ABSTRACT

This essay is a study of cultural life of Lepcha. The view that, Lepcha are the original inhabitants of Eastern Himalayan region is accepted by the majority of the scholars. Lepchas have their own language, script but they are not getting the opportunity of education in their mother language. The Lepcha community lived in five countries, but their number are very poor to get political identity, the major number of Lepcha live in India. Earlier they were animists, and their life was within the world of mountain. Study of their folklore, tales, story, music are shows that they are very close to nature, this closeness help them to get a vast knowledge about nature, flora & fauna, and wild animal. These essay tried to analyze their culture, craft work, specially skill of their women in making dress, their musical instrument, their song and tales which indicate their origin and separate identity among himalayan tribes.

Keywords: Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup; Mayel Lyang; Kanchenjunga; Eetbo-Deybo; Indigenous; Animists; Chyee

INTRODUCTION

Mutanchi Rong kup Rum Kup,(Beloved children of mother nature and God)popularly known as Lepcha, the name which is given to them by their neighbour Nepalees. The Lepchas call themselves “Mutane Chye Rumkup” in their native language Rong-Aaring or Lepcha language, which in literal, means ‘Mother loved one children of god’. Among the three major ethnic group (Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali)of Sikkim Himalaya, Lepcha are the most primitive and indigenous tribe. The Lepcha are born naturalists who live in relative isolation from outside world with their own tradition practices and beliefs. Lepcha belongs to Mongoloid racial stocks. Though the question about the origin of Lepcha has a created a controversy among past and present scholar. Some anthropologist believe that Lepcha were emigrated long long before from the various part of tibet and Mangolia. Whereas the Lepcha believe that they are the son of the soil, that is Mayel Lyang and they have many tales in favour of their believes. Scholar like Dr. D. C. Roy has the view that lepcha are the aborigines of the western Himalayas, and Tibetans came later and occupied the Lepcha land. Mayel-Lyang, the Mythological lands now covered by Sikkim, Illam region of eastern Nepal, the district of Darjeeling and some pockets of Bhutan from time immemorial.

Present day the population Lepcha lived in five countrys-India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Tibet, but they are now mainly lived in first three country. In Nepal they have settled from ancient times in eastern part of Mai Khola in Ilam district and very small number in other district. In Bhutan Lepcha lived in south and south western part, that is close to indian border. India is the homeland of the Lepcha, here they live in Darjeeling district of west bengal(main concentration is Kalingpong sub-division),Sikkim, and a very few number in Tripura. Earlier Lepchas were nature worshipper but gradually they converted into Buddhism -Lamaism(under tibetian rule) and Chiristanism (during british rule).some lepcha also follow Hinduism.
Peace loving Lepcha lives a very simple tribal life, which is very much enrich in culture. Some characteristics of tribal art is their music which is their signature tunes. The dancing legs are the motion whereas the folk-tales and folk song are props of their art music and dance as a whole the tribal folk craft, folklore, folk-dance wood carvings and their countenances combine to offer them an aesthetic life which is worth mentioning. In the activities the age as such has no place and person of all age group take active part in all these occasions. They are also fond of riddle and practically everybody knows some but a few of them are famous for their repertoire. These arts presents vivid picture of tribal life. The artistic activities concern their hunting, agriculture and other aspects of their everyday life. Various aspects of tribal life such as their economic life, social life, conjugal life, sacred life their thoughts, their cattle and poultry, vegetable and fruits are also amply represented in their folklore, art and craft. The folklore contains in itself their unwritten record of cultural life. In other word folklore is the mirror of the tribal culture. The Lepchas folklore are meledious and contain interesting folkstory, some important stories are as follow

Creation of the world- The creation story (Aa-Ect-Sung) is the core part of Lepcha traditional story (Lungten sung) It takes more than thirty days and night to complete the whole story.

