabla.* All the images placed on the *jho* are made of clay, mixed with fine fabrics. Most of the images including the image of Lord Buddha were made in the village by a monk belonging to Tawang Monastery; a few were procured from Tawang on payment.

In the front row, there are 15 (fifteen) butter lamps which are lit at the time of puja. Also there are 10 metal bowls which are filled with water before starting the puja. On the wall, one big rectangular earthen slab, 12′×5′ in size, called Dorji Tsem is fixed. This contains about 1000 carved out images of three Buddhist deities, known as Chhepa-mi, Jigji and Chhela-mangung. It is learnt that this earthen slab was also made in the village by a sculptor from Tawang monastery with the help of a cast for images made of copper which was procured by the monastery from Tibet.

On the right side of the temple room, one big wooden book shelf is fitted, where 33 Tibetan books, each wrapped with a piece of yellow cloth, are kept. All these books are called *Damans.* There is a big book kept on the top of the shelf known as Dorji. This library does not contain any book belonging to the *Tanzur* or *Kanzur.* All these books are used only by the Lamas who visit the *gompa* on various occasions. Also the same books are carried by the young girls around the village, during their Chhokar festival.

On the left side, in the front portion of the room one drum is hung from the ceiling. Many other puja articles such as flutes (*jaung*), cymbals (*bikchhang*), bell (*grebo*), conch shell (*dungkar*), bumpa and Dorje are kept on a low bench near the entrance. The *Lama* usually sits there with the above puja articles around him and performs the puja whenever required.

The third storey, approached by a wooden ladder, is meant for storing grains and other commodities collected from the households of the village, for the purpose of communal worship. The wooden masks used in different dances are also kept in this hall.

Outside the *gompa*, three long prayer poles, each belonging to a *blang* of the village are erected. When the flags are worn out by rains and wind the members of the respective blangs replace them. Several cylindrical wheels containing prayer written scrolls of paper are fixed in the niches of the *gompa*. The sacred formula *"Om mani padme hun"* written in Tibetan script is repeated hundred times on each scroll. The same formula is found on the wheel also. It is customary for a person to go round the *gompa* and rotate each of the prayer wheels. This symbolises that the person concerned has completed hundreds of prayers in a short time.

There are two apartments in the premises of the *gompa*. These are used for cooking and feeding during the community worships. At present the condition of the *gompa* is not good and it requires renovation. The roof is completely damaged and leaks profusely during the rains; many of the prayer wheels have either been removed from the niches or are damaged. The outside apartments too are in wretched condition. The management and control of the *gompa* rests with the village council and mainly the *gaon* buras. Food grain, silver, gold, cash money or other articles collected in the name of the *gompa* are kept with the *gompa* itself and these cannot be kept with any member of the village council individually under any circumstances. The food grains, clothes, etc., are kept in the third storey; whereas the silver or silver ornaments, gold and cash money are kept in a box inside the main temple, which is sealed in presence of the office bearers (i.e. gaonburas, members of the village council and the chowkidars) so that the chowkidar who is entrusted with the key of the *gompa* may not remove any article. The seal made of brass and the black sealing wax are procured from Tawang *gompa* on payment. The seal is always kept with the senior gaonburah.

There are nine village chowkidars, whose terms complete after every three years, but the key of the *gompa* remains with an elderly chowkidar. The account is checked annually by the office bearers and in case there is some discrepancy in the account,

the chowkidar possessing the key is held responsible. The religious rites and ceremonies are performed by a *Lama* (Buddhist Priest) who is supposed to attend the *gompa* thrice a day, clean it, offer water to the deities and lit the butter lamps in the temple.

Lama

Lama is the religious head in the village who presides over all the religious functions and ceremonies and reads religious books written in Tibetan script. He receives his training from some *gompa* or monastery. The monastic education comprises of acquiring scriptural knowledge, monastic discipline and performing various rites etc. A Lama who studies for longer period in a monastery of higher order obtains the status of *gelong* (an ordained monk). He stays in the *gompa* or monastery and remains unmarried throughout his life. Others get married and lead normal domestic life and along with the same perform the day-to-day religious rites of the villagers. Mostly in each village, one Lama is found who performs the minor pujas and other routine religious duties. Such Lamas are not much educated; but they are supposed to possess the scriptural knowledge and should know the performance of religious rites. It does not matter if these ordinary Lamas are married.

In this village, there is one Lama named Tsang Norbu, who is a local resident and lives with his family. He officiates at all the Buddhist pujas of the villagers. Before getting the status of *Lama,* he studied for five years in Tawang monastery. It is said that his grand father, a resident of the village Shergaon was an eminent Lama of Tawang monastery. He lost his eyesight in his old age at Tawang. On hearing this sad news, the people of Shergaon sent his grand son, Tsang Norbu, to Tawang to serve him. When he reached Tawang, he got himself admitted in the monastic school as long as his grand father was alive. It covered a period of five years. During this time he learnt two forms of Tibetan alphabet for reading and writing; the right form monastic discipline as well as the performance of various religious rites. Besides the above education, he took part in dramas and religious music, such as dance, vocal and instrumental music. According to him the course of studies in above monastic education is quite time consuming and requires five to twenty years to cover the various stages. To become a *gelong,* one has to study for about 20 years and to become a *Chhonje,* it requires at least five years. The education is free because the public supports this institution whole-heartedly.

After attaining the status of Chhonje, he left the monastery and returned to his village Shergaon. After a few months he married a widow from the village Rupa and settled here. Since then he is the *Lama* of Rupa and performs all the religious rites of the villagers.

Lama does not do any cultivation or domestic work. He is absolutely dependent on the labour of his family members and other villagers. It is taboo for him to kill any creature and take meat. But there is the other rule that a Lama is expected to accept anything he is offered; therefore, he eats fish and meat when offered by the villagers. But under no circumstances he can kill any animal; this is regarded as an act of great sin.

Income and expenditure of the gompa

On several occasions, money in cash or kind is donated in the name of *gompa* by the villagers and outside visitors. Sometimes the Administration also grants small amount, for the renovation of the *gompa*. The money collected by the village council as fine for various offences committed to the villagers is also deposited in the *gompa*. Generally the cash amount received from the various sources is used for the maintenance of the *gompa* and purchasing butter lamps, images and books. The contributions made by the villagers in the form of foodgrains and other articles are consumed during the various festive occasions.

In addition to the *gompa*, there are a few other sacred spots and structures of religious significance. The particulars of the some are furnished below :—

Kakaling

It is a gate erected just at the entrance to the main village. All the villagers pass through this gate while coming from or going out of the village, so that they may be pardoned for the sins committed by them knowingly or unknowingly. Also it is believed that its existence prevents the outbreak of epidemic and natural calamities, gives good agricultural yield and make the village prosperous.

The present structure of the *kakaling* was built in 1957. It is 16 ft. in length. 9.5 ft. in width and 18 ft. in height. It has two side walls and a C.I. sheet roof. The C.I. sheets and paint for decoration were donated by the Government. The construction work was done by the villagers themselves; but the

decorations and the paintings on the ceiling, were done by a Tibetan from Tawang. He took three months for completing the work. After the completion of the work, he was given Rs. 1000.00 in cash and three endichadars worth Rs. 80.00 each.

Dongzur

Dongzur is a shrine erected for the welfare of the villagers and sometimes in the memory of a deceased belonging to a rich family. In the former case, it is constructed by the villagers, whereas in the latter case it is made by the family of the deceased. There are two Dongzurs constructed by the villagers, one for the welfare and prosperity of the village and the other in the memory of a *gaonburah,* the particulars of which have already been furnished.

Dongzur is a two storeyed stone structure, having two roofs. One huge hollow wooden cylinder is housed in the upper chamber which is filled with innumerable prayer papers. The cylinder is polished with red paint and around it the sacred formula "Om Mani Padme Hum" is written in Tibetan alphabet. Its upper end is supported with two crossed wooden planks, fastened across the walls and the lower end is pivoted on a water wheel which is installed in the lower chamber. This cylinder is kept in rotation regularly with the help of stream water brought by a channel. When the water is brought to Dongzur, which will admit a fall of 3 to 5 feet, it is run through a wooden flue on the water wheel. The wheel along with cylinder always rotates in clock wise direction and one rotation completes one prayer of "Om Mani Padme Hum". According to the villagers though they cannot pray to the Almighty throughout 24 hours, every moment of their life passes with prayers of "*Om Mane Padme Hum*" as they have made *dongzurs, manes* and prayer flags etc. the sources of such prayer which continue praying to God every moment. For instance, in one prayer flag generally 34 prayers are printed and once the flag is moved by wind it means 34 times the same prayer is repeated. So a man having a glimpse of many such fluttering flags for a second, supposes that he has already completed hundreds of prayers in one second.

Chhortens

Chhortens are solid stone structures and made in order to get rid of various night spirits, diseases, sufferings and disabilities of mankind. Also its existence is believed to make the village prosperous and wealthy. When there is distress in the family, the members of the family visit the *chhorten* and go round it thrice in veneration, for getting over the distress.

There are three chhortens in the village, named Chharenji, Chhambeyang and Chhana Dorje. Chharenji Chhorten was constructed by *nasobi* clan to get rid of their sin committed by killing many Kacharies and other plains people during their visit to markets in the plains many decades ago. Chhamba Yang was made by the side of the first Chhorten, by Thonga clan as in remote past many of their children died due to an epidemic and the Chhana Dorji was made by the villagers to protect themselves against the spirits of the Akas, who were killed about 80 years ago, when they raided Rupa.

At the time of the construction of a Chhorten, a worship is performed for ten days by the Lamas coming from Tawang. At that time a vessel called *schhe bumpa* is consecrated by the Lamas. Ten days after this the *bumpa* is filled with pieces of prayer paper and various types of incense. Then the whole vessel is wrapped with a piece of red cloth and given to the villagers on payment of Rs. 55.

When the site for the construction of the *chhorten* is selected, one girl having both the parents alive, and dressed in ceremonial clothes, carries the *bumpa* on the site. There, Lama performs a puja called *Twiya-Ramne;* after that he adjusts the location of the bumpa in such a manner that it is in the centre of the structure. Then the *chhorten* is built around and over it.

Manes

These are simple stone walls, 2 to 3 feet wide and 6 to 8 feet high, the length sometimes ranges upto 50 feet. These are always constructed by the side of the village tracks. In all, there are 12 *manes* in the village; the biggest one is situated near the Kakaling. This *mane* is 22 × 7 × 2½ feet in size many decorated stone tablets, with the common inscription "*Om Mani Padme Hum*", have been fixed on the wall. It is told by some persons, who have knowledge of lamaistic theology that this sacred formula contains six syllables, which close the doors of rebirth in six realms. These six realms are lorded over by six Dungans (demons), Lha Tsering Yointuoi, Ida Trekom, Ida Dungan, Mayul, New Chhetam and Lhama Thepche who have different characteristics of their own. Any person taking birth in their regions can never enjoy happiness and tranquility. Therefore, to avoid rebirth in above six realm, every Buddhist recites the sacred formula "*Om Mani Padme Hum*", and *manes* are constructed on every village path to remind the villagers about this. It is believed that all the creatures of the world touched by the wind, passing through a *mane* take birth in a good place.

Household deities

The villagers do not have deities exclusively at the household level. There are, however, some households where the images or photos of Lord Buddha and other dignitaries of Tibetan Buddhism are kept and worshipped from time to time. At the time of the survey the number of such household was eight. These images or photos are always kept on a particular shelf known as *chhesam*. The heads of the households concerned daily lit the butter lamps in the chhesam and perform worship. Besides, once in a month the Lama is asked to visit the households and perform the worship of Buddha Festivals at the community level. In different contexts mention has been made of some of the important festivals of the villagers at the community level. For the convenience of the perception of the complex of institutions associated with religion in its totality, the same have been brought together and supplemented by other details here.

Chhokar

This is the festival of sacred books, meant for the common welfare of the villagers. It is observed in the month of May every year, and is always performed in the *gompa*. The village Lama or some learned Lamas invited by the villagers perform worship for six days continuously, by reading sacred books, burning incense and offering water and grains in the name of the deities in the *gompa*. On the seventh day, the unmarried girls of the village, forming three groups according to their *blangs* go in a procession round the village, carrying holy books on their back. They visit all the religious places of the village including the confluence of Ziging Kho. The procession starts from the village *gompa* and first reaches the twin *chhortens* where the girls carrying the books go round the *Chhortens* and take rest for some time. In the mean time, the Lamas perform a puja called *Chhejadam*, when they offer water, local beer and grains to the dignitaries of Tibetan Buddhism. At the end of the puja all the people present there, including outsiders, are offered local drinks. After enjoying the drinks, the procession proceeds further and makes a halt at another *chhorten*, where too the same puja is repeated; but no drinks are offered. In this manner, the procession comprising of all villagers including women and children, visits the two *dungzurs;* one of which is 100 yards east of the *gompa* and the other is two furlong west of the

gompa. At these places the participants are offered drinks by the people of *shere blang* and *blang afan* respectively. From the second *dungzur* the procession returns to the *gompa,* where once more the puja is performed and drinks are enjoyed. This is followed by a dance called Aji Lamu dance. During the course of visiting these religious places, two persons dressed in worn out clothes and hanging a model of male phallus (called kempo) from their waist band perform a joker dance. It is reported that, it symbolises that the villagers will be blessed with more children.

In the evening, all the unmarried girls and boys of each *blang* assemble in a house and offer drinks to each other. Also the old men and women visiting their blangs are forced to drink as much as they can, so that after completion of the festival, they may remember the day and admire the hospitability of the *blang.* In this way, the villagers spend the whole evening and the night in drinking, feasting and merry-making. In each *blang* the drinks are arranged by the adolescent girls, belonging to it.

Next day, the people go to a hill top named *kro,* where the village deity resides. There the village Lama, reads holy script and afterwards presents ceremonial scarfs to all the persons present there. After this, the newly married women and a married women who have remained barren for many years, go round the *kro,* carrying stones on their back. This is considered to be a magical performance to simulate child bearing. Those persons who have not got sufficient cattle or food grains, go round the *kro,* so that their desires also may be fulfilled.

Sosiwang

This festival is celebrated in honour of Lord Buddha which falls in the month of July. The images of Lord Buddha and other important personages of Tibetan Buddhism, made of flour and locally known as *Tarmus* are worshipped at the *gompa* for two days consecutively. One day after the completion of the puja, all the villagers received blessings from the Lama and then consecrated food (prasad) is distributed among them.

