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**"WE ARE WARP AND WEFT" -  
NOMADIC PASTORALISM AND THE TRADITION OF WEAVING  
IN RUPSHU (EASTERN LADAKH)**

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Michaelmas 1996 [i.e. 1997] TT

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## ABSTRACT

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### "We are Warp and Weft" - Nomadic Pastoralism and the Tradition of Weaving in Rupshu (Eastern Ladakh)

This thesis, based on twelve months of fieldwork and archival research undertaken in Ladakh, explores the place of wool and weaving in the life of Rupshu. It attempts to trace the nexus between livestock, fibres, textiles, social and symbolic structures in Rupshu in order to understand the multitude of contexts within which wool-oriented activities exist. The craft of weaving was bestowed upon Rupshu by the gods, and thus all acts related to it have a close connection to the sublime.

Rupshu lies in the easternmost part of Ladakh in North India, in a Restricted Areas Zone, and is accessible only to Indian citizens. Hence, extensive fieldwork has not been carried out in this area. Further, though there is a little documentation on the craft of weaving in Ladakh, none exists on the nomadic tradition of weaving.

The first two chapters introduce the region of Rupshu and explore the historical context. They include a discussion of the origin and development of weaving and textiles in the area, and of the old trade routes in fibres.

The next two chapters examine the connections between livestock, the source of fibres in Rupshu, and the Ladakhi pantheon. The relationship between the two is reflected in the manner in which livestock are revered and treated in Rupshu. Further, this affinity is widely expressed in Rupshu, and one such occasion is the harvesting of the fibres.

The next four chapters look specifically at the craft of weaving, and local representations of the tradition. Using examples of particular pieces woven in Rupshu, I examine the gender, spatial, and hierarchical relations that they express and perpetuate.

Not all the fibres harvested in Rupshu are used there, and the final chapter examines their distribution through trade. While woven articles are not traded, specific containers are woven for the transport of fibres and their characteristics are looked at here.

The concluding remarks include a discussion of the future of wool and weaving activities in Rupshu, and address the dangers posed by re-settlement schemes, and a shortage of pasture and over-grazing. These trends would eventually lead to a decrease in the number of livestock, and cause the people of Rupshu to abandon their tradition of nomadic pastoralism.

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### NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

The dialects spoken in Ladakh (including Rupshu) are forms of Tibetan. Thus, all Ladakhi terms, appearing in italics, have been transcribed according to the system prescribed by Wylie (1959), and the orthography is largely based on the work of Jaeschke (1987). Some terms given here are not accounted for in dictionaries, and I have spelt them in the manner in which people in Rupshu wrote them for me.

Within Ladakh, differences are apparent in the language spoken between regions. However, I have emphasized only the variations between Leh and Rupshu, and where these words appear I have written Leh before them. Where Hindi or Urdu terms appear I have specifically mentioned this before the word.

Place names and personal names have been spelled in a manner closest to their pronunciation in English, but their formal Ladakhi spellings (except for Christian, Hindi, and Urdu personal names) are given in Appendix 1 and 2 respectively.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Warp and weft is always there in the talk between husband and wife, or a mother and her children. It is there amongst relatives. After all,”  
Abi Yangzom stated, “We are all warp and weft (*nga-zha rgyu spun yin*).”

It is said in Rupshu that men and women weave threads that reflect kinship, where patrilineal descent is defined in terms of *pha-rgyu* (father’s warp), and matrilineal as *ma-rgyu* (mother’s warp). One’s progeny is generally seen as *spun* (weft), the endless lengths of threads stretching out before the weaver.<sup>1</sup> Thus, to be warp and weft is to know your family, your lineage, and to recognise your relatives on either side. Even in villages in Ladakh, where women do not weave, it is said that “women spin threads that hold together the social fabric of society” (Aggarwal 1994: 229-230).

Weaving and textiles speak of the dynamic nature of life, as well as the regenerative and degenerative processes involved. The ritual and discourse that surround the manufacture of cloth establish it as a great connector, binding humans not only to each other but to the ancestors of their past and the progeny who constitute their future (Schneider and Weiner 1989: 3). In Rupshu, the craft of weaving is said to have divine sanction because it was bestowed upon Rupshu by the gods. It happened like this:

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<sup>1</sup> Jaeschke states that in addition to the word *spun* meaning weft, it also refers to children of the same parents, brothers and sisters, and in a wider sense refers to cousins, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law (1987: 330).