Lord Eetboo-deyboo Rum created the Koongchyenkoonglo-chyoo (Kanchenjunga mountain) and matli Pano (Earthquake king) Kanchenjunga is the elder brother of Matli Pano. Lord Eetboo-deyboo Rum created the two but this creation was not habitable for any creature because the whole world was covered with water Eetboo-deyboo Rum was concerned about human beings and where they would live. The lord thought about the shelter for human beings, hence it was decided that Matli Pano would lie above the Talyo da. Lord Eetboo-deyboo Rum made the soil on his body which became the earth, where the creatures could live. Matli Pano did not want to live under the soil, so he moved below the earth and caused the whole world to shake. There was no control over his body movement and thus there were floods and earthquakes everywhere and no creature could live comfortably.

Eetbo-deybo now decided that Kanchenjunga should stand on Matli Pano’s chest so that he could control the movements of his young brother. Towards creation of human the story goes like this: The God out of pure snow from the top of the mount Kanchenjunga made a shape of man into which he infused nine Nongyong, and the life appeared. That person was named Fudong Thing. Perceiving his state of loneliness God thought of creating his partner. Then Go
d created another shape of a Woman and infused nine Nongyoung as sample from the body of founding thing (Thus causing only eight Nongyong in case of a male). She was named Nongyong Nyu’. They started life as friend. The place where the two ancestors of the Lepcha s were kept was called Nye Mayel Kyong. The place supposed to lie near Kanchenjunga. In spite of everything they were not content with their life. Because God forbade them to enter into any physical relations till they attain full maturity after which they automatically got the opportunity of cohabitation and procreation. But as they grew they forgot the words of their creator. Nuzong Nyu proposed in such a way that fudongthing could not control himself and began to act like her husband. The result was, God by way of punishment sent them nine steps down to this mundane world i.e. Tarvong Partam. There they blessed with the children. Thus Fudongthing and Nuzoan Nyu were the first parents of the Lepchas.

Origin of Lepcha Marriage: The myth on origin of Lepcha Marriage on a justification on the Lepcha marriage ceremony and it is very interesting to listen, as it is in below.

Thousand of year ago a young robust and powerful Lepcha Tarbongthing after journeying and exploring Mayel Lyang for many months arrived at a placed called pari pagnyen.He was very tired fatigued and hungry. Tarbongthing looked, for a shelter for the night but no village or human settlement was in sight. He saw a fruit tree nearby with hundreds of birds on it. To satisfy his hunger he set Radoo Ramyang, a bamboo trap, to catch birds on the fruit tree. He caught a few birds and satisfied his hunger.The next day Tarbongthing set Radoo Ramyang once again on the same fruit tree and went away to look for a village. Where he returned to his shelter in the afternoon. Tarbongthing found to his annoyance, there were only dry twigs and leaves hanging on his trap instead of birds.
Tarbongthing was puzzled angry as well as curious to find out the person who was perpetrating a mischievous deed on him. The next day once again he very carefully set Radoo Ramyang on the same fruit tree and hid himself under the bushes and keep eyeing on the tree. In the late afternoon, Tarbongthing saw a young beautiful girl coming out from the wood towards the trap and freeing the birds one after another from the trap and putting dry things and leaves on the trap. On seeing this Tarbongthing sneaked behind her and caught her very firmly. The young and beautiful girl, although surprised, fought back to free herself from Tarbongthing but Tarbongthing somehow overpowered, subdued her at the end.

Tarbongthing asked her, why did you free the birds from the trap? The young girl replied that she was the guardian preserver and champion, of the birds and asked him, ‘What harm did these innocent birds do to you? She also said that, she freed the birds from the trap because they have equal right to live in this beautiful Mayel Lang. Both of them were young beautiful and handsome, both of young attracted to each other in fact it was love at first sight.

When she wanted to go home because it was too late, Tarbongthing barring her way, asked her & her’s village name. The girl replied that her name was, ‘Narip Naom’ and she came from sakyong. Tarbongthing again asked her if she would run away with him to start their own family life. She replied you must ask my mother and uncle’s permission. My mother is Tace-Tanye Moo-Nyoo. Having said this she disappeared into the woods. Tarbongthing returned to his mother Numkoot Amoo Nyoo and expressed desire to marry her. After that Tarbongthing’s maternal uncle went sakyong with marriage proposal. His proposal welcomed there but Narip Naom’s mother and uncle said that Tarbongthing and his uncle must adhere to and fulfill marriage conditions.

