

## **Chi - The Traditional Drink of the Lepchas : A Case Study.**

**Dr. Shera Pandi Molommu**

*Assistant Professor, Department of History, Kurseong College, Kurseong 734203,*

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**ABSTRACT:** The Lepchas like all indigenous found all over India, were in isolation and devoid of all social contact with the outside world. They were hunters and gatherers and devised a way to ferment millet grains into a sweet beer popularly known as Chi, this mild beer was so popular that it has imbibed itself into every social and cultural life of the Lepchas. We shall with this study try to bring forth how this mild beer became the drink of the gods and how every ceremony is rendered useless without it. We will delve into its origin, its preparation, the method to drink it and effects on Lepcha society.

**Keywords:** Lepcha, Indigenous, Brew, Beer, Ceremonies, Social, Religious.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Lepchas are indigenous tribals of mongoloid origin living in the basin of Mt. Kanchenjunga. With regards to the Lepchas and their land, the Lepcha inhabit the southern and eastern slopes of Mount Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas, a land located in Sikkim and Darjeeling, India, lying between 27° and 28° N and 88° and 89° E. They are nature worshippers and follow the old animist religion commonly known as Monism, in this religious practice we find the use of an alcoholic beverage brewed from millet called 'Chi'. According to ancient Lepcha tradition<sup>1</sup> 'Chi' is said to be of divine origin, the recipe for which is said to have been brought from a sorceress in the netherworld by a cockroach. Chi or the fermented beverage is as symbolical as the blood that flows through the body in Lepcha culture; Chi in a sense makes the Lepcha culture a whole. It is extremely difficult to fathom the Lepcha culture and Lepcha society without Chi. According to K.P. Tamsang, "Chi is the national drink of the Lepchas."<sup>2</sup> Foning writes, "Our tribal drink Chi is such that without it we cannot please our gods, and cannot appease the dreaded devils and the demons; so much so that without it, we cannot even get wives. Life cannot be imagined without it."<sup>3</sup> According to P. B. Chakrabarty "The drink has deleterious effect on snakes and demons, but for the gods it is a refreshing drink. It is said through its sacrifice their rage is calmed."<sup>4</sup> Through the Chi sacrifice, i.e. through the enjoyment of the intoxicating drink, they become softened and quiet. "Chi has been a part of Lepcha life, culture and religion. Chi has to be considered as holy as 'Dagras' or 'Somras'. Boongthings and Muns have to be served Chi when they come to perform any religious ritual. Even now in the villages it is difficult to find workers to work in the farms on payment of wages, if at one time during the lunch break Chi is not served to them. On all occasions, being social, religious, marriage, or any type of festival, Chi is invariably used."<sup>5</sup> This Chi is an intoxicating drink and Gorer has found it "mellowing, soothing, and pleasant, rather than stimulating and exciting." He also states that "The Lepchas believe that Chi has medicinal qualities, and especially that it is a protection against chills: it is always given to invalids."<sup>6</sup> For the same reason, a woman who has given birth to a child is also given daily dose of Chi. P.B. Chakrabarty states that "The Chi sacrifice has an entirely original and individual character and is closely bound up with the life and rituals of the Lepchas."<sup>7</sup> Chi has been said to be a medicine for light heartedness as it help the Lepchas in confronting the Lepchas in their day to day struggles to make ends meet and hardships of living in difficult terrain in the forests.

### **II. ORIGIN OF CHI**

The Lepcha stories states that their supreme creator Itboo Deboo Rum on seeing the plight of the Lepchas created Tamsangthing from the pure virgin snow of Mount Kanchenjunga and blessed him with supernatural powers to save the Lepchas from the clutches of the evil Laso Mung Pano. When Tamsangthing arrived in Dzongu to deliver the Lepchas from the clutches of Laso Mung Pano, he found that the morale of Lepcha people was too low and sunken to fight against the devil, Laso Mung Pano. To remove fear from the mind of the Lepchas, Tamsangthing consecrated a young Nyolik-Nyosong as the first 'Mun', a Lepcha priestess, to rejuvenate the lost morale of the Lepchas. He gave Nyolik Nyosong Mun supernatural powers by offering her three young shoots of 'Pashyaor', the elephant grass Nyolik Nyosong Mun tired her best to revive the lost morale of the Lepchas and prepare them for the battle with Laso Mung Pano but even her supernatural powers