Tonu Wang

Tonu Wang is observed in the month of November every year, when the villagers send some of their men to Doimara to bring betel nuts and leaves for Khiksaba puja from the Kacharis. This puja is meant to appease the forest deities which may otherwise harm the persons who are sent down to Doimara for getting the above items.

Khiksaba

Khiksaba is the biggest festival of the villagers. It is performed in the month of December before they commence their journey to Doimara. It is meant to appease their supreme diety *Shunkhi* or *Phu-sawang*. As the villagers feel that they are liable to be harassed by many spirits residing in the dense forests, lying in between Rupa and Doimara, in order to keep such spirits in check, they perform this puja.

It is performed at a place about two hundred yards away from the gompa where one prayer flag, three yards in length is erected. For the occasion some people are sent to bring betelnuts and leaves. Generally 15 loads of betelnuts and leaves are brought, out of which one load is given to the people of Shergaon and one load is distributed among the villagers of Sinchong inhabited by the Khowas. The Shergaon people are given a share because of the fact that they too perform this puja in their village and that when the Kacharis send their present they include the needs of the people of Shergaon as well. The Khowas are given a share: in exchange of potatoes, bananas, vegetables and sugarcane which they bring for this puja.

A priest or *jiji* belonging to Duingla clan presides over the worship. He is assisted by four other priests of the village. Since the Duinglas are reputed for their special skill in managing the super-natural, the main priest is always selected from among them. During the puja, offerings in the form of rice, fruits and local drink are made to the deity. This worship lasts for seven days and this period is marked by frolicking and merry making accompanied by drinking bouts.

Jonkhlong

The ceremony is observed in the month of May every year to check the wind storm which generally causes the poor growth of crops. To appease the malevolent spirit, responsible for these phenomena one pig and six fowls are sacrificed. Also immense quantity of local drinks, fish and rice are consumed in the feast that follows.

Phu-lapsang

The villagers observe this ceremony when there are no rains and the prospect of crop is not satisfactory. This worship is performed on the hill-tops situated in different directions. The Lama accompanied by many villagers goes to the

selected spots and conducts the puja. The deities responsible for timely rains are represented by dough figures locally known as *Tarmus* or *Torma*. (Tibetan) and are worshipped by chanting some mantras and offering water, grains and beer. When the worship is completed, the Lama distributes consecrated food (prasad) among the people. After that drinks are taken by all.

Shaman

In the religious complex of the Sherdukpens a very important role is played by shamans or Jijis. It is for them to manage all the benevolent and malevolent super-natural forces. The shamans are not born; or in other words one does not succeed to the position of Shaman by birth. It is through initiation that one person can become a Shaman or Jiji. Again all the Jijis are not equally powerful. Out of the nine Jijis, living at Rupa at the time of the survey, only one was considered to be competent to handle the serious cases.

The *jijis* are required to observe certain taboos. They do not take onion, garlic, flesh of deer and wild boar. Also they avoid killing animals even for sacrifice to the forest spirits who demand blood and flesh. Therefore, in the past the villagers used to engage Khowas, for killing the sacrificial animal. Now-a-days, the Khowas do not come; hence some of the villagers themselves are required to come forward for sacrificing the animals.

Village organisation

As indicated in the first chapter, Rupa is a big village, with a central core and eight hamlets. Though the central core is the centre of power and all the significant activities at the village level, the people living in the hamlets are by no means second class citizens of the village. They belong to the same maximal lineages and kin groups and through marriage ties and exigencies of seasonal migration, they frequently come together and are interlinked in multiple networks of relationships. In the village council or *jumba* the persons living in the hamlets, participate equally, along with others, though because of physical distance, their involvement is not always as intense and as frequent as in case of those living in the central core. Over the lands, forest and rivers of the village, the people in the hamlets have the same rights and privileges as the people of the main village. They, all go together for fishing, hunting and collecting honey from the jungle.

Besides, all the households of the village are members of the village *chhikak*, which undertake the supply of labourers by turn, for carrying loads and undertaking other works, on payment, as and when required by the government for development. In the common religious, social and economic activities of the village also all the people including those living in the hamlets participate equally.

Village Council

The village council, is an ancient institution of the Sherdukpens. It is known as *Jumba.*

It consists of *gaon-burahs* (thik-akhao), ordinary members (Jungme) and chowkidars (Kachung). All these persons hold their offices in honorary capacity. The *gaon-burahs* are the most important persons in the village, and in the council they carry special weight.

Generally in one village, there is only one *gaon-burah* (G.B.); but Rupa being a big village, has three *gaon-burahs.*

The *gaon-burahs* are elected by the villagers in a general meeting of the village and the names of the elected *gaonburahs* are forwarded to the Administration for approval which is generally agreed upon. This formality is observed because of the fact that the *gaonburahs* are supposed to be the representative of the Government in the village. Their main task is to keep the villagers informed about the orders of Administration which are to be carried out by the villagers. As emblem of his office, each *gaonburah* is given one red coat by the Administration. The other members of the council are also elected by the villagers. They assist the *gaonburahs* in the meeting of *Jumba* and represent the different sections of the village population in the council. The chowkidars (Kachung) are drawn from all clans of the village. As a rule one person is nominated from each clan as a village Chowkidar and he holds this post for three years continuously. After three years from each clan another person is selected, who in turn relinquishes his office after the completion of three years. Hence all the households of the village, perform the duty of chowkidar one by one. The duties of a chowkidar are to patrol the village and the hamlets in the night, convey the orders or the messages of the Administration to the villagers and assist the *gaon-burahs* and members in the meeting of the *jumba.*

As already mentioned Rupa being a big village, its council consists of three *gaon-burahs,* seven members and nine chowkidars representing nine clans of the village. Territorially speaking

all the eight pams or hamlets, in addition to the main village, are represented in the council.

As the *gaonburahs* are the most influential persons in the village, their brief particulars are furnished.

1. *Dorji Thongdok*:—He is the most influential *gaonburah* of the village and is designated as the first *gaonburah*. He knows Assamese, Monpa and Hindi languages and had once served as a political interpreter under the Administration. He had been to Delhi, Calcutta and Shillong on the invitation of the Government. In 1964 he was aged 57 years.

2. *Jom Norbu*:—He is also an influential *gaonburah* of the village and is designated as second *gaonburah*. He knows Tibetan, Monpa and Assamese well, and was 57 years old in 1964.

3. *Tsang Norbu*:—He is an old man suffering from Tuberculosis and is now unable to do much work as the third *gaonburah* of the village. However, no person has been appointed in his place so far. In 1964 he was aged 64 years.

The *gaonburahs* and the members may hold their office for the life time. But in case they do not desire to continue or if their activities displease the general public, they may drop out.

The meetings of the *Jumba*, are presided over by the first *gaonburah* of the village. The case is discussed first among the members, in presence of both the contesting parties and then taking into consideration the opinion of the majority of the members of the *Jumba* the first *gaonburah* gives his verdict. The *Jumba* does not have a separate building of its own. The meetings of the council are therefore held in the *gompa*. On sunny days the sittings of the *jumba* take place outside the *gompa;* otherwise these take place inside the *gompa*. The *jumba* has mainly three-fold activities; administrative, developmental and judicial. Brief accounts of the same are furnished here.

1. *Administrative*:—The times for opening of new Jhum land or for going on hunting or fishing are fixed by the council in a separate meeting, in which the whole village takes part. When any person or family belonging to other village seeks to settle there, it is for the village council, to give permission or to withhold the same. Sometimes due to natural calamities or break-out of famine in the village, the people suffer and it is the duty of the *jumba* to arrange relief for the stricken family or person.

2. *Development:*—All sort of development works, e.g., repairing the village tracks, making new bridle paths, constructing manes, Kakalings and other religious shrines are undertaken by the villagers, after a formal decision has been taken by the *jumba.*

Judicial:—Breach of customary laws, torts and minor crimes like theft and disputes relating to inheritance etc., are dealt with by the *jumba.* Generally, the complainant lodges his complaint with that first *gaonburah* who summons the meeting of the council. If the case is a minor one, it is disposed off in one sitting. If the accused denies the charge the methods of oath and ordeal are frequently adopted. The person concerned is asked to take an oath, in the presence of one of the *gaonburahs* and a jiji. If he is guilty, blood will come out of his nose within three days. If blood does not come out, he is acquitted of the charge and he is compensated in cash or kind, by the complainant for being unjustly maligned. In case of murder, robbery adultery, however, the accused is to pass through a more severe test. For this purpose two stones, one white and the other black, are put into a vessel containing boiling water which is coloured with local dyes. Then the person concerned is ordered to pick out one stone. At this stage unless he is an extra-ordinarily hard boiled type, his/nerve generally gives way, if he is really guilty, and he confesses his crime. But if he is guilty and is a man of strong nerves, he inserts his hand inside the boiling water and tries to pick out one stone. If the stone picked out by him is white he is held innocent and all the members of the village council beg his pardon and offer him drinks. If the stone is black, he is held guilty and is penalised according to the decision of the village council.

The most common form of punishment is imposition of a fine, the amount of which varies, according to the nature of the guilt. There are specific terms to indicate the amount of fine and the nature of case, where it is levied. Some of these are indicated below:—

Nature of Fine	Worth of	Nature of case
1	2	3
	Rs.	
Rangbung	3·00	It is paid by the accused who was involved in land dispute, damage of crops on minor theft.

1	2	3
	Rs.	
2. Kho	5·00	It is paid by the accused who was involved in land dispute damage of crops on minor theft.
3. Sit	7·00	Occupation of land, theft of illegitimate/connection with unmarried girls.
4. Sarjyat	18·00	Theft, making an unmarried girl pregnant, or elopement of a girl.
5. Dukhiya	35·00	Major theft or adultery.
6. Serchang Nyeba . .	More than 200·00	This fine is imposed generally on a *Chhao* boy who elopes a Thong girl.

In case of murder, the culprit will not be punished to life imprisonment or death but he will have to serve in the house of the victim throughout his life. In his place one man from his family can be deputed to serve the family of the deceased. This type of punishment is locally known as 'Yam-khao'.

Even after the consolidation of the effective administration in this area, there has been no change in the system of village panchayat. In fact as a result of the recognition accorded to this institution, it appears to have been strengthened to some extent. If however, the village council fails to decide a case, it is referred to the circle and then to the district level officer of the Government, for decision.

Voluntary and social service organisation

For carrying out community services for the interest of the village as a whole, for instance, construction and maintenance of village tracks, religious shrine etc., there is a traditional organisation called *Bhu-bla*. All the heads of households are members of this organisation. It is divided into four groups or *chhikaks*, each with a distinct name—Thuik, Yusir, Thonga and Thuikhong. Generally the membership of a *chhikak* is based on the physical clustering of houses or neighbourhood in the main village. The households in the pams are attached to the different *chhikaks* in

the main village, in such a manner, that the entire population of the village including the hamlets is more or less evenly distributed among the *chhikaks*. Whenever any community activity is to be undertaken, the *gaonburah* assigns duties to the differnt *chhikaks* by rotation, so that the total workload is more or less shared.

The *Bhu-bla* organisation can be considered to be a voluntary organisation, but it also appears that it has an element of mascent regimentation, inherent in it. Perhaps this reflects the co-existence of two basic orientations—one associated with the abstraction of Buddhist theology, the other associated with the pragnatism of their folk religion.

In recent years, two non-official servicing organisations have also been functioning in the village—one is the Adimjati Sevak Sangh and the other is the Women's Organisation, Tejpur. As particulars about the same have been furnished earlier, it is not proposed to repeat the same here.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion*

The descriptive account furnished in the body of the text, brings out the fact that Rupa, does not represent a single spatial entity or social organisation; it stands for diverse orbits of spatial and social organisation superimposed on one another.

The village has been delineated in space, in different ways, at different times, by different people. There is not a single Rupa, but a number of Rupas. This is at the same time a source of flexibility as well as of tension, in the social and political relations of the villagers with the outside and also among themselves.

One way to physically identify Rupa, is to consider it in term of the territory recognised by the administration, that belongs to it. But this territory is not the same, as the one recognised by the Sherdukpens of Rupa. Previously they considered Jigaon, situated at a distance of 13 Km. from the main residential cluster of Rupa, to be a part of the village. But it appears that the people of Jigaon did not like to remain clubbed with Rupa, under the same administrative policy at the village level. This unwillingness was more related to the social distance between the people of Rupa and Jigaon, than to the physical distance between these two places.

Though to the outsiders, the people of Jigaon are also Sherdukpens, to the Sherdukpens of Rupa and other villages of the tribe, they are Sherdukpens of lesser shade; they are more commonly known as Yanlaks. They are supposed to be persons of Bhutia origin, who were adept in smithy, and were allowed by the Sherdukpens of Rupa to settle in their territory a few generations ago. They were required to carry out smithy work and also to render certain ceremonial services during the seasonal migration of the Sherdukpens to the foot hills. The Yanlaks, therefore, were a satellite community and the land occupied by them was a sub-village.

When the Government recognised Jigaon as a separate village, it was not merely an act of administrative rearrangement, but precursor to a social upheaval. The satellite community gained in

*The responsibility for the conclusion entirely belongs to Dr. B.K. Roy Burman.

its civil status in the local polity. The Sherdukpens of Jigaon, who were second class Sherdukpens as it were, became equal along with other Sherdukpens. But it appears that the newly gained equality has tended to push the community in two opposite directions: firstly, to become full fledged Sherdukpens and secondly, to become full fledged non-Sherdukpens. It appears that at present, there is a tendency among some in Jigaon to claim Yanlak to be a distinct community. But Jigaon has not been able to cut off its umblilical cord altogether. Even now, on certain ceremonial occasions of the tribe, Jigaon is not recognised as a separate entity. It is dealt with as a part of Rupa social complex.

Besides, the village of the Yanlaks stands on a different footing from Shinchong, the village of the Khowas. Before the extension of the effective administration to the region, the Khowas were subjugated by the Sherdukpens. They were required to pay annual tribute in service or in kind. Their territory was a subjugated territory; but their distinct civil identity was not merged. They had a separate village authority of their own. Hence, when with the extension of effective administration, the Khowas were exempted from payment of annual tribute, Rupa did not feel that its identity was being mutilated. The Sherdukpens know that any claim that they might have over the Khowas belonged to the civil order and not the moral order.