Tarbongthing and his uncle agrees to the all conditions of the Lepcha Marriage customary law and bride price. Thus the first Lepcha marriage ceremony was solemnised between Narip Naom and Tarbongthing and Lepcha Marriage customary law originated in Mayel Lyang. In Lepcha society in marriage ceremony they sing to bless the new Bride:

Hê aey . . . . !
Let the bride and groom live long
Like the Himalayas standing strong.
Let them flower and fruit
With bright sunshine on them,
In this world.
Like the love of Teesta and Rangeet
Let them flow together forever, and
Let their love endure for all time.
Hê aey . . . . !
Into the laps of groom’s parents,
The jewel bride is entrusted,
Amid uncles, aunts and relatives as witnesses.
Let the jewel bride shine,
Let her bring the light to this house
From this day onwards.
Hê aey . . . . !
On completion of the marriage vows and blessings,
On the union of these two,
Let the young boys and girls
Dance, sing and play together,
To celebrate the wedding with joy and delight

**Origin of clans:** Origin of Lepcha clan is also related to mythological tales. According to myth Lepchas fought under Tamsangthing against Laso- Mung- Pano(a devil), and win the war. When the devil was slain the Lepchas and Tamsangthing moved the place called Tarkaol Tam-E-Tam (Valley of deliverance), then Tamsangthing give the title to Lepcha according to their role in the war. The descendents of those Lepcha are known on the title. Thus clan had originated in Lepcha community. These are as below.

1. The Lepcha prayed to God Eetboo-Deyboo were called Mallamu.
2. The Lepcha who plucked all the teeth of the demon were called Lukshongmu.
3. The man who pierced the eye of monster were called Simakmu
4. The Lepcha who cut the body of the monster were known as Suthungmu
5. The man who threw dust at the eyes of the monster in war were called Sadaamgnu
6. The man who prepared the swords for the work were called Korvomu
7. The man who made the string of the bow were called Brimu
8. The person who supply food for the soldier were called Jeribu
9. The person who served Lepcha leaders during war were called Ademmu
10. The Lepcha who make the bow and arrow were called Frenthatimu

**Origin of Chyee** :- To use the supernatural powers bestowed upon Nyolik Nyosongmun by Eetboo-Deyboo Rum, she revealed that the medicine for the restoration of lost morale of the Lepcha soldiers lay in the form of Buth (ferment). Buth was in possession of matlimanyak and Tungdyer Palyung a Cockroach agreed to bring the Buth from matlimanyak.

On the way back while tierd Tungdyer Palyung was resting, pamaol Bu, a pure Black Cobra snaked in and stole a bit of Buth from tungdyer Palyung and tested it and became mad and very poisonous. A honey bee (hu) tested a little Buth, developed sharp needle to prick with seemingly negligible string, like this sum large birds became carnivorous, a tree (kantek ) develop sour taste. Finally kundong koonge a plantain tree touched it and it fruit’s became sweat. Lepcha people believe, in this process, Buth became poison less and got ready for them.

Tungdyer Palyung finally arrived with Buth and gave it to priestess who cooked millet, mixed Buth to prepare Chyee, fermented beverage the ultimate power potion, and distributed it among Lapcha soldiers to raise their morale in the war against Laso Mung – Pano, the devil. With their high morale the Lepchas fought gallantly.

The Lepcha have some more tales about the origin of year, creation of Lepcha priest and Priestess, the two sun etc. all the story passes one generation to another as Folklore. Folklore thus reciprocally related to the life of the Lepcha of Sikkim & Darjeeling. Folklore shows indication to construct the history of Lepcha.

**Art and Crafts:** Folksongs, Music and dance of the Lepcha are a composite whole which is one of the dominant characteristics of their culture. In folksong verse and music go together and the musical aspect is much more reflected in practice. The folk-poetry is merely a vehicle for the folk-tune. The Lepcha people go on singing a small poem of four to eight lines for hours together with help of flob-
music. The simple catchy folk-tunes conveying the feeling and sentiments of their ancestors, their lives and thoughts, their activities and achievements, their moral and discipline are of great value. One of their famous folk song is -

“Golden snowy peaks of kanchanjunga
Is your crown,
The shining morning dews
Playing on Kursaong and Survo flowers,
Your ornaments.
Oh! Mayel Lyang…..
In Mayel Lyang, the Lepcha land,
In the lap of Mount Kanchanjunga,
To be born, live and to die,
And to be able to meet
My ancestors in Poomju in the Himalayas,
After death,
Through the old and ancient path,
I am happy and glad.
Oh! Mayel Lyang…..”