were letting her down. In her search for a remedy Nyolik Nyosong Mun found that a recipe for a strong brew was in the possession of a spirit 'Matlimanyoo' a sorceress in the netherworld that would be able to restore the lost morale of the Lepchas. She looked for a volunteer to go to the netherworld and bring back the power potion; a cockroach 'Tungdyer Palyung' came forward and volunteered for this arduous adventure. In due course of time the cockroach was able to trick the sorceress and steal the valuable item which was hidden in the back of her neck. On his journey back the cockroach got tired and rested for a while, seeing the cockroach resting a black cobra 'Pamaol Bu' took his chance and stole some of the brew, on tasting it the snake became mad and extremely poisonous. Next in line came the honey bee 'Hu' as soon as it tasted the brew it grew a sharp needle like sting. Next in line were birds, the birds that tasted the brew became carnivorous, even the fig tree 'Kantek' tasted some and developed a sour taste, last to taste this brew was the plantain tree 'Kundong koong' which developed sweet fruits. After all these trees and animals had the brew it was purified from all its poisonous elements. The cockroach then handed over this precious brew to the Mun, she cooked some millet and mixed the power potion known to the Lepchas as 'Bhut' and was able to prepare 'Chi'. She then handed over the Chi to all the Lepchas which lifted the morale of the Lepchas, the Lepchas fought gallantly alongside Tamsangthing and was able to defeat the demon Laso Mung Pano. Thus goes the myth on the origin of Chi. The sorceress on coming to know of the robbery of her prized possession put a curse on Chi 'Chi thong ya gong ney maon, thong ma ya na gong ney nyung', meaning it is a good medicine if drunk properly, but a poison if taken in excess.<sup>8</sup> The Lepchas believe that it is due to this curse that if taken in excess it makes a man fight, quarrel, lose respect, health and wealth. H.G. Joshi has written, "This intoxicating drink according to the tradition of Rong is of heavenly origin. Tradition has it that at the very outset the ferment used in the manufacture of the intoxicant was brought to mankind from the other side of the world in a cunning manner by a special messenger. Immortality, too, is linked up with this drink. Birds have a special part to play with the drinks."<sup>9</sup>

### **III. PREPARATION OF CHI**

Usually made of black millet, as it is a hardy plant and easily grown without much tending along the Himalayas. It is first husked, cleaned and after a simple wash normally cooked in large quantity in an earthen or metal container (preferably copper) the cereal is cooked until all the water has been absorbed, it is continually stirred by a bamboo paddle specially made for the purpose. Sometimes millet is replaced by rice or wheat depending on availability, after it is cooked properly the hot millet is spread on a large bamboo mats (nowadays polythene sheets) then powdered yeast (a concoction of roots) is vigorously mixed with the millet while it is semi hot. Then the grain is transferred to large wicker baskets made of bamboo (nowadays huge plastic buckets) lined with banana leaves or plastic in an airtight manner. The top is also covered in an airtight manner and left untouched in a corner usually covered by something heavy, the fermentation process normally takes a few days depending on the weather. The Chi is ready in three days in summer and takes nearly seven days in winter, the drink which is ready is a pleasantly smooth and sweet which has low alcohol content which grows stronger with each passing day if left untouched.