“In the beginning the world was populated by gigantic, human-like beings known as *bdud-po* (demon) and *bdud-mo* (demoness).<sup>2</sup> They destroyed everything in sight and ate their own children. Some even say that the *bdud-mo* ate the *bdud-po*. They were very strong and powerful, and no one could get any work out of them. One day a big Lama<sup>3</sup> came and told these people that they must stop their bad ways and live peacefully with all living creatures. He then taught religion to them. The *bdud-po*, who were wiser, listened to the Lama. But the *bdud-mo* did not. They still went around doing bad things. So the Lama taught the *bdud-mo* how to weave. Then the *bdud-mo* became women, but in order to stop them from becoming *bdud-mo* again and going back to their wicked ways, they had to keep weaving. That is why, even today, women are kept busy weaving the whole day so that they do not stray back to their bad ways. That is why we women weave so much,” said Abi Yangzom and chuckled to herself, “There are still some *bdud-mo* among the women here, but I won’t tell you who they are.”

This thesis explores the place and underlying connections of wool and weaving in the life of Rupshu. It attempts to trace the relationship between fibres, textiles, social, and symbolic structures in Rupshu. The concern here is to analyse the ways in which fibres, weaving, and textiles are constructed, symbolised, understood, enacted, and experienced. I opened with the notion of warp and weft being the ties that bind people to each other, as well as representing the threads of life. Abi

---

<sup>2</sup> The suffix *po* and *mo* refer to male and female respectively. Michael Aris informed me that literally the words *bdud-po* and *bdud-mo* meant enemy (personal communication, Oxford 1995). Among lay Tibetans it is said that female Tibetans are descendants of the She-Ogress, hence the impetuous, violent, witch-like nature of women (Miller 1980: 160).

<sup>3</sup> I was told that the “big Lama” was actually a god in disguise. However, opinions regarding his identity varied. Some people in Rupshu told me that the Lama was Guru Rinpoche (also known as Padmasambhava). This is the Indian yogin who brought Buddhism to Tibet and is quite well known for his demon-quelling rituals (Snellgrove and Richardson 1968: 96-97). Others said he was Pulon Rigpachen, a figure who is associated with the origin of almost everything in Rupshu (cf. section 2.1). In some versions of the story Pulon Rigpachen is supposed to have accompanied the Lama and they say that it was he who taught the *bdud-mo* how to weave.

Yangzom's narrative about the *bdud-po* and *bdud-mo* suggests that the belief system underlying weaving demonstrates its links to the gods, the ancestors, and the advent of religion in Rupshu. Similarly livestock, the main source of the fibres used in weaving, are sacred animals conferred upon Rupshu by the gods and are a means through which they receive divine blessings. However, the threads that extend within Rupshu eventually move beyond it as well, as fibres harvested in Rupshu move out and enter the arena of trade. It is these ideas that I use to frame this study of weaving practices that characterise the people of Rupshu.

Chapter One introduces Ladakh, and within it the regions of Changthang and Rupshu. A brief historical overview is followed by a summarised account of the geography and demography, and some details about the livestock and fibres found there. The second part of the chapter presents the literature used here, and traces the historical development of weaving practices and textiles within Ladakh. A discussion of the old trade routes that focused around the trade in fibres and textiles is also included here. The remainder of this chapter looks at the field experience on which the thesis is based.

The mythological creation of Rupshu is presented in Chapter Two. This is followed by a sketch of the early history of the area, the reign of the first chief, and the building of the first monastery at Korzok. Recent changes in Rupshu have led to a division of land and transformations in the power structure. These have affected the old pattern of migration, and the present migration route pursued in Rupshu is also described here.

Chapters Three and Four look at the source of fibres in Rupshu, and the manner in which these are collected. Chapter Three looks at the symbolic interpretation of livestock and the manner in which they are dedicated to the gods, spirits, and demons that make up the Ladakhi pantheon. The remainder of this chapter looks at livestock management and pasture organisation. Chapter Four outlines the harvesting of fibres in Rupshu and their preparation before weaving can begin.

All women, including nuns, and most men in Rupshu weave. Chapter Five outlines the stages involved in their progress towards becoming accomplished weavers. Before weaving can begin, a preparatory stage is warping, which is described next. This is followed by a discussion of the loom and its metaphorical interpretations.

The significance and importance of cloth woven by women is the subject of Chapter Six. The most prominent of these fabrics is that used to make garments in Rupshu, and the method by which these fabrics are processed and dyed is examined here. The last section looks at the manner in which the fabrics are cut and stitched to make clothes worn in Rupshu.