More complex, however, was the relationship of the Sherdukpens with the Kacharis of the plain. In the past, the Sherdukpens used to collect tribute from the Kacharis living in between Dhansiri and Belsiri rivers. But, it does not appear that the Sherdukpens considered the Kacharis as their subject, or the land of the Kacharis as their subjugated territory. The tribute that they used to get from the Kacharis, has been described by many as blackmail money. Perhaps it was so. But this was commuted into annual stipend during the later phase of the Ahom rule; and the same system continued during the British rule. It continues till now. It is, however, significant that even after the commutation of the so called quit money into stipend or posa, the Kacharis have continued to give some sort of tribute in kind. But why? Is it because, they apprehended that, the posa payment by the state, was not a sufficient deterrent? Do they have such apprehension even now? A bare knowledge of the conditions of that area, would convince any one that at least at present, there is no reason for the Kacharis to have any apprehension of physical terror by the Sherdukpens.

It appears that, there were two elements in the payments made by the Kacharis to the Sherdukpens. Firstly was the military consideration, secondly was the consideration of economic and political relations. At the tribal level, the Sherdukpens, because of the strategic location of their habitat, were in a position to carry on raids on the Kachari territory, cause devastation and then turn to their mountain retreat. But it is obvious that, neither by number, nor by superiority of arms, were they in a position to continuously rule the Kacharis. Therefore, it was only quit money that they could impose on the Kacharis. But then, there were also other matters of mutual interest. The Sherdukpens required supply of food grains, metallic wares and cotton textiles from the plains; on the other hand they had sheep and goat, woollen goods, musk, borax and other jungle products to offer. In this circulation of commodities, there were two possible alternatives. After coming all the way to the foot-hill, the Sherdukpens could as well sell all their wares in the nearby markets in the plains of Assam. But till recently, the bulk of the wares do not appear to have been transacted in this manner. Most of the transactions used to be carried on through the Kacharis. Thus, the Kacharis served as the middlemen between the Sherdukpens and the agriculturist population of the plains of Assam. This role of middlemen was sanctified through a number of rituals at the places of the Sherdukpens and the Kacharis both.

The rituals symbolised the principle of circulation, which appears to be basic to the social structure, not only of the Sherdukpens, but also of most of the hill tribes of N.E.F.A. The tributes paid by the Kachari households to the Sherdukpen households were indicators of another principle, which was in a nebulous state, in the context of primitive political and economic organisation: the principle of earning profit during the course of commodity circulation. But before discussing the same, it is proposed to examine the symbolism of circulation in some detail.

For ages, the most important source of livelihood of the tribal communities of the region has been shifting cultivation. It used to be supplemented by collection of jungle products. There were also some household crafts at various levels of technology, but in most cases the technology was low. The population living in the area was, therefore, perpetually haunted by the spectre of starvation. But at the same time, the diversity of the terrain, the differences in the proximity from the more or less stable food producing region of the plains of Assam in the south, and the fairly

sophisticated handicraft producing centres of Tibet and Bhutan in the north and the west, created conditions where reciprocity was an imperative need for survival. It was this principle of reciprocity, which promoted circulation. It was symbolised in two forms; one in the form of ceremonial friendship, the other in the form of circulation of sacred bells and sacred plates made of brass, which did not have any use value. The bells and the plates were transferred from family to family as bride wealth. Again, these were returned to the family concerned, through the institution of the marriage of father's sister's daughter. These were also barterd for mithun and other valuables. The possession of these, conferred status to the household, as a recognition for the service rendered to the community, by upholding the principle of circulation.

The ethos of circulation is even expressed in the lamentation of the father when the daughter takes leave after marriage. He tells her that it is part of the principle of circulation that he should give her away, even though it rends his heart.

Circulation on the basis of reciprocity presupposes a world view, where accommodation and compromise constitute basic organising principles in human relationship. This is symbolised in their myth, where the demon who had abducted the princess was forgiven as soon as he apologised to her spouse whose dire was roused. He was even befriended and the princess, her spouse and the demon danced together.

A question arises as to how Rupa could become the place for exchange in cash, if reciprocity was the basic principle, not only for the circulation of articles, but also for organising the human relations.

To examine this question, one is to consider what are the antimonies of circulation and reciprocity respectively.

Here it is to be made clear, that the antimonies are being examined not in term of sociology of knowledge, but in term of empirical situations.

The antimony of circulation is extortion and that of reciprocity is market.

Both the antimonies have been symbolically represented among the Sherdukpens. At Rupa they have built up a chhorten in honour of a *gaonburah,* who oppressed them and extorted goods and services for years, and asked for their forgiveness in his death bed. This narration brings out two processes; firstly, the symbolic enunciation of the self-destroying character of extortion and secondly, reiteration of the principle of reciprocity, even to the extent of deifying a repentant oppressor. In fact, one may wonder, whether it is really the ex-oppressor who is deified or whether it is the principle of reciprocity or the fact of his repentance which is extolled. Perhaps, the collective act here communicates different things to different persons; or even to the same person in different contexts.

In any case, this narration and the *chhorten* associated with it, also bring out the fact that extortion as a method of control of services and goods, is within the mental focus of the community, though its limited validity is also recognised.

In fact, the Sherdukpens as well as other tribes of NEFA practised extortion quite considerably, both in their internal social relationships as well as in their external relationships. But at the same time, they did not allow the acts of extortion to supersede the overall process of circulation through reciprocity. May be sometimes, extortion was a short term handmaid of reciprocity, but not its substitute. One can even visualise situations when the social organisation of reciprocity would be out of gear and extortion would be required to restore the balance. Such situations would be caused by failure of crops in the plains, or in the hills, dynastic changes or shifts in the centres of power in the plains or in Tibet or Bhutan, introduction of improved technology in any sector of production, expansion of transport and communication and so on. But unmitigated extortion could not be a long term process; in that case the whole political structure of the hills would have required a complete reorganisation and the loosely connected tribal entities would have been wedded into a state structure. But there were two constraints to this. Firstly, the nature of the terrain and the low level of technology did not provide the economic base for sustaining the state structure. Secondly, it would have reduced the flexibility of a larger system of economic and political relationship which involved the Kingdoms

of North-East India, Tibet and Bhutan during the pre-British period. The loosely linked up tribal entities of NEFA allowed the organised States to operate their spheres of influence without directly confronting each other, and at the same time to ensure that commodity transactions from one area to another took place through diverse, but fairy stable channels. Thus it is in the interest of maintaining a larger system or systems of relationships, that the tribes of NEFA remained in a state of perpetual flux in their internal relationship and were not integrated into a single polity. It is easy to perceive that a single polity would have subjected it to pressures and pulls of cultures of entirely two orders—one primarily based on settled agricultural economy, the other having more diversified and at the same time technologically more simple base, particularly drawing upon agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry. It would have been required either to ally with one and confront others, or to merge completely with one of them. Any of these developments would have complicated the mutual relationships of the organised states of this part of the world, which by virtue of the differences in the nature of their economy, were partially interdependent on one another. Conversely it follows that, had the wider system of symbiotic relationship not been there, or had it broken down, conditions conducive to the integration of the tribes of NEFA into a single State structure would have prevailed.

This analysis brings out the fact that the loose ensemble of tribal communities in NEFA served both as buffer as well as bridge in between the organised states. It however remains to be explained why the bridge role or the system of circulation was primarily organised on the principle of reciprocity. As observed earlier, the antimony of reciprocity in the circulation of articles is market.

But did conditions prevail for the market to operate? Market would require security, minimisation of the role of tradition in determining the exchange values, continuous responsiveness of the exchange values primarily to supply and demand, civil sanction to the infringement of the norms of transaction and so on. Looked upon in a different way, market enthrones the kings, while reciprocity enshrines the gods.

This, however, is a figurative statement. There is no pure market and there is no pure reciprocity. Market relations cannot continue for long without circulation of a minimal of empathy. On the other hand, as already indicated, there are always possibilities of stalemate being created in reciprocity and thus paving the ground for extortion.

In any case, it is obvious that a pure market could not operate in NEFA, without creating a centralised polity, which as already indicated, would have been self-defeating.

This analysis takes us back to the question raised earlier about the role of Rupa as a place for exchange in cash. Is it possible that Rupa was a market only symbolically and not in an empirical sense? Or is it possible that Rupa was partly a market and partly a strategic area in the system of circulation based on reciprocity.

As already stated, there is no pure market or pure reciprocity. It is symbolised by two institutions connected with the Sherdukpens of Rupa.

At Rupa there is a *chhorten,* which was constructed by the Sherdukpens as a mark of repentance for killing a large number of Kacharis once, during an encounter. Obviously there was an occasion, when the system of reciprocity broke down. But the chhorten symbolises the anxiety of the Sherdukpens to restore the system. Is it possible that a short spell of exchange through market economy is associated with this break down? It is not necessary to make any conjecture. But it is obvious that Rupa could not be a centre for exchange in cash, in a historical sense, with its network of socio-political organisation.

The other institution is the chhorten in the foot-hill in honour of a Tibetan Lama, who is supposed to have taught them how to carry on trade with the people of the plains and then to have disappeared mysteriously.

This legend is of particular importance. It is significant that the chhorten is located in the foot-hill, where the Lama met the Sherdukpens. It is obvious that the Sherdukpens believe that they used to come to the foot-hill and carry on the transactions with the Kacharis, even before the Lama taught them the principle of trade. The innovation which was introduced by him, was to carry on transactions directly with the plainsmen in the markets situated in the plains. This new practice, however, did not completely replace the transactions with the Kacharis, based on the principle of reciprocity. It only supplemented the former practice. The mysterious disappearance of the Tibetan Lama is also quite interesting. The legend symbolises the introduction of the new principle, of circulaton, by a Tibetan entrepreneur by-passing the system of reciprocity; it also symbolises the discontinuation of

the direct role of the Tibetan in the new system. The location of the chhorten at the foot-hill, where the Sherdukpens migrate mainly to carry on the reciprocal transactions with the Kacharis, also symbolises the subordination of the new principle of market transaction, to the old principle of reciprocity.

But at the same time, to the people of the plains, a new image of the Sherdukpens also began to emerge out. They symbolised the people of the western sector of NEFA who were involved in market economy. Thereafter, it was an easy transition to consider the main village of the Sherdukpens as the centre of cash transactions. Thus though Rupa might not be much of a Rupa (centre of transaction in silver coin) its reputation was fixed.

A question that still remains unanswered, is how the new principle of market transaction was subordinated to the old principle of reciprocity? It appears that the answer to this question will bring out the true character of the tribute, ceremonially paid by the Kacharis to the Sherdukpens. This tribute represents at least part of the profit that the Sherdukpens would have earned had they carried on the entire trade directly in the market. It is an architype of profit in the peculiar institutional complex of the region,—a compromise between market and reciprocity.

This is not the only compromise, that the Sherdukpens have to make in their pursuit of the principle of reciprocity. One can see it, in their internal social relations as well.

The social organisation of the Sherdukpens symbolises the synthesis of two opposite principles, namely, extortion and reciprocity, in a dramatic manner. As discussed in the body of the report, the Sherdukpen community is divided into two primary categories, the Thongs or the masters and the Chhaos or the servants. Each Thong family has a Chhao family attached to it. But the Chhaos live in separate households and own property including landed property. They are however required to render certain services to the masters on various occasions and are not entitled to certain rights which go along with the membership of the community. For instance, they do not have a share in the posa paid by the Government; or again they cannot expect to receive any tribute from the Kacharis. The extortion of certain services or the denial of certain rights is however one side of the picture. There is the other as well. Each Thong family has a secret treasure of its own. Its location is known to the head of the family and his head Chhao. Ordinarily the head of the

family does not visit the secret place; whenever he requires anything, the Chhao fetches it for him. When he dies, the Chhao shows the hidden treasure to his son.

It appears that if the Thong extorts services from the Chhao, he reciprocates by investing the Chhao with great dignity. He is not servant in the ordinary sense of the term; he is servant-*cum*-trustee-*cum*-conscience keeper of the family. From the point of view of the cultures, within the orbits of industrial or industrialising societies, this institution seems to be ridden with a number of anomalies. But an emic view of the institution would perhaps bring out its character, as an architype of modern bureaucracy, in a primitive setting. It should however be noted that, the present rapid study does not provide enough light for making any definite statement. At the same time, it is also to be appreciated that the involvement of the Sherdukpens and other tribes of NEFA in the circulation of goods, cutting across nations and cultures, would have logically stimulated the growth of some sort of bureaucracy. A study in depth, with a wider scope, and covering the region as a whole, would be rewarding.



Plate 1. Gaon burah with his wife.

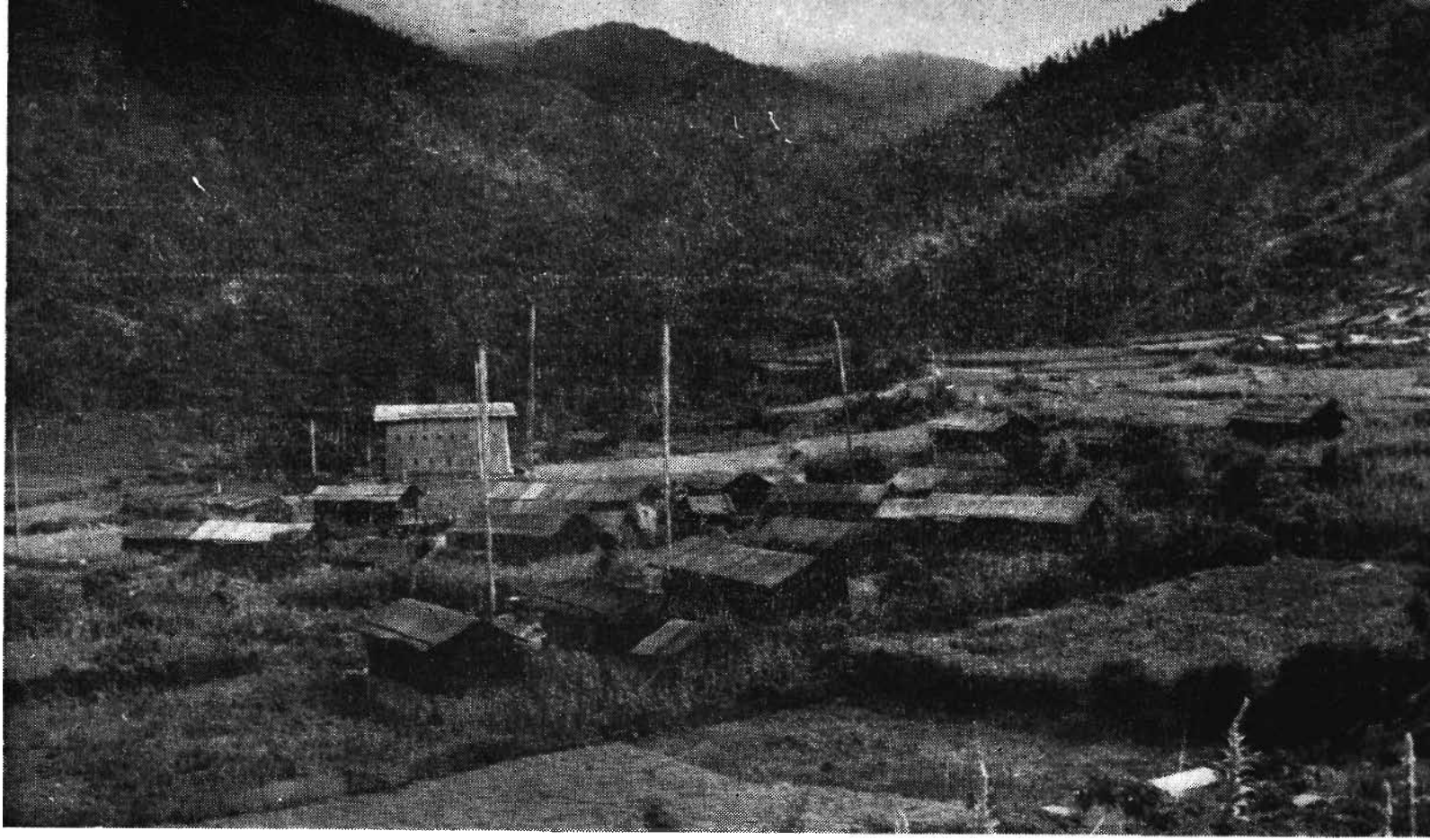


Plate 2. A view of the village showing the topography.