### **IV. DRINKING OF CHI**

To prepare the drink; grains of fermented millet is put in a bamboo container, 'patyoot', hot boiling water is then put into the container to the brim and left aside for some time, the hot water incites the fermented soft millet grains to burst and give out its juices. The juice is then drunk through a narrow bamboo pipe, 'pahip', at one end of which small holes are made so as to let the juice in but not the grains, a rudimentary filter of sorts. The container is normally filled with water for as much as four times after which the Chi loses its strength. Another way of drinking Chi is by straining it, the millet grains are put into a porous piece of cloth dipped into a vessel containing semi hot water and pressure applied to bring out the juices, this strained Chi is put into glasses and drunk straight, this is said to be considerably stronger and a faster process. Lepchas also drink commercially distilled liquor 'arok' made from Chi, normally it is bought from local who make it. According to Gorer "Adult Lepchas drink at least one patyoot of chi daily: if they did not, they say, what would the poor pigs have to eat? Pigs are normally fed on the used grain, unless it is rice chi, when the soused grain is eaten by humans."<sup>10</sup> According to J. D. Hooker, Chi was used by the Lepchas as a welcome drink just like a glass of tea or juice nowadays, visitors to houses or villages were normally presented with a vessel full of Chi, he calls it Murwa beer. "This mixture, called Murwa is invariably offered to the traveller, either in the state of fermented grain or more commonly in a bamboo jug, filled quite up with warm water; when the fluid, sucked through a reed affords a refreshing drink."<sup>11</sup>

### **V. RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE OF CHI**

The Lepchas ardently believe that Itbu Deboo Rum, the Creator, other Gods and Goddess, and evil spirits accept the offering of Chi. Before drinking Chi, a Lepcha always, offers it to his God, Guardian deity and spirits with prayers. This small offering is called Chi fat. While drinking Chi, a Lepcha person is very respectful

towards it; in case it overflows from the top of the or cylinder, he will, gather the over-flowing Chi grains back into the cylinder, normally a small vessel is placed at the bottom of the container to catch the falling grains. Chi is not only an alcoholic beverage to the Lepchas but it is also food to them; therefore, Chi is also called Chi Zaom in Lepcha. The word Zaom seems to have been derived from the word, Azaom meaning food.<sup>12</sup> Chi is refreshing as well as nourishing. The expression, Kaot naon, I'm full, is often used by the Lepchas after drinking Chi. According to L. A. Waddell "It is the wine of the country and is a food as much as a drink."<sup>13</sup> Chi is used in all of the Lepcha ceremonies; given below are some of the important ceremonies in which it is used:

**1.1. Tendong lho rum fat:** This is a ceremony held on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August every year to thank Mount Tendong which saved the Lepchas from extinction from the floods caused by the rage of river Rangeet. The Lepchas atop Mt Tendong saw Mt Mainaom slowly being submerged by the flood water and all those atop being engulfed by the flood waters, out of fear they fervently began praying to Itbu Deboo Rum, and began offering Chi to save them from drowning, Itbu Deboo Rum appeared to the Lepchas in the form of 'Kohaom Fo', a hill partridge, the Lepchas began sprinkling Chi and praying to the partridge, some of the sprinkled Chi fell on the chest of the bird, hence it is said that the chest of this bird tastes like Chi. Itbu Deboo Rum in the form of the partridge was pleased by the offerings and prayers made by the Lepchas and requested the river to abide the rules of nature and begin to flow to its destination. The floods then slowly began to subside and all the Lepchas atop Mt. Tendong were saved and once again began to populate the land.

**1.2. Chu lho rum fat:** Chu in Lepcha means the Himalayan peaks with pure white snow and Rum means the God. This age-old folk dance of Lepchas is performed in honour of the Mount Khangchendzonga. Once a year, the Lepchas perform Choo rum ceremony to Kanchanjunga, the guardian deity of the Lepchas in Kurnyit Lavo, that is in the month of December-January, on this occasion, the Lepchas prepare two large choka laongs, which means 'conical ceremonial figures made of moulded rice', representing Kanchanjunga peak and Pundim peak and several smaller choka laongs, representing the lesser snowy peaks and place it all on a raised bamboo platform outside the house facing towards the Himalayas. In front of the choka laongs, they place a cupful of Chi, the Lepcha's national drink, three fresh laid eggs, rice, flowers, a small offering lamp made of moulded rice and a red cock. When everything is ready, they burn incense and the Lepcha priest boongthing then steps forward and throws rice, flowers and drops of Chi from the cup into the air and gives thanks to Kanchanjunga peak and Pundim peak and to all the other lesser snowy peaks for the protection of the Lepcha people.