Lepcha people celebrate different occasions in different way. They have various dance style for various celebration, that shows their cultural enriches. these are

**Zo-Mal-Lok:** This is a popular folkdance of Lepcha community where young and the old jointly take part of singing and dancing this dance depicting the showing reaping and harvesting of paddy.

**Chu faat:** In the honour of Mt. Kanchenjunga and its four associate peaks Mt. pandim, Mt. Kabru, Mt. Simbrum and Mt. Narsing this dance performed by Lepchas. Carrying butter lamps and green bamboo leaves, the dancers performed this ritualistic dance with devotional songs. It is their believes that this peak are repository of five hidden treasure such as salt, medicine, minerals, sacred books and food grain.

**Tedong Lho faat:** It is a folklore, which is often retold to the new generation in lyrical poetry. This folklore corresponds the divine occurrences as described in the Indian Vedas Matsya Purana & in the Bible as the ‘Great flood’

**Kar Gnok Lok:** Is famous Lepcha folkdance which depicts the sojourn of a group of migratory swans who take a flight from the warm plains towards the cold Himalayan region in the month of Feb-March and from cold region to the warm plain in the month of October- November. The seasonal migratory flight of the swans guide the Lepchas to begin sowing and harvesting their crop.

The Lepcha community have rich variety of their indigenous musical instrument, some notable are Sut-saang (Played like volion) Tung-bak(Played like a pass mandolin) Bangho, Tangdyu, Bampathut, Pan thongtalit suno, palit-kheng etc. the themes of the most of Lepcha songs are mainly based on their culture and tradition which include birth of the child marriage, death, returning soul to the Lyap of Kanchenjunga and other natural surroundings. Though the songs and music of Lepch’s are being influenced by electronic media and western music but effort are being made by Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association to protect their enriched culture, language and literature.
Lepchas are like magician in bamboo craft. They can make variety of products for their daily usage with great artistic sense, their dress unique and colourful. The Lepchas prepare their own dress from time immemorial for both men and women. Dum praa use as garment of men in day time and it also use as blanket at night. Thyak Tuk may be round or almost conical in shape and is a colourful dress other men dress Tago is a Shirt, covers the upper part of body and Tam is a Lepcha’s Trouser.

Female dress known as Dum-dem is worn by covering the body criss-crossing just below the neck. It is a long dress which covers whole body up to feet. They use long sleeved loose blouse inside the Dum-dem. Ladies cloths are not coloured like men dress.

Lepchas hat are the representation of their skill in crafts work. Lepcha’s hat are different in size and shape. The hats are Sumok Thaktuk, Papri Thaktuk, Seyraaboo Thaktuk, Soring Thaktuk. Most of hats are made of wood and used for different purpose. The Baanpok, a short knife also have good decoration Tungip, Lepcha handbag & Tukvil Lyak Lepcha women’s necklace are example of their handicrafts. It shows skill of Lepcha artisans.

CONCLUSION

Lepcha the real inhabitants of the Sikkim and Darjeeling region is living there from a time immemorial. They stay very close to nature and thus they gain a vast knowledge on the plants, flora and fauna, poisonous snakes of their region. That’s why they are honored as good botanist. This region not only cover most part of their folk knowledge but also their ritual belief which are reciprocally connected with the mountains and hilly Kanchenjunga. Folklore, folktales, folk-dance, everything which related to Lepcha life is related to mountain. The worshiper of nature lepcha limited their life within the area. Study of their folklore tales indicates their origin of these regions. The folklore folk-music shows their relation with nature and crafts shows various aspect of their daily life. Folklore art and craft provide a mirror through that the world can see the enriched culture of Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup.

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