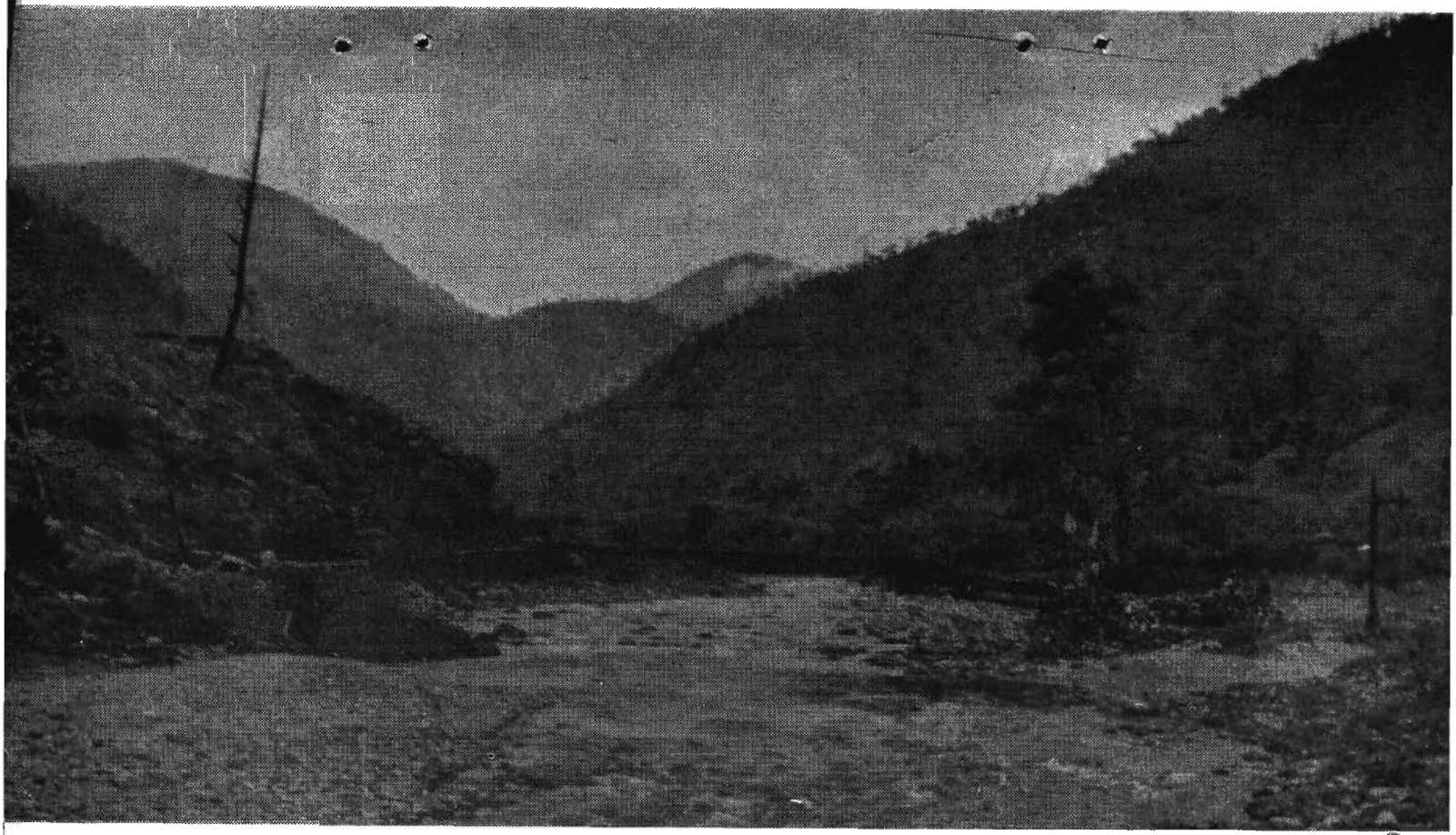


Plate 3. A distant view of canti level bridge over the river Ziging Kho.



Plate 4. Flag post erected near the bridge over the river Duphla Kho (Ziging Kho).



Plate 5. Kakaling (village) with Gompa on the left side.



Plate 6. Stone (Size 46′ × 19′ × 16′).

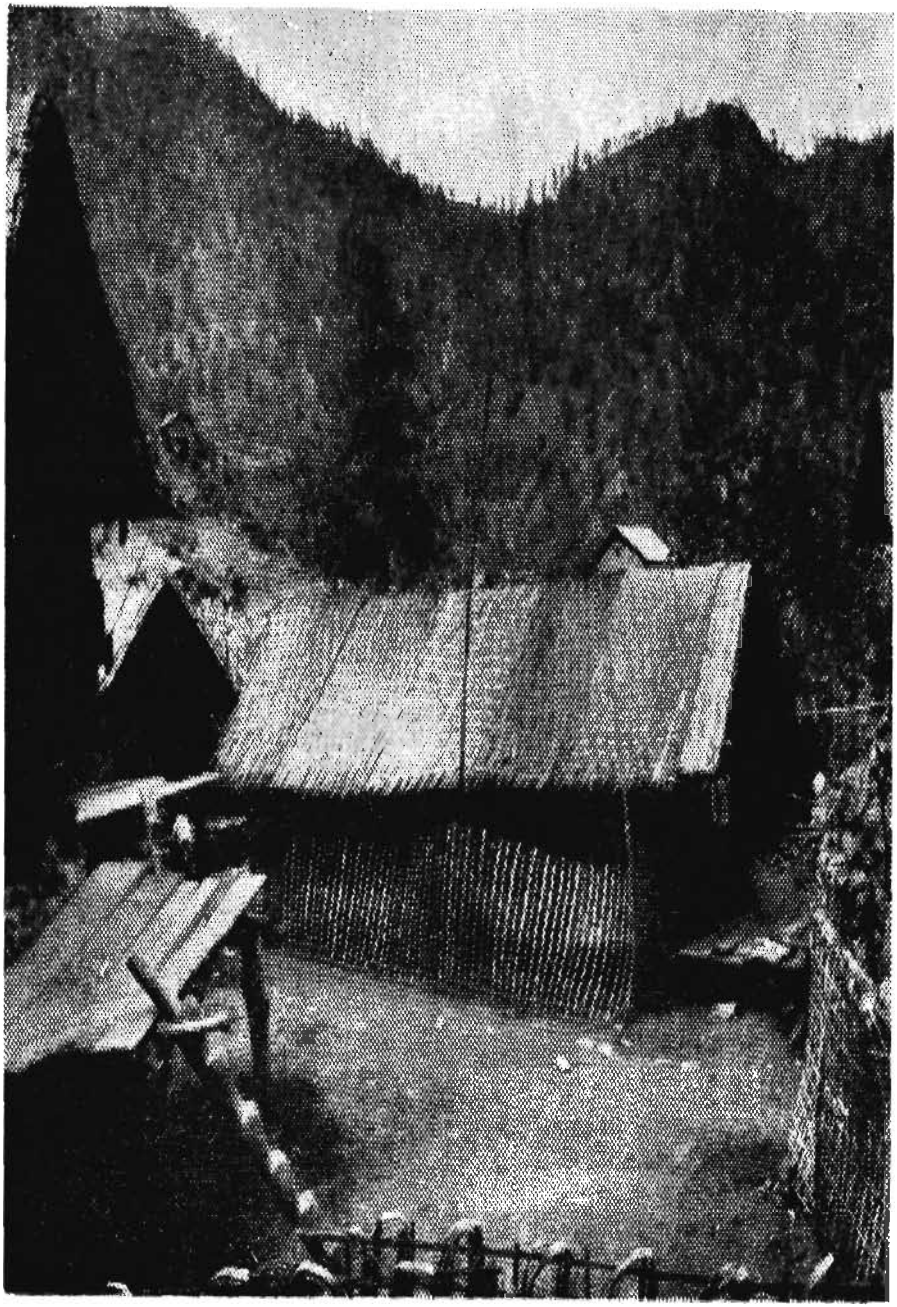


Plate 7. Hut Type House.

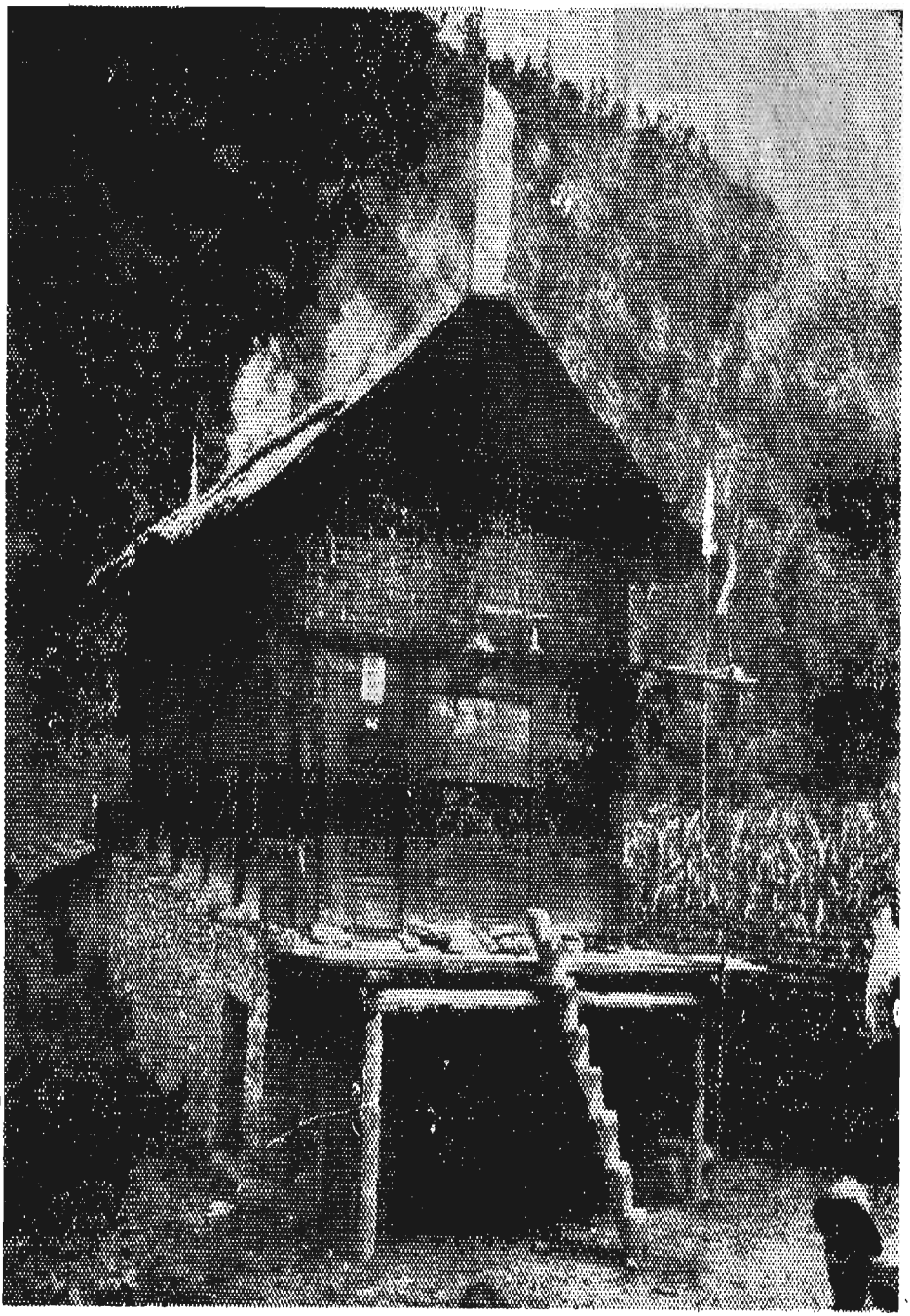


Plate 8. Wooden Plank House (Size 45′ × 18′ × 18′).



Plate 9. Group of Sherdukpen girls in ceremonial dress.



Plate 10. Sherdukpen girls in day-to-day dress.