**1.3. Saykoo rum fat:** Prayers and offerings to 'Mayel Kyong' and the seven immortal Lepcha couples who live in this paradise. It is said that it were the seven immortals couples living on this mystical land who became children in the morning, grew into young people in midday and as the day faded they started becoming old. One hunter inadvertently came upon this land and the couples gave him seeds of various cereals and vegetables; thus the Lepchas started settled agriculture. On this day the Lepchas show their thankfulness to these seven immortals and make offerings to them. They believe that in times of distress these Lepcha couples will come down and save the Lepchas from extinction. The Lepchas in this ceremony offer to these immortals all the grains and vegetables along with Chi in bamboo vessels sprinkled on top with uncooked rice and look forward to their guidance.

**1.4. Li rum fat:** One of the most important gods of the Lepchas is the 'Li Rum' or the god of the house; in any given case it is believed that the mother of the house is the preserver and the devotee of this God. When a woman first starts her own house she follows her maternal lineage and in due process is given alongside other materials a thunderstone or 'Sadder Long', the father of the house does not give much importance as to how she appeases the 'Li Rum' as they know that her mother has taught her well and she will do the necessary to bring prosperity to the new family, the prayers and offerings are normally made on any given day except Sundays. In the morning the mother of the house appeases the deity of the house by offering him fresh cup of chi, burning of incense of pine needles along with the latest fresh produce from the fields which mostly consists of fruits, vegetables and grains which have yet to be consumed or sold.

**1.5. Lyaang rum fat:** As the name suggests it is the God of the land, most of the Lepchas subsisted on produce from the land so this God is very important in their day to day life. It is believed that on the day that this festival is held there is usually rain and a sure belief that the Gods have been appeased. The Lepcha people offer the chi brew to their deities in a wooden/bamboo vessel together with rice and flesh of little birds on a banana leaf-plate. 'Chi' has to be prepared by a young virgin and the sacrifice is called 'Lyang-rum-fat' and performed once a year in honour of Itbu Deboo Rum. Generally the head of a family, who is also the family priest, performs the "Chi" sacrificial ceremony. The Lepchas celebrate this every year during the spring season. Nowadays on the day of the offering the whole village gathers at some predetermined spot and sacrifices are made of fowl and offerings are made of eggs, chi, rice, fish, fruits and various products from the land, it is a festive experience often held at the behest of local village communities (Shezums) and proper prayers and offerings are made by contributions and subscriptions.

**1.6. Muk zik rum fat:** In Lepcha Muk means greenery and as most of the Lepchas are agriculturists the Lepchas give much importance to this festival, this is an offering to Mother Nature and in normally held jointly at the

village level. It deals with ecology, environment and surroundings. It also speaks about fishes, reptiles, insects, bees and birds, trees, bushes, shrubs, wild edible vegetables, flowers, fruits and roots etc. that are found in Mayel Lyang. Comparable to the Sansari puja of the Hindus it is held in February of each year. The boongthing makes special offering to the Gods for their benevolence in providing to the people that till that piece of land, he offers the gods all the things the land has provided along with chi made of black millet and cups of strained black millet chi and seeks his blessings for the forth coming year so that life can and will flourish on this tract of land.

**1.7. Pong rum fat:** This is an annual sacrifice Pong Rum and his wife Sugi Rum is the patron saint of the hunters, as he is the protector of all things wild. Every year in October the hunters make their annual sacrifice to him, Chi has to be offered to him which has to be made by the father of the house and should not in any case be prepared by a woman, in case a man cannot prepare it a virgin girl must prepare the Chi. If not Pong rum will be offended and in his rage the hunter will not be successful in his hunts. The sacrifice consists of Chi, dried fish, roots and tubers, fruits and flowers.