While the weaving of fabric for garments is the sole prerogative of women in Rupshu, the tent is woven and stitched only by men. Chapter Seven looks at the structure of the tent and its relationship to ideas of space in Rupshu. It also examines the separation and formation of new tents, and the allocation of tent sites at each new encampment.

The focus of Chapter Eight is "*cho-lo*", a game men play as well as a system by which local representatives are elected and decisions are made in Rupshu. The rules of the game are described, as well as the arena within which it is played. Though *cho-lo* is a game forbidden to women, it is a design they weave and this has bearing on their participation in the decision-making processes in Rupshu.

Present patterns of trade are explored in Chapter Nine; the main items traded are livestock, pashmina, salt, and wool. Men weave bags, specifically to carry these goods, and the first part of the chapter looks at the characteristics of the containers. The remaining sections examine the manner in which these goods are distributed and priced.

The concluding remarks address the future of weaving in Rupshu and the future of the people of Rupshu in Ladakh. One of the main concerns is a shortage of pasture, which is leading to over-grazing and eventually no doubt to a decrease in the number of livestock. As a result, each year a few families pull down their tents and leave Rupshu in search of a better life elsewhere.

## CHAPTER ONE

### SETTING THE SCENE

"Traditionally Ladakh has been a land of high altitude farmers, cultivating fields along the Indus, and herders roaming the Changthang or 'northern plain'. Animal husbandry was widespread since yak, goat and sheep wool were needed for ropes, tents, clothing and other textiles. Spinning and weaving are done in virtually every household" (Myers 1983: 42).

Weaving and the loom, it is said in Ladakh, are ideally modelled on the mythical loom of Duguma ('Bru-gu-ma), the wife of King Gesar of Gling.<sup>1</sup> It is claimed that Duguma's loom still exists somewhere and she sits there weaving on it. Abi Yangzom mentioned that there were some who thought she was a goddess (*tha-mo*) who lived "above". There is a popular saying that Duguma "weaves only one row a year" ("*lo 'thags lo gcig la sked gcig*"), and that when she completes her fabric the world will come to an end.<sup>2</sup>

"Everything will go upside-down and there will be nothing left here." Abi Yangzom said, then leaned over and whispered, "It is said that she has only another fifteen rows or so left to weave, so there really isn't very long left. Anyway I'm old now so at least I know I won't be around!"

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<sup>1</sup> No one was able to say for certain what kind of loom this was. There were some who thought it might be a backstrap loom since she was a woman and women in Ladakh usually weave only on such looms.

<sup>2</sup> The proverb, "like the weaving of Jo-Jo Druguma" is included in Gergan's collection of a thousand Tibetan proverbs. He explains it as follows: "It is supposed that Druguma, ... wove some home-spun cloth at which time she crossed her shuttle once in a year, so that the cloth could only be completely woven by the time the world came to an end. So the saying denotes work which is accomplished exceedingly slowly" (1942: 185).

The weaving of Duguma is then the archetype for all present-day weavers in Ladakh. However, though weaving is widely found throughout the region, the practice is not uniform and differences are recognised. The contrast essentially lies between the regions of Lower and Central Ladakh, where agriculture is widely practised, and Changthang which lies in the north (*byang*). Changthang is predominantly inhabited by pastoralists, some of whom are also nomads. The major differences between the two areas are those concerning the weaver, the loom, and the weaving season.

In the villages of Lower and Central Ladakh weaving is exclusively men's work, though it is not a full-time occupation nor is it confined to a particular community like other skilled occupations in Ladakh, such as carpentry or metalwork (Rizvi 1990: 37).<sup>3</sup> This is unlike Changthang where both men and women weave. In contrast, in Tibet it is the women who are the main weavers. In Bhutan too, though the men also produce textiles, as a rule they do not weave: they cut already-woven cloth and sew it into finished forms (Myers 1993: 3). Picton and Mack observe that in areas where men weave, they are usually full-time specialists; but if a woman weaves it is because for that culture weaving is among the various skills expected of her

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Ladakhi scholar Ghani Sheikh, unlike many areas of North India, the weaver does not belong to a profession that is looked down upon and regarded as low-caste (personal communication, Leh, August 1993). The Ladakhi-Buddhist lay population belongs to one of the following four classes: royal families (*rgyal-rigs*), nobility (*sku-drag* or *rigs-ldan*), commoners (*mi-dmangs*, *dmangs-rigs*, or *dmangs-phal*), and the lowly (this divides into the *mgar-ba*, *mon*, and *be-da* (Brauen 1982: 328). Erdmann gives the last division as *rigs-ngan*, outcastes (1983: 141).