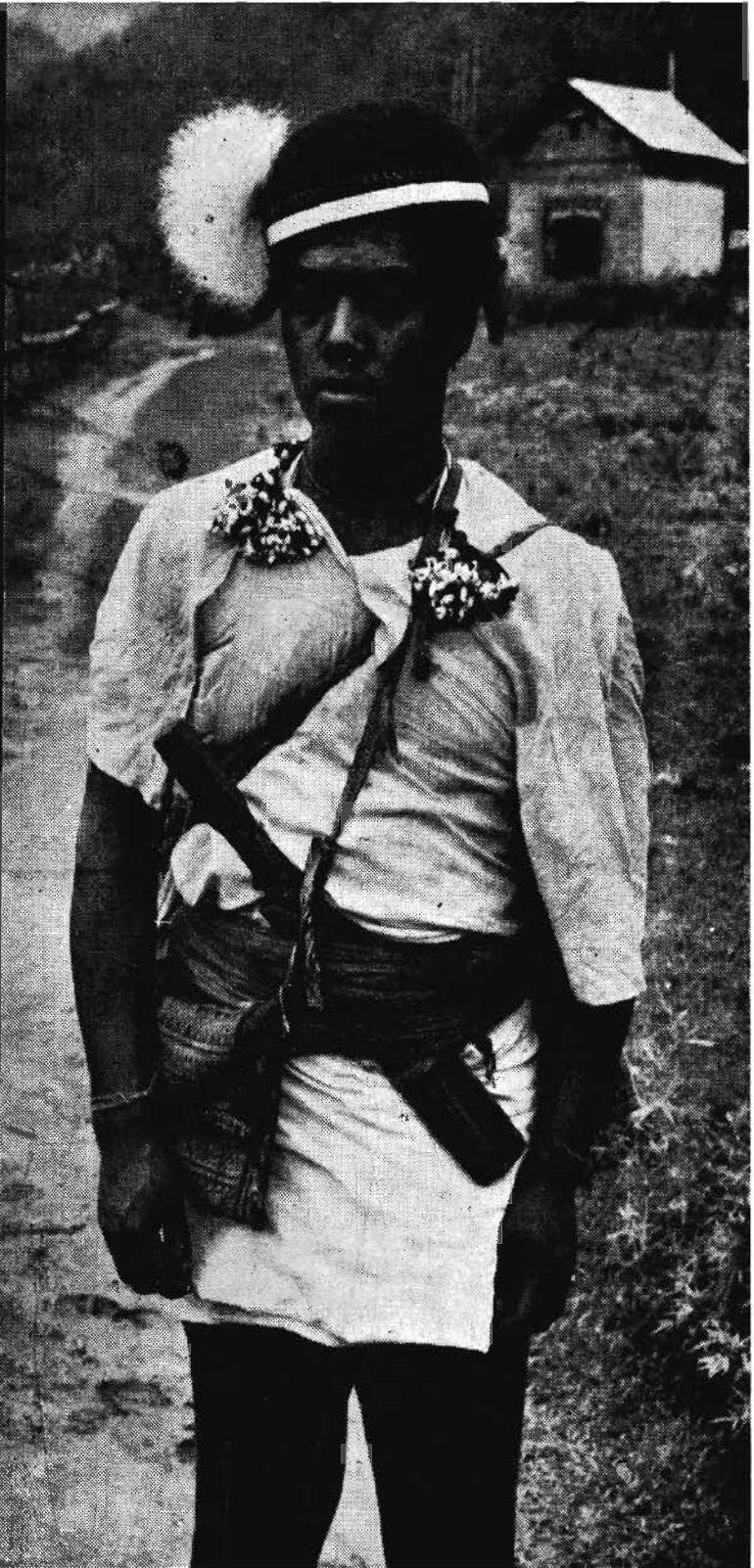


Plate 11.

A village youth in traditional dress.



Plate 12. A village damsel in ceremonial dress.



Plate 13. Ornaments



Plate 14. Utensils



Plate 15. Water carrier and Pan (*Midir* and brass *Dekchi*).



Plate 16. Bamboo baskets.

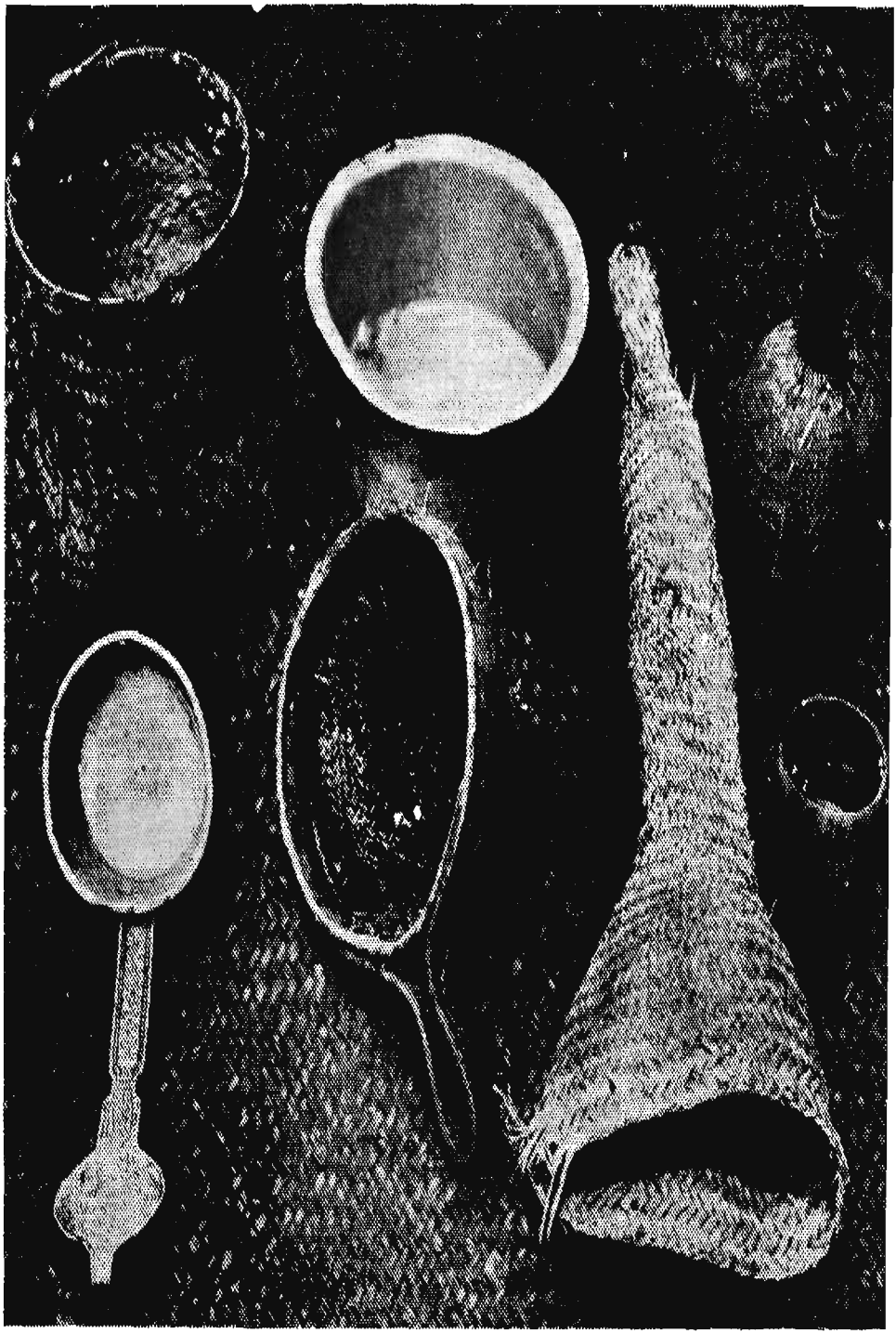


Plate 17. Utensils for making local bear.



Plate 18. A Sherdukpen woman cooking the food.

Plate 19. Ploughing the field.





Plate 20. A woman with her daughter working in the cultivation field.

Plate 21 Agricultural Implements. (Chhampao and Chhigi).

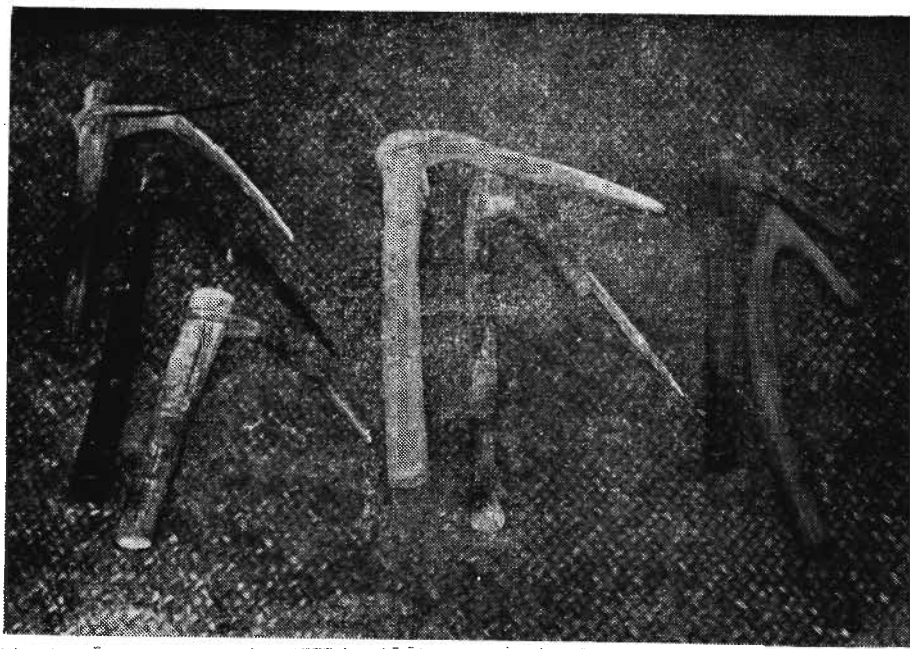




Plate 22. Sherdukpen girls pounding paddy.



Plate 23. A woman grinding the maize.

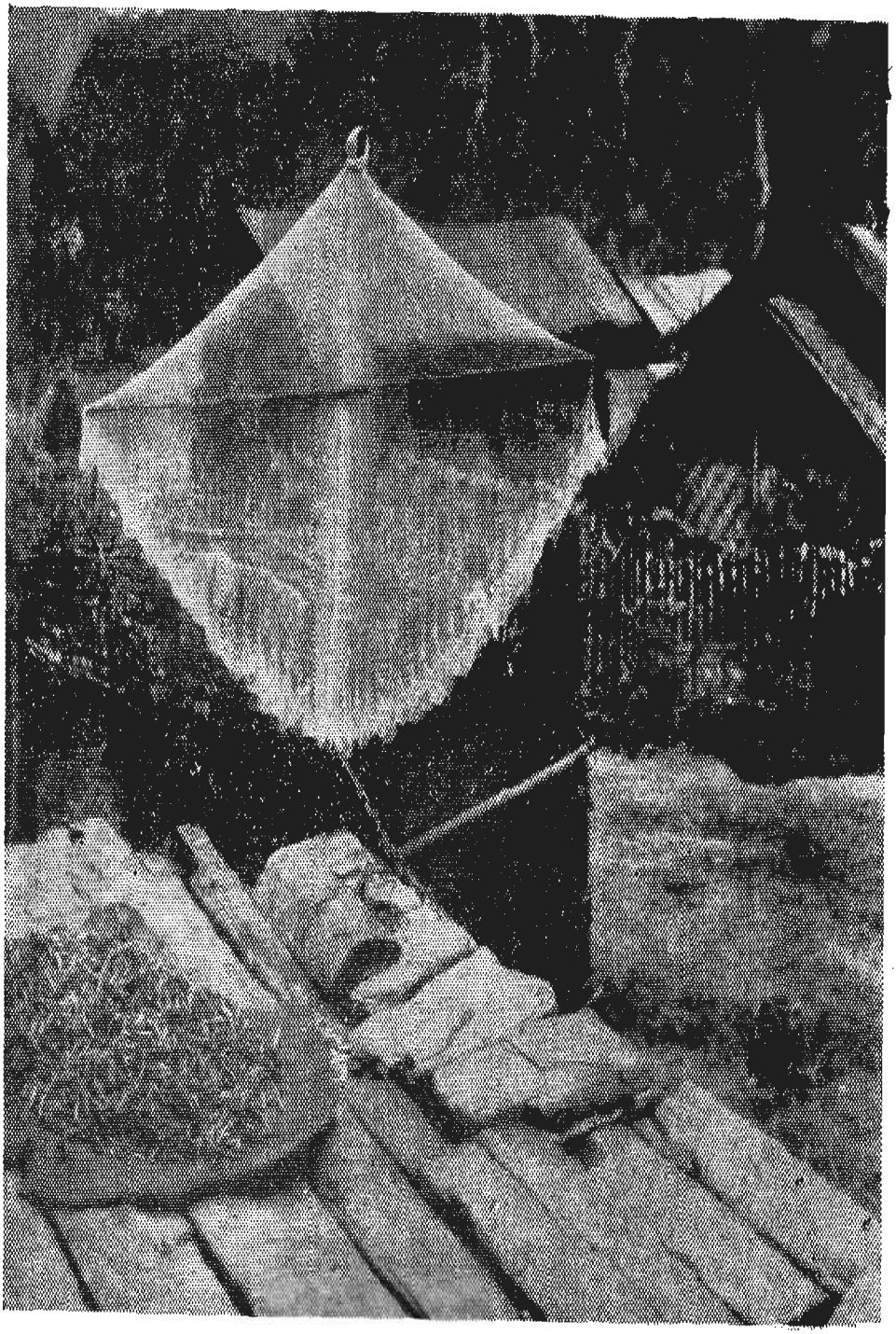


Plate 24. Fishing Net (made locally).