**1.8. Peek sat:** Generally, the ordinary Lepchas, observe 'Lut dyan' (symbolic discarding of all things that are undesirable in the coming year) and 'Pik-sat' (purification ceremony after discarding) rituals in the shortest and simplified version with propitiation and prayers at home done by the head of the family in a symbolical manner. The head of the family is the main conductor and coordinator of the function. In some families, after the 'Lut' and 'Pik sat' ritual is over, there is the practice of paying obeisance and respect to the elder by each member of the family by bowing their head after going to each such elder turn by turn and the youngest and the junior most has a trying time going to each of the elders and bowing down and after that, there was the convention of drinking Chi from the same pot starting from the senior most, turn by turn, this is a very important custom with brings together all the Lepcha kinfolk into one fold, any person given the privilege to drink from the pot is automatically taken to be a one from the Lepcha clan.

## VI. IMPORTANCE OF CHI AT BIRTH

From cradle to grave, Chi is extensively used. During 'Tungbaong Fat', cleansing and naming ceremony, a new born baby is fed with a few drops of Chi by a Boongthing or Lepcha priest. About a month before the birth of the child especially strong Chi is prepared and set aside; this Chi is left aside and only to be opened on the third day after delivery. On the third day after delivery a birth feast is held, on this feast the Chi basket is opened, each guest is given three vessels 'patyoot' of Chi and lots of strained Chi, the mother is also given this Chi to regain their strength as it is believed to have medicinal qualities. Even to make the child's horoscope a large packet of Chi has to be presented to the Mun, after which the Mun draws the do's and don'ts and all the precautions and ceremonies that have to be performed by the parents for the sake of the child.

## VII. IMPORTANCE OF CHI IN LEPCHA MARRIAGE

There are three stages in Lepcha marriage: nyom-vyat or the quest, aseok or betrothal, and bri or bringing home the bride and Chi plays an important role in all of these ceremonies. In the first stage after the boy's side has zeroed on upon a girl, a member from the boy's family usually the maternal uncle goes to the girl's village and inquires about the girl's availability from someone who is very close to the girl's family. The emissary brings with him a packet of Chi known in Lepcha as 'Chi Prok Panol' and presents it to the house from which information is gathered, it is a large packet in between 15 to 20 kgs. After finding out about the girl's availability the entourage returns and the boy's side will send a few statesmen headed by a middleman or a Peebu with a Chee Prok Panol to the girl's house. The girl's family normally asks for the reason of their visitation and on their asking the formal proposal is placed, this is known as the 'Abong Phot' meaning the 'bursting of the mouth'. Once the proposal has been placed the girl's family are well within their rights to decline or accept this proposal, the Chi Prok Panol does not influence their decision. In the second stage the Aseok (meaning joining or merging) is actually the validating ceremony at which the formal gifts from the family of the groom to that of the bride are presented; these gifts are called Lakto-Panol 'the price of the bride' and consists of these compulsory items<sup>14</sup>:

Two full baskets of Chi.

One fore and one hind leg of a bull with the tail attached with hooves preferably unshaved.

'Amu Dum dyem' meaning a dress for the mother.

'Abo Ayong-lu' meaning a shawl for the father.

'Panol Mu zyong' or present for the maternal uncle.

'Panol Bo ku' or present for the paternal uncle.

'Panol Phaming' or present for the brother.

'Panol Mu nyu' or present for the maternal aunt.

'Panol Bo nyu' or present for the paternal aunt.