(1989: 20-21). Further, there are few areas where both men and women weave, and in such places they each use a different loom (ibid). Rupshu is one such place.

In Changthang a weaver, whether male or female, is called a *'thags-rdzi*, while male weavers in Lower and Central Ladakh are known as *'thags-mkhan*. However, not all men in a village weave. Instead, weaving tends to be a hereditary skill, passed down from father to son, and practised only by certain men in the village. At the same time, no family has a monopoly over weaving in the village, and so a man whose father does not weave can learn to weave from another man who does.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is common to find one, two, or even three weavers in a village. However, there may be villages without a weaver, and so weavers also move between villages. The practice is either for the people to take their wool to the male weaver or for him to be called by each family in turn to their homes to weave their wool. The weaver will stay at one house for the length of time it takes him to weave all the wool he is supplied with. In return he is given food, and other forms of payment.

The second main difference in weaving practices between the two regions is in the kind of loom used. All looms in Ladakh are referred to as *'thags* or *'thags-cha*. They are all portable, and can be dismantled and reassembled within minutes. In the villages a foot-loom (also known as the shaft or treadle loom) or throw shuttle loom is

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<sup>4</sup> Aba Palle, retired superintendent Handicrafts Industries (Leh), explained it in terms of economic necessity, where certain men weave because they need the alternative income to support their family. Therefore, weavers were usually poor men, and as they became rich, many of them left off weaving.

used, while in Changthang all looms are stretched along the ground, women using a backstrap loom and men a fixed-heddle loom.

The final comparison between the regions concerns the period of weaving. In Changthang weaving is mainly done during the summer months, beginning in May or June, and ending in October or November. This is because it is impossible to weave during winter as it is simply too cold to move one's hands. In contrast, in Lower and Central Ladakh weaving is mainly practised during the winter months. This is because the weavers are ordinary farmers who, having spent the summer working in their fields, will turn to their looms in winter, when weaving is done out in the open.

The above is a brief outline of the varying weaving traditions in Ladakh, in order to set the stage for the thesis which concentrates specifically on the tradition of weaving in Rupshu. The first part of this chapter introduces Ladakh and Changthang, where Rupshu is placed. A brief historic overview, followed by geographic and demographic details are included here, along with specific information on the fibres and livestock found in Ladakh. The next section looks at wool and weaving in the literature on Ladakh and Rupshu. This is discussed in two parts, the first dealing with the historical development of weaving and the second examining the history of the trade in wool. The last part of this chapter describes the context within which I carried out the fieldwork which forms the basis of this thesis.

### 1.1 Ladakh, Changthang, and Rupshu

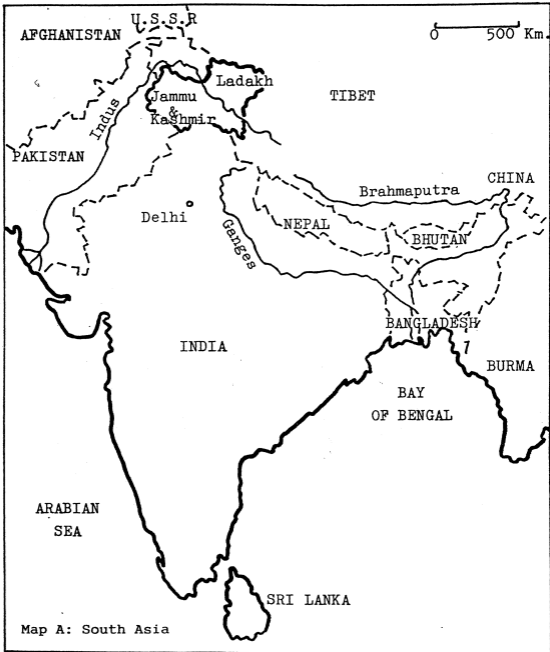
Ladakh lies embedded in the mountain world of the Karakoram in the north-west, the Himalayas in the south-west, and the Trans-Himalayas at its core (Map A). The Indus, rising in the interior of Tibet, flows through the centre of Ladakh, going further on to the western part of Pakistan. The Changthang (*byang-thang*) or "Northern Plateau" is situated in Ladakh's easternmost portion, and extends from Durbook in the north, Demchok and Koyul in the centre, to Rupshu in the east (Map B). Actually, Changthang refers to a much wider area that spans a thousand miles from Ladakh in the west, across Central and North Tibet, to the Chinese province of Qinghai in the east (Goldstein and Beall 1990: 41). Those who inhabit the Changthang are commonly known as Changpa (Northerner).<sup>5</sup> From the Ladakh side there are two approaches into Changthang from Leh: one from the south-east via Taglang La and the second from the north-east via Chang La. It is the one via Taglang La, at an elevation slightly over 17,000 feet, which leads to Rupshu.<sup>6</sup>