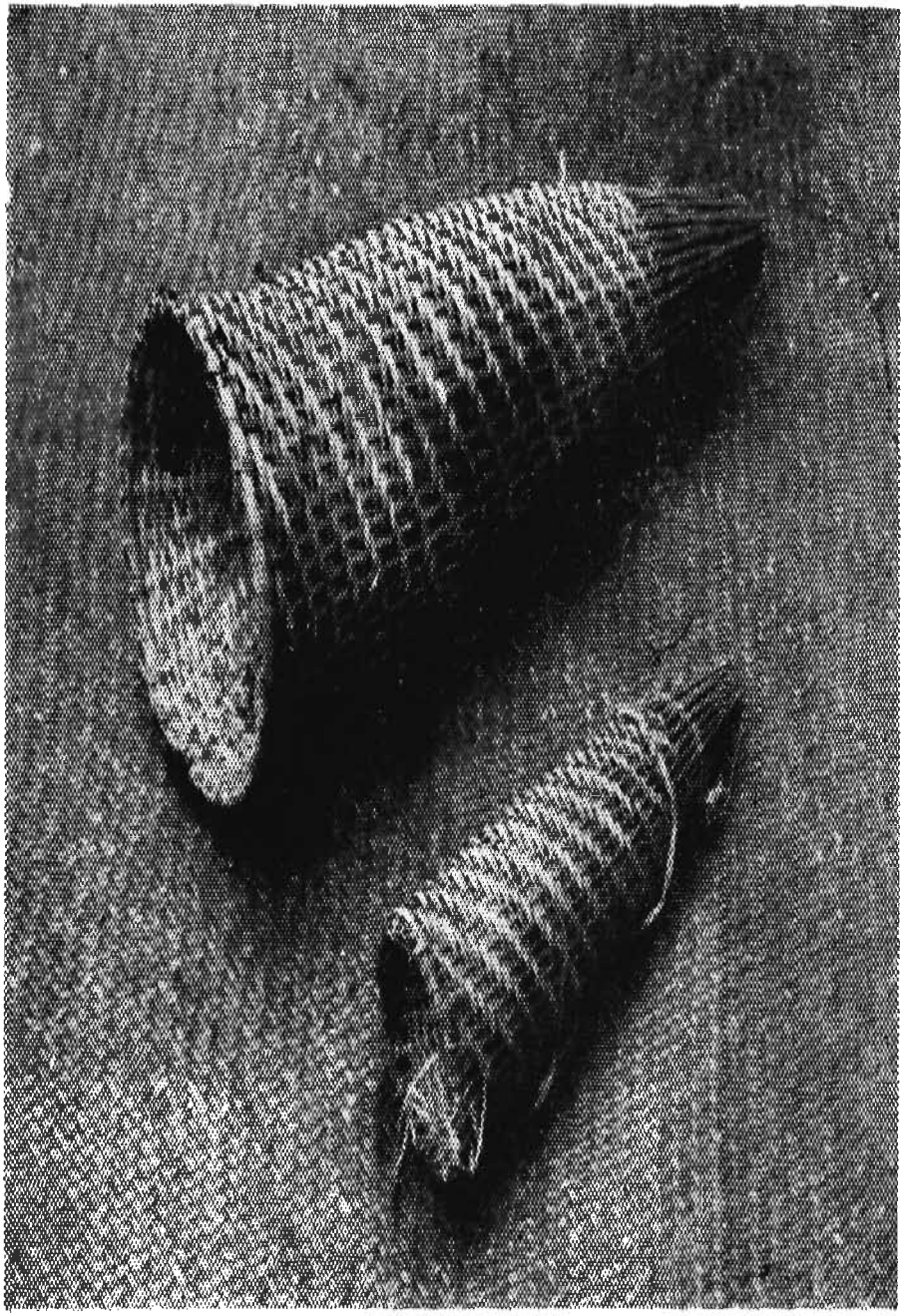


Plate 25. Fishing Trap.



Plate 26. An old man at loom (Daun-Thobrang).

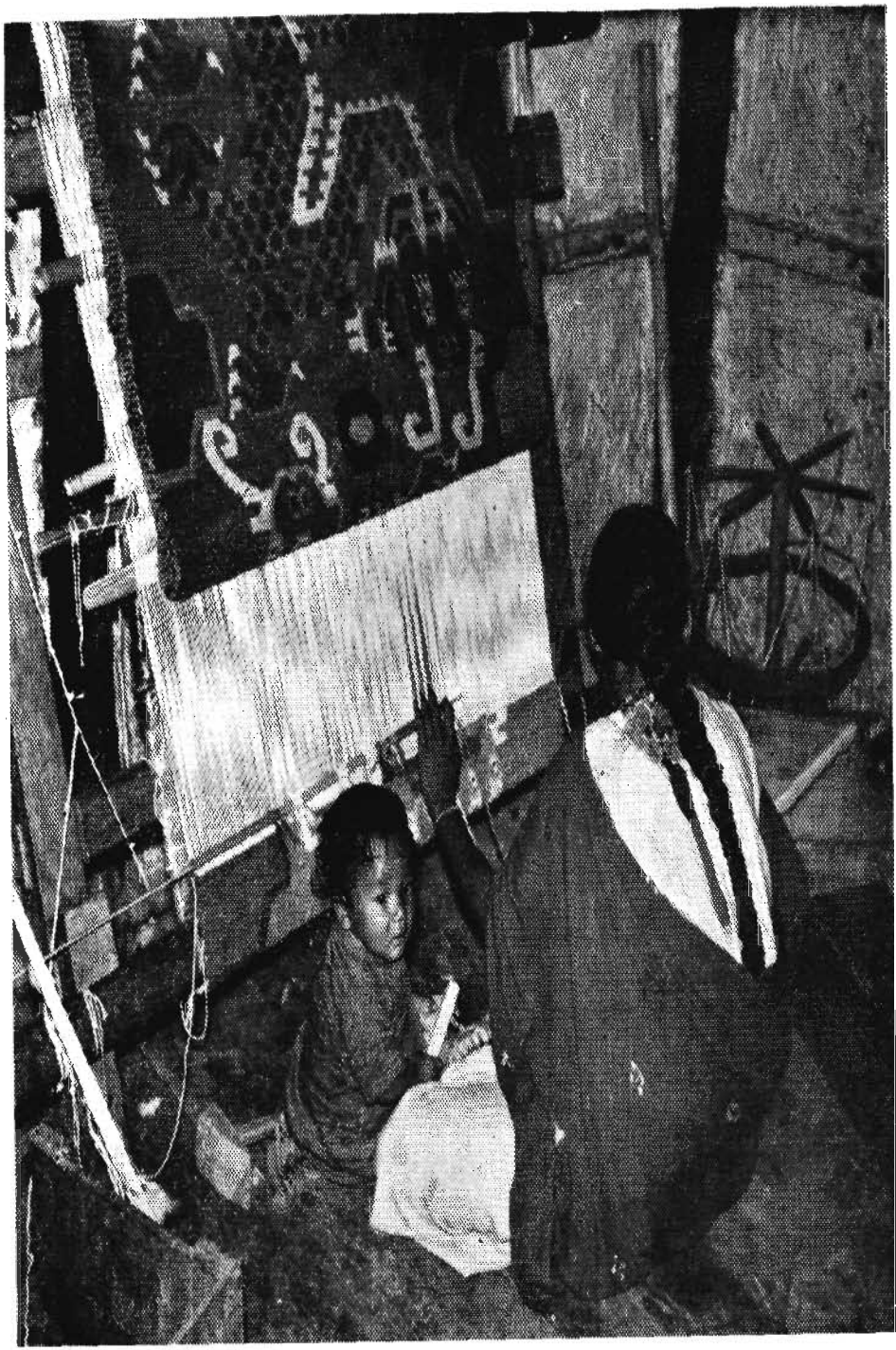


Plate 27. A Sherdukpen girl making carpet at a centre run by Adim Jati Sewak Sang.



Plate 28. A village craftsman (Silversmith).

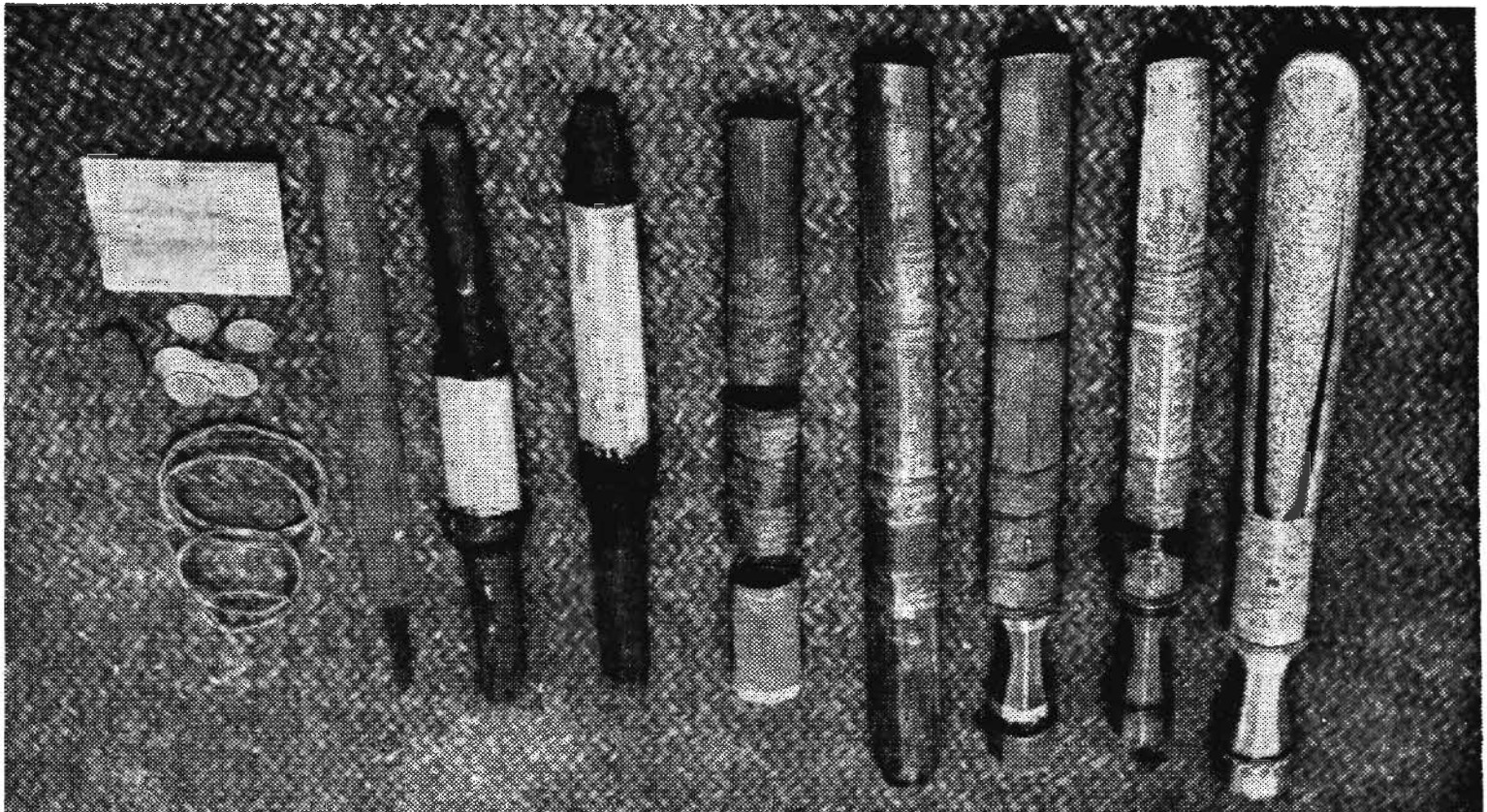


Plate 29. Silver Daos of different size.

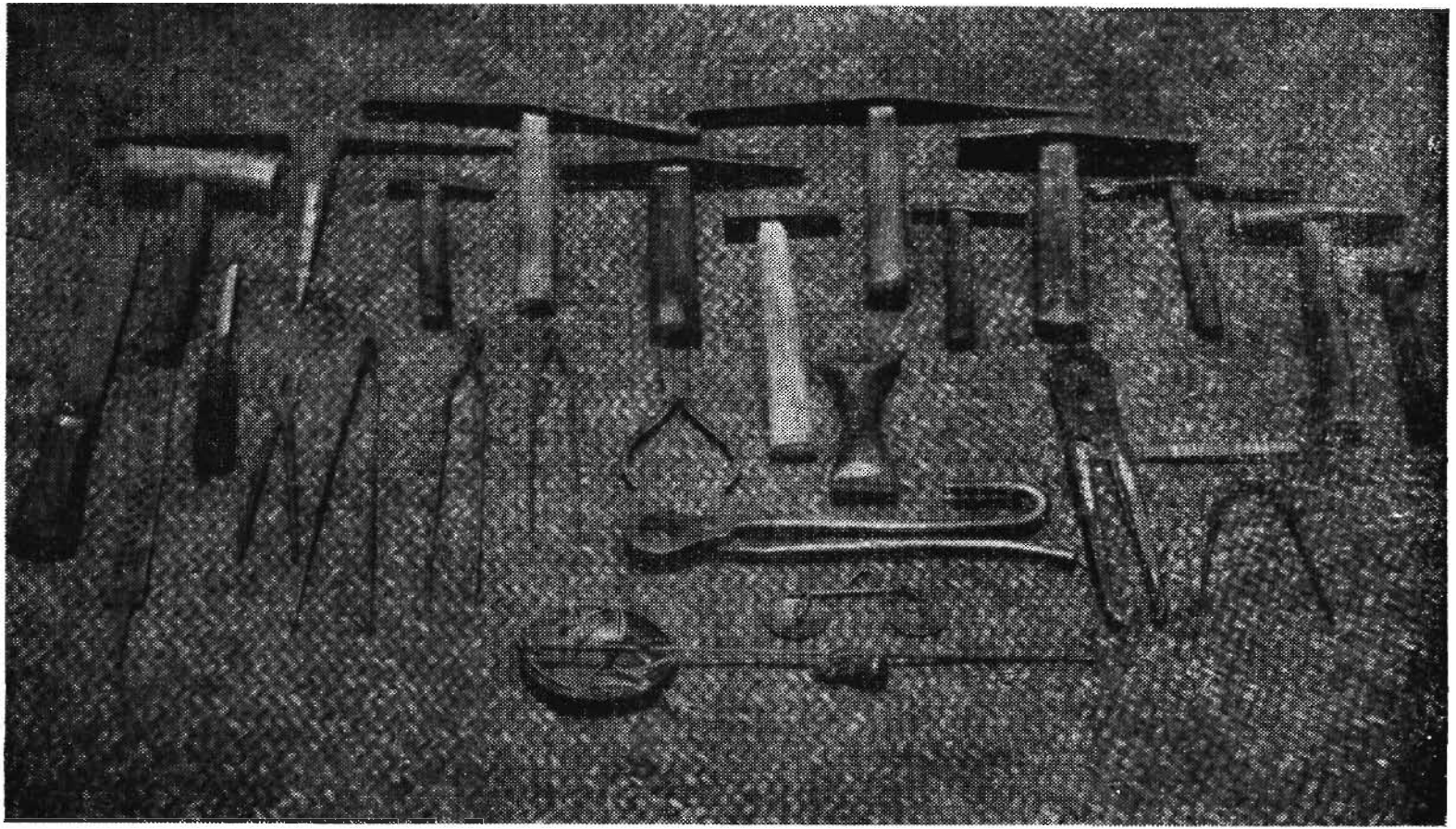


Plate 30. Tools use by silversmith.



Plate 31. Ornaments and Silver pots made by silversmith.



Plate 32. Hospital at Rupa.