At the end of all these formal offerings the girl who is mostly seen behind masses of other women comes out and gives the final approval to the acceptance by touching these presents and the Chi basket. According to Tapan Chattopadhyay "If she picks up a load of Chi and a coin, this will mean that she has given her consent to the marriage."<sup>15</sup> The third stage the wedding is known as the Bri and may take place a few weeks, months or years after the Asek. When the grooms party is ready to give the feast a party, the parents of the boy sends the boy back to the girls house, along with the normal presents of Chi and meat this time the groom brings for the mother in law a milch cow and its calf. On the day preceding or on the day of the wedding the bridal party will set off from home. The panol or the presents taken by the bride consists of a load of Chi, a carcass of a pig and some loads of cereals. Early on the day of the feast the boongthing makes all the necessary arrangements, one of the two bulls is known as the 'myok bik', this bull is the offering to the gods and the boongthing sets up an altar near the bull and brings with him special strained Chi in huge pots which are smeared with butter and few reeds for sprinkling the Chi upwards to the Gods, this Chi is prepared from a special basket called 'Myok mangkung chi bu' dedicated to the 'Mangkung' gods in the name of and on behalf of the groom. This ceremony is known as the 'Saki Rum Fat'. According to Foning " This special basket containing the mangkung chi will have a very special shape, so that it will not get mixed up with the dozens of other Chi baskets prepared and kept for maturing months earlier, ready for the community feast. As for the mangkung, it is a supernatural personal spirit possessed by each individual. The nearest meaning of the word would be 'the spirit of one's own personality'. According to our belief, the boy, when living in his father in law's place during the period in between the Asek and the wedding, has virtually worked like a slave for full seven years. So, within that time it is feared that, acting and working in the manner that he did, his personality could decline and even perish. This special Chi offering and dedication to the mangkung god is for raising up his supposedly fallen, or damaged personality."<sup>16</sup> At the end of the ceremony the boongthing pours the sacred Chi in the 'Katak' or wooden or bamboo cup smeared with butter and hands it over to the bride, she sips from it three times and hands it over to the groom who also sips from it three times. Then the bride's party is made to sip from it and later the groom's party. This is the oath of matrimony called "Sung Kyo Fat", which first binds the newlywed and then binds the families and the clan.

### **VIII. IMPORTANCE OF CHI IN DEATH CEREMONY**

It is believed by the Lepchas that the dead should be able to see the mountain of their origination; hence the dead were always placed facing Mt. Kanchenjunga. After the burial has taken place, the boongthing or the mun places on the grave a pot of chi for the departed soul in a bamboo container with the sipping pipe inverted as a mark of respect for the departed soul, so that it may not go thirsty on its journey to its final resting place 'Rumlyang'. Three days later some more food and chi are kept near the grave for the yearning soul.

### **IX. ILL EFFECTS OF CHI**

According to A. K. Das "The drinking of Chi is a curse to them. Their socio-religious function also compels them to spend a lot."<sup>17</sup> Chi and slaughter of animals had to be invariably arranged during marriage and funeral services. For marriage functions, however, nobody grudges the expenses even though it is unbearable as Chi and slaughter of animals have to be resorted to in both marriage and funeral functions. Sang lion (Shard) ceremony is fixed on 14th or 21st day from the date of death and prior to that Chi must be prepared. Rituals usually last two days and for those two days the boongthings and the visitors have to be fed. There are instances of people being angry and quarrelsome if good Chi and good food with meat are not served to them. Reports of quarrels and scuffles on such occasions due to chi drinking are often heard. The vicious habit of drinking chi has brought many Lepchas to their knees, as we know the Lepchas are fond of drinking but this fondness has acted as a curse when it comes to many. Indira Awasty has observed, "Lepchas are very fond of drinking Chi, a millet beer. This excessive habit makes them physically and psychologically weak and economically in debt."<sup>18</sup> The author after studying the Lepchas over a length of time has found the wretched condition of the Lepchas was mainly due to excessive drinking. She writes, "...there are complaints that when a Lepcha gets an agricultural loan from the Farmers' Cooperative, he goes and gets drunk first, spends a goodly amount on drink and the rest may be stolen while he lies in a stupor. There are many reports about "poor breeding" which lead to the birth of blind, dumb, and handicapped children. The diseases common to all communities in the area are T.B. and other respiratory diseases and stomach ailments."<sup>19</sup> Many of the original land owners are seen working as agricultural labourers due to over drinking of chi, thrifty settlers of other races have exploited this vicious habit, they are ready with cash and the Lepchas habituated to drinking mortgage or sell their land/ holdings very cheap. The Lepchas due to their fondness of drinking liquor was easily exploited by the plainsmen, on seeing the Lepchas coming to sell their produce, especially cardamom the Lepchas were served cheap Indian liquor. This liquor was highly sought after by the Lepchas who only had access to homemade brew (Chi) all the year round, the plainsmen made him drink till he dropped and in this stupor conducted business, some Lepchas were found lying on the Gaddis of these plainsmen for days. Having spent most of his money these Lepchas went home