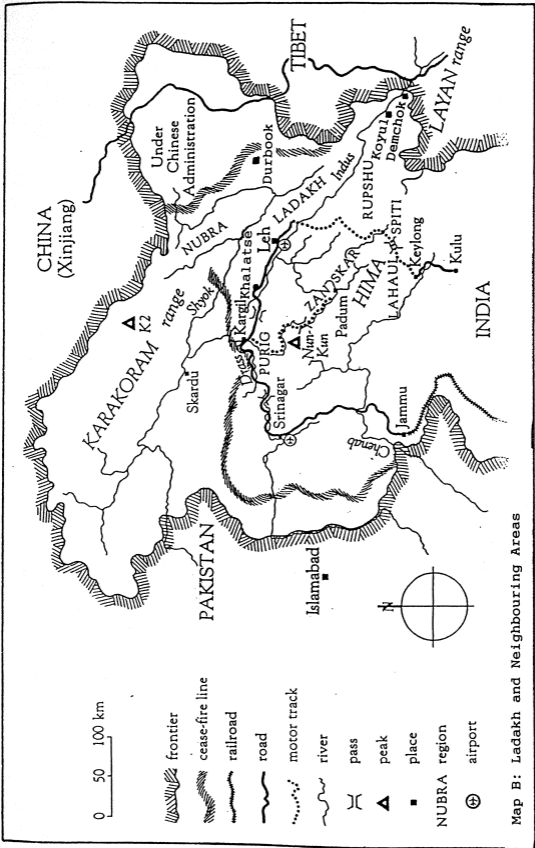
Ladakh was once an independent Himalayan kingdom, and though oriented in its sympathies towards Tibet in terms of a shared religious and literary culture, Ladakh

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<sup>5</sup> The suffix *pa* is added to the end of place names to indicate a person who comes from that place. Thus, Rupshupa refers to a person from Rupshu.

<sup>6</sup> Over the years the name of the place has been spelt in various ways: Rukchu (Cunningham 1854), Roopsho or Roopshoo (Shaw 1871), or Rubshu (Francke 1910), whilst many other writers, including administrative reports, have spelt it Rupshu (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841, Dainelli 1933, Prince Peter 1950, Petech 1977). The spelling "Rupshu" is the one commonly in use today, and the convention I have followed.





Map B: Ladakh and Neighbouring Areas

was never subject to the government at Lhasa (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 2). However, unlike Tibet, Ladakh was never a theocracy. All government officials, including the king, were laymen, though high lamas occasionally participated in affairs of the state (*ibid*).

In 1834, Ladakh was annexed by Zorawar Singh and came under the jurisdiction of the Dogras, the Hindu rulers of Jammu. Ladakh was ruled by them up to 1947, and was never directly governed by the British. After India's independence it became a part of the North Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Its geographical position made it strategically important in India's relationship with both Pakistan and China, and as a sensitive frontier district it remained a restricted area until 1974.<sup>7</sup>

Ladakh covers an area of nearly 82,000 square kilometres, and elevations in the region range from 8,000 to 18,000 feet. It is a high desert plateau and temperatures range from +33°C in July to -50°C in January. The region is divided into two main districts: Leh and Kargil. The 1981 census gives the population of Ladakh as 134,372, with 52% being Buddhists and 47% Muslims. Buddhist Ladakhis are concentrated in Leh District,<sup>8</sup> Muslims in Kargil District. The Muslim community consists largely of Shi'as and a Sunni minority. There is also a small Christian

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<sup>7</sup> That year only the regions of Leh and Kargil were opened; Changthang, Nubra, and Da-Hanu remained in the Restricted Areas Zone.

<sup>8</sup> Buddhism is currently expressed in two major forms: Mahayana and Theravada. The former is practised in most of Northern and Eastern Asia (Bhutan, Japan, Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet), and the latter in South-East Asia (Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand) and Sri Lanka. For a distinction between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism see Gombrich (1971: 15).

community, started by the Moravian Missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century. For administrative purposes Leh District is bifurcated into three sub-divisions, which are referred to as "Blocks": Khalatse, Nubra, and Nyoma.<sup>9</sup> Rupshu lies within Nyoma Block in Leh District.

Rupshu, covering 6,436 square kilometres, is one of the highest inhabited regions in Ladakh and altitudes range from 12,000 to 16,000 feet. Temperatures are the most extreme here, and can reach as low as -45°C in winter. Within Rupshu there are two lakes: Tso Kar and Tsomoriri, which are important landmarks in the region.

The 1981 census gives the population of Rupshu as 499. In an independent census carried out by the Buddhist Youth Society of Rupshu in 1990, the total population was given at 339 and the number of tents at 73.<sup>10</sup> These figures do not include those who have emigrated to Leh over the years, as government officials said it was difficult to keep count of everybody.<sup>11</sup> The drop in population over the last ten years is probably due to migration from Rupshu to Leh. Over the winter of 1994-95

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<sup>9</sup> The area from Khalatse to Upshi has always been divided into two areas: the upper region (including Leh) is known as Stod, and the lower as Sham.

<sup>10</sup> In a survey done by the Leh Nutrition Project (LNP), a non-government organisation working in Ladakh, in 1992 the figure was put at 375. The Education Board conducted a census in May 1993, in which I participated. Our count gave the total population at 346, and the number of tents at 70.

<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to maintain an exact census of the Rupshupa who have settled in Leh because quite often they are accounted for in both places. What happens in some cases is that Rupshupa living in Leh may continue to hold livestock in Rupshu and a member of the family may live there for a period of time. This is usually in summer, around the same time when officials would visit to take a count. Inevitably, the officials account for all their family members, even those living in Leh.

five families migrated to Leh to settle permanently there, and one family returned from Leh to Rupshu. None of the figures cited above include the Tibetan refugees living in Rupshu. A Tibetan nurse who regularly brought medicine for the Tibetans estimated their number at 130.

It is said in Ladakh that some of the finest quality wool (*bal*) and pashmina (*le-na*) is found in Changthang. Pashmina is known in the west as “cashmere”, because Europeans first encountered this fine fibre in Kashmir.<sup>12</sup> The word “pashmina” is derived from the Persian word *pashm* which means wool (Ryder 1987: 3).<sup>13</sup> Thus, in its raw unprocessed form pashmina is referred to as *pashm*, and the word pashmina refers to the cloth woven from *pashm*. However, the words *pashm* and pashmina are often used interchangeably in Ladakh when referring to the fibre. Pashmina is a seasonal growth, stimulated by the intense winter cold of windswept plateaus situated at high altitudes. It comes from the winter undercoat or down of a particular variety of domestic goat (*Capre hircus*), which in Ladakh is known as “pashmina goat” or Changra (literally “Northern goat”). Pashmina is recognised as a luxury fibre and commands some of the highest prices in the world of textiles, because of its extreme softness, elegance, and lustre. “Only vicuna from South America, musk ox and

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<sup>12</sup> “Cashmere” was the old spelling of that country’s name. However, Kashmir was merely the route by which the fibre reached the Indian, and eventually the European, market in the form of finely woven shawls. Even today there are few, if any, cashmere goats actually in Kashmir (Ryder 1987: 3). Pashmina also came to be known as “shawl-wool”, because shawls made from pashmina were the chief manufacture and export article of Kashmir (see Datta 1970: 16, Brown 1984: 104, Warikoo 1992: 853).

<sup>13</sup> However, Ghani Sheikh informed me that *pashm* meant soft and not wool (personal communication, Leh, July 1996).

shahtoosh, none of which is available in anything approaching commercial quantities, achieve higher prices" (Commonwealth Secretariat Report 1993: 14). The appeal of pashmina also lies in the romance and mystery surrounding its origin, and its association with remote populations (ibid: 14-15).<sup>14</sup>

While sheep are reared throughout Ladakh, pashmina goats are only raised in the Changthang region and parts of Nubra. In Lower and Central Ladakh there are local goats, but they do not yield pashmina of a commercial value. Within Changthang there are also a variety of qualities of pashmina available, and the finest comes from the regions of Rupshu, Korzok, and Kharnak. The reason for this is the high altitudes at which the livestock are grazed. As a result