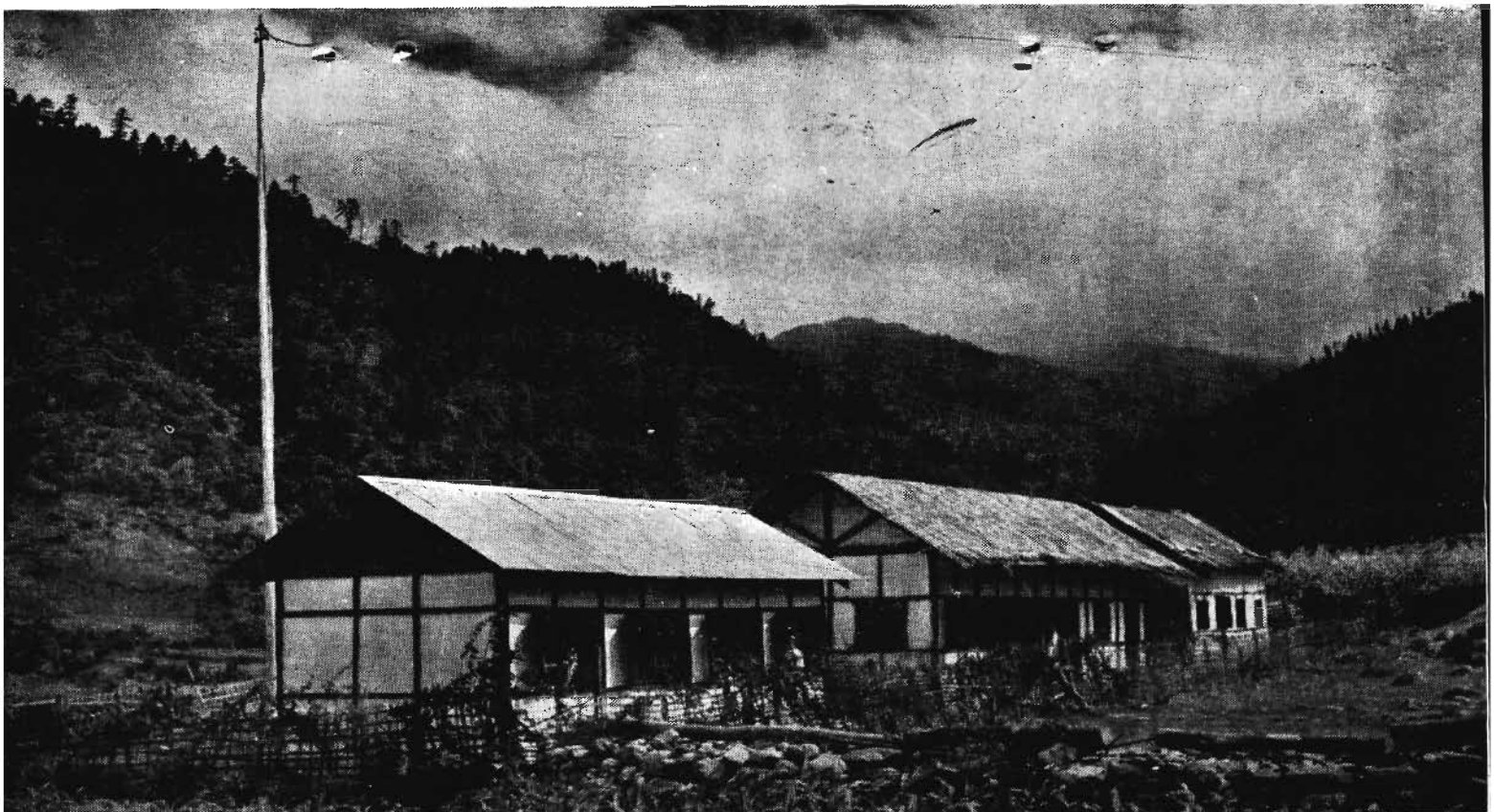


Plate 33 Village L. P. School



Plate 34. Ceiling of school Kakaling.



Plate 35. Sherdukpens alongwith their families on their way to Rupa Gaon from Doimara.



Plate 36. Sherdukpens after little rest, ready for march on their way to Rupa Doimara.

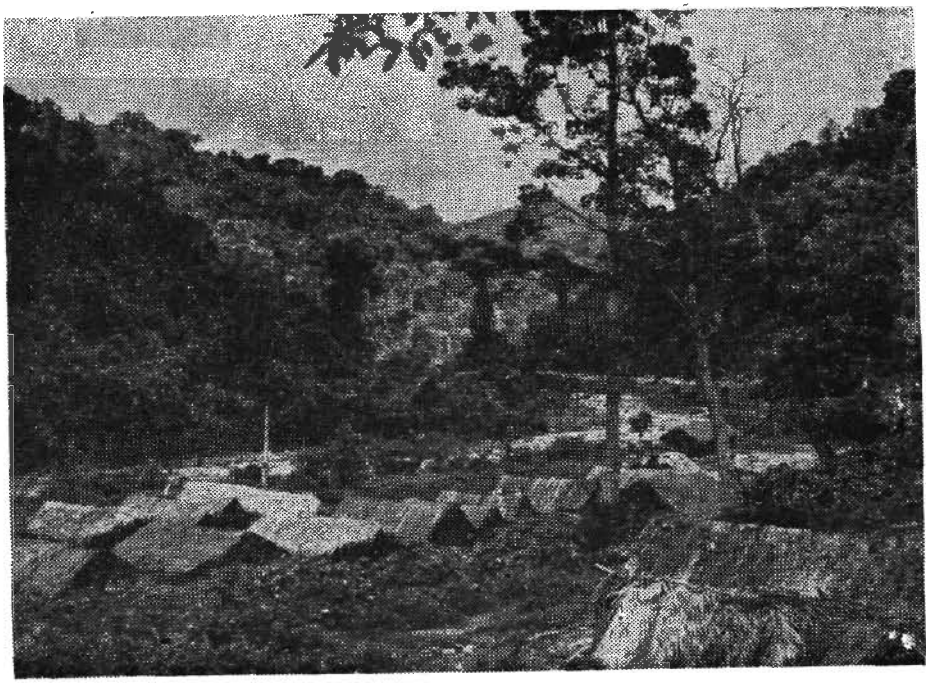


Plate 37. A view of winter camp of Sherdukpens at Doimara.



Plate 38. Shrine at Doimara.

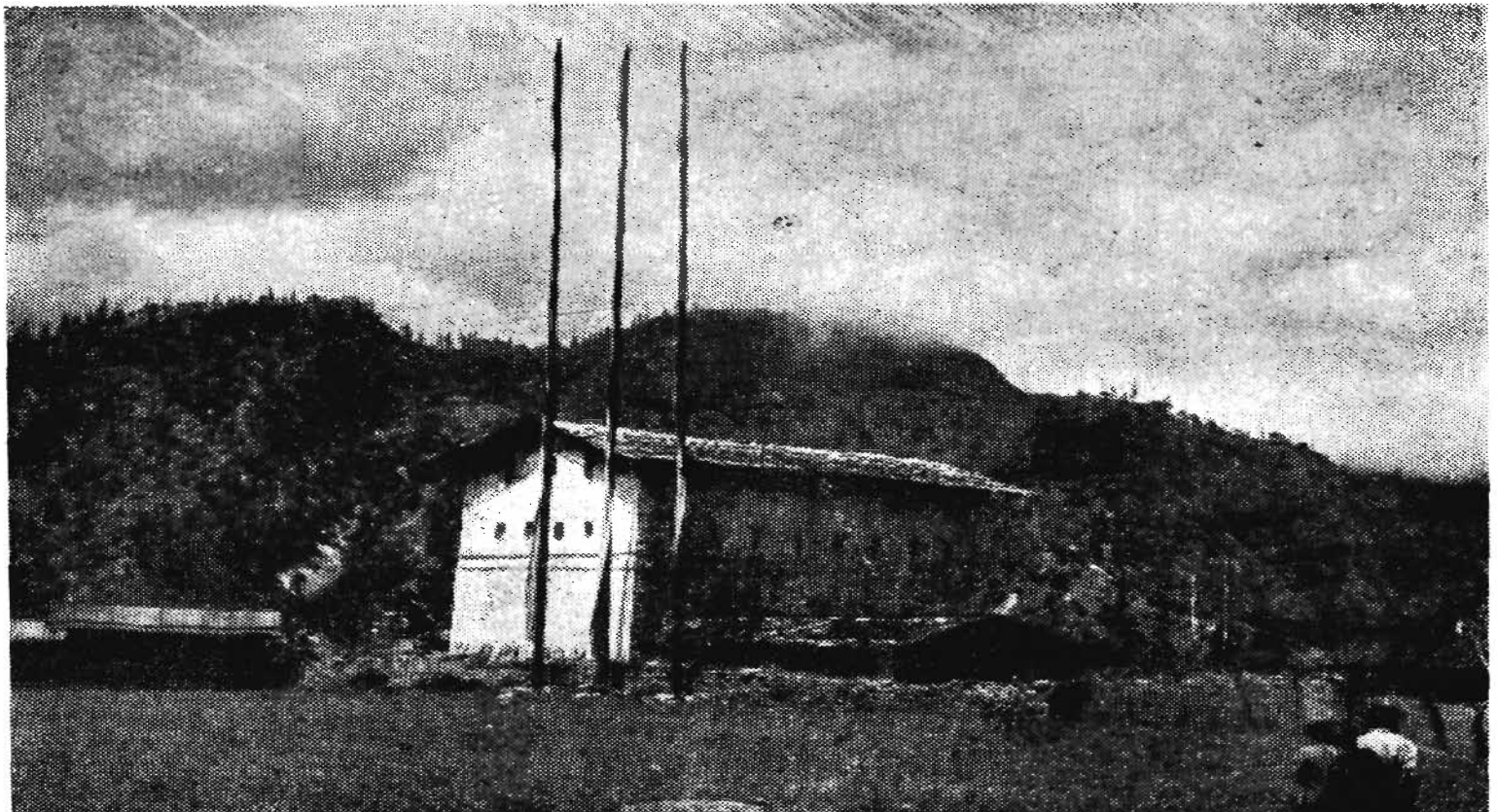


Plate 39. Village Gompa, On the left side there is one apartment for cooking food during festivities.

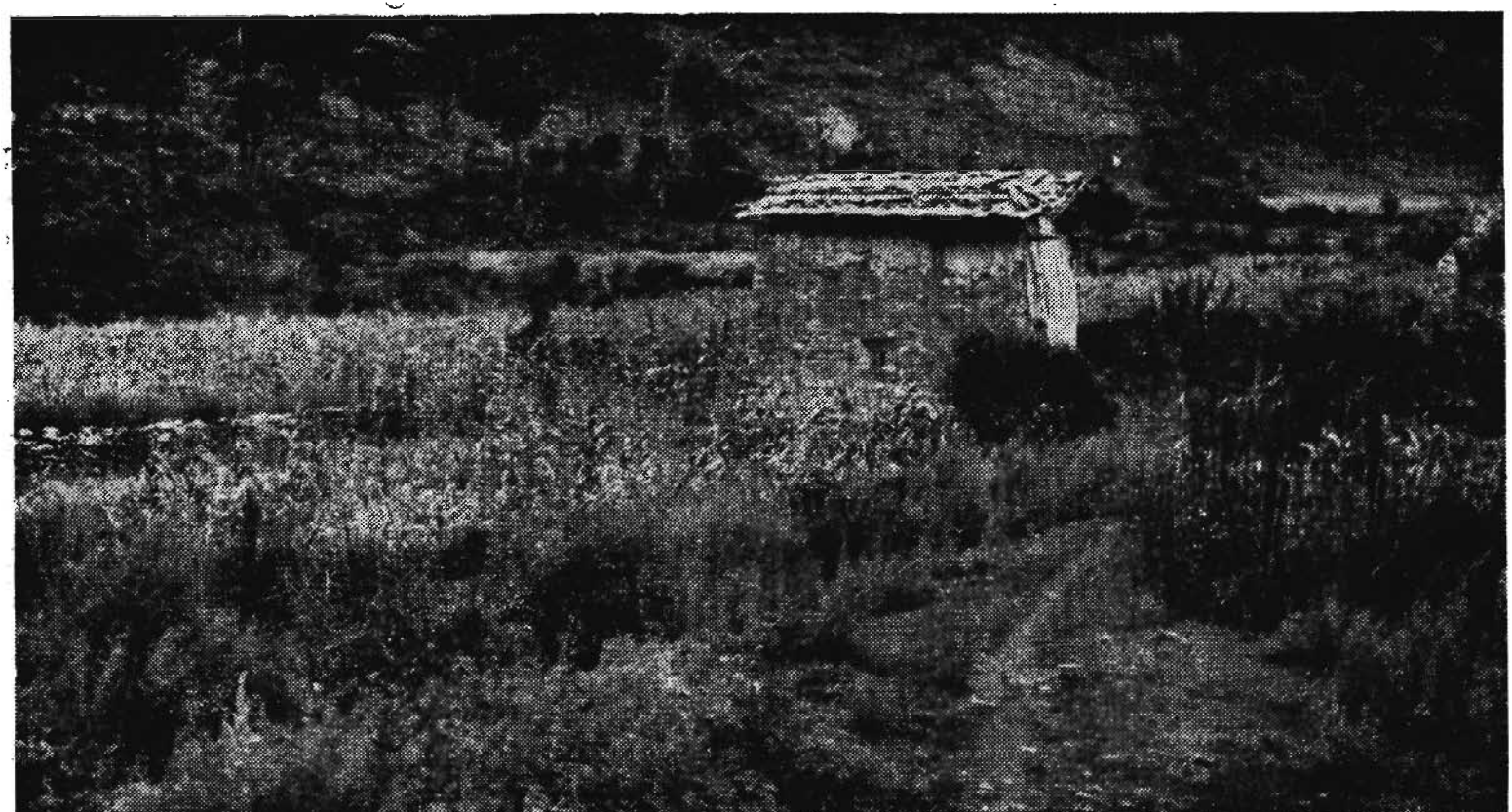


Plate 40. *Dungzur* (a religious shrine). Inside it is housed a prayer wheel which is run by water.



Plate 41. *Village Manc.*



Plate 42. *Chhorten :* These two Chhorten, are religious shrine and are erected in order to get rid of various might spirit and sufferings of the villager.



Plate 43. Stone tablet inscribed with prayers being kept on the village *Mane*.



Plate 44. Worship of local deities for curing the sick persons.