gathering products often in barter at very steep prices. The beneficiaries in the end were not the Lepchas who tilled the fields and produced these crops but the middlemen who conned these innocent Lepchas and bought their precious products for peanuts. The Marwaris knew the Lepcha language and the moment the Lepchas with their cardamom used to arrive at the market, they were treated in all courtesy serving them Chi and food and in the state of intoxication these poor people were given very little for the produce. Even small time vendors who used to sell products in these Lepcha villages used to go carrying their products, sell them on credit and realised the cost of such items in costly and precious cardamoms.

R.N. Thakur has observed, "The Lepchas must be taken out of the vicious Chi pool if this tribe is to be saved."<sup>20</sup> Excessive Chi drinking has also caused liver damage of the people and each Lepcha family has at least one case of their near and dear losing their life of excessive drinks. Perhaps, about one fifth of the hill people employed on compassionate ground in the Government Offices in Sikkim and Darjeeling may be wards or family of their deceased relative who died of drinking while still in service. May be one fourth or more of the Lepcha population die due to Chi. This is where the curse of the sorceress seems to have come true, To quote Stocks, Matlimanyoo the sorceress from the neither world from whom the recipe for Chi was stolen is said to have cursed those who drink Chi "you have stolen my ferment, if you only know how to use it, you would be able to offer the Chi to the Rum, but now you will find that it always excites you it will cause you to quarrel, it may even kill you."<sup>21</sup> Gorer has said, "Lepchas are very conscious of the risk of drink producing quarrelling; in the myth which tells of the origin of Chi the original yeast was stolen from an old woman who put the curse of quarrelsomeness on it. In point of fact I found no quarrelling at feasts, though people became loud mouthed, and shameless in speech than before."<sup>22</sup> Even the great Lepcha King Gyebu Achiok lost his life due to Chi. His head was chopped off when he was in a drunken state. Morris has observed, "But drink is the greatest social evil in Jongu; and this, too, may have a bearing on the question of sterility. All the Lepchas, men, women and children, drink far too much; and in Jongu it was unusual to find any adult sober in the evening. Fortunately, I personally found Chi a most unpleasant drink, for it tastes to me like a mixture of sour cider and old ale gone bad; but had I attempted to keep pace with Lepcha hospitality I should now have been in a home for advanced inebriates: A little alcohol, of course, does nobody any harm; but unfortunately the Lepcha is not satisfied with a little."<sup>23</sup>

## **X. CONCLUSION**

It has been well documented that Chi is a very important alcoholic beverage for the Lepchas and as many earlier European authors like Gorer, Waddell and Hooker have written; Chi as they found was a very mild beer comparable to wine with very low alcoholic content. They have stated that Chi or Murwa was drunk throughout the day and even by toddlers. Even the authors after an arduous journey found the drink refreshing. So it draws me to conclude that as years passed chi has been replaced by stronger and less expensive country liquor which seems to have changed the drinking habits of the Lepchas. 'Arok' or bootleg liquor was already present within the Lepcha community which was sold commercially as stated by Gorer but it was premium in those days. Decades after foreign liquor has replaced Chi as the drink of the Lepchas which seems to have had a detrimental effect on the Lepchas, Chi hence is not to be blamed Chi is still the Chi as it was before, but it has been replaced by cheap liquor which has easily found its way into the drinking culture of the innocent Lepchas. Chi is made for special occasions like festivities nowadays but for everyday consumption cheap country liquor is easier to procure, hence the social and economic degradation among the Lepchas.

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