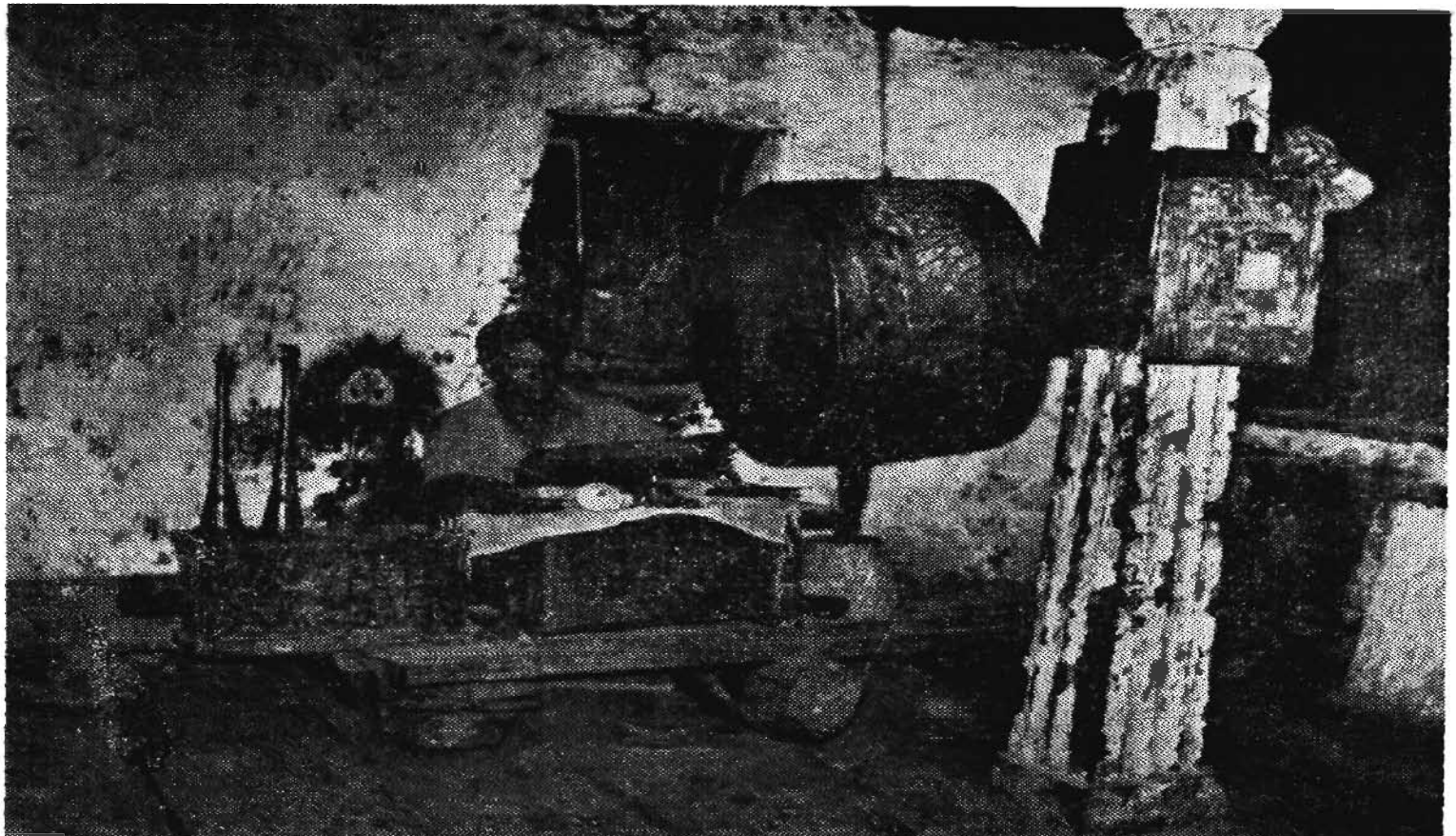


Plate 45. A lama performing puja.

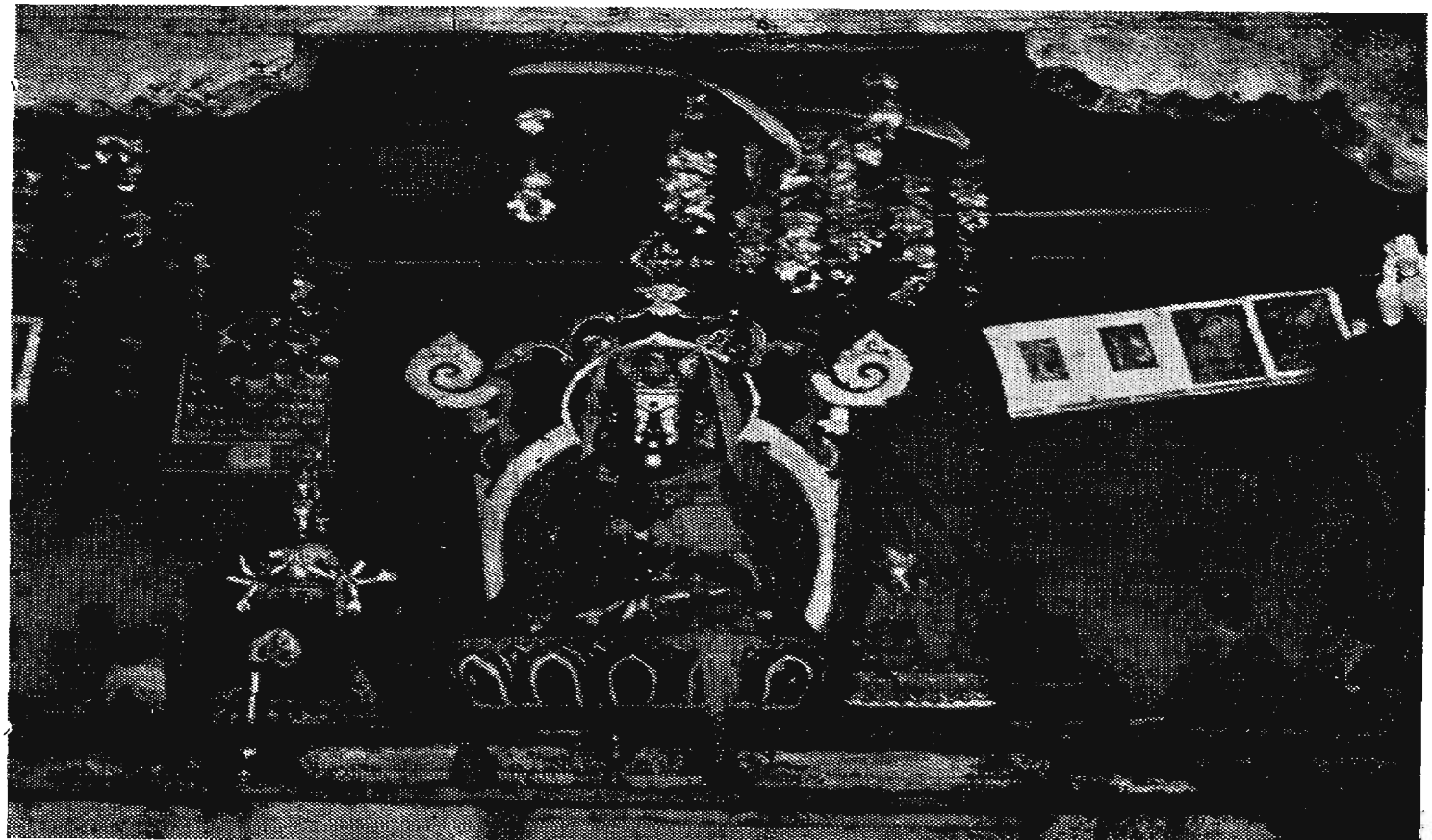


Plate 46. Image of Lord Buddha inside Gompa.

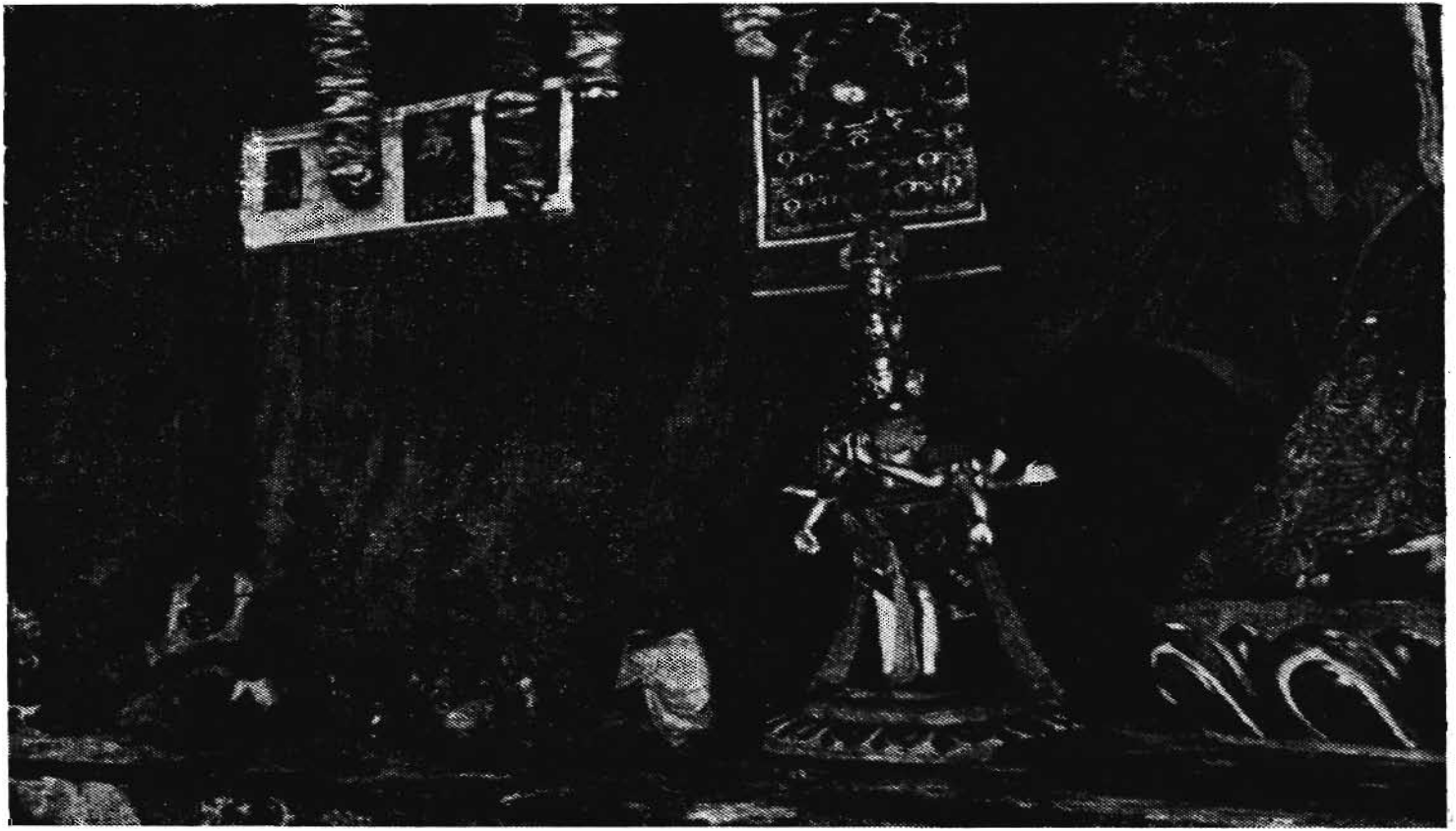


Plate 47. Details of the arrangement of deities on the right side of Buddha inside the Gompa (From Left to Right-*Drema, Dorji, Tanjing, Tuptothang-thong, Tombe* and *Chhma Dorji*).



Plate 43. Details of the images on the left of Lord Buddha inside the Gompa, (Name from right to left-*Rinchin Narbu, Chareji, Chhombepang, Trena, Dorsing Chareji* and *Chhma Dorji*.

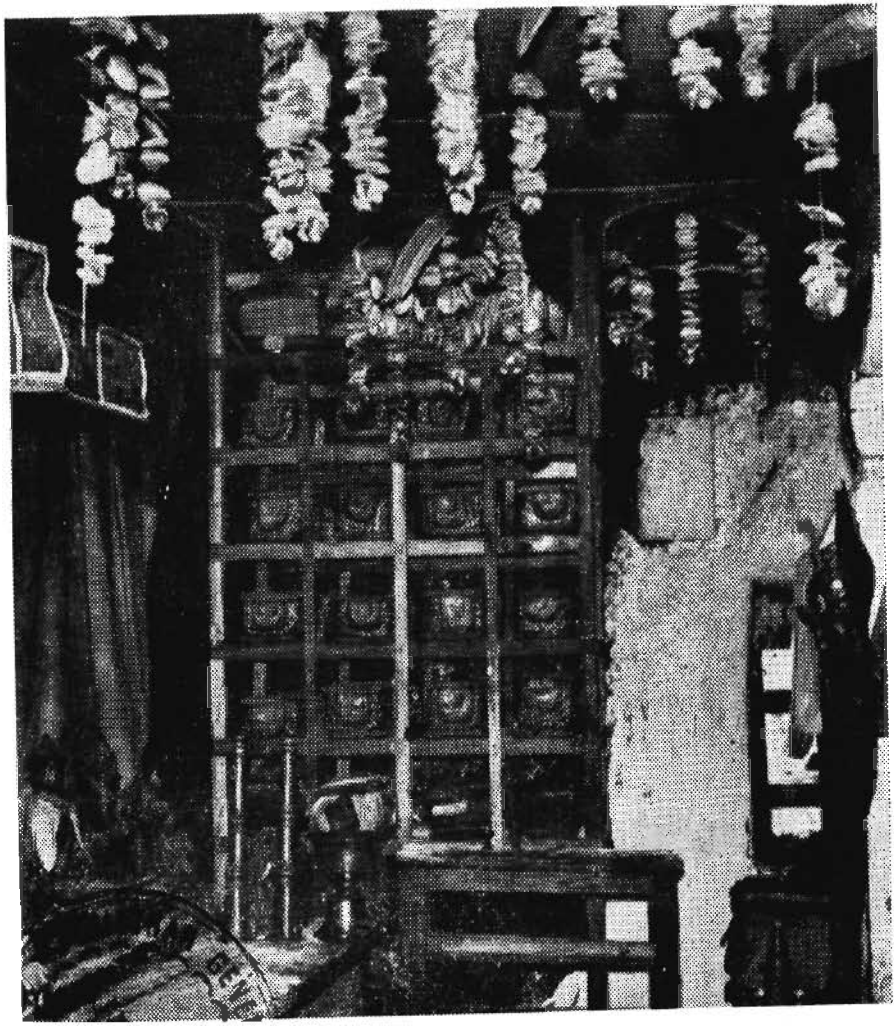


Plate 9. Library inside the Gompa having religious books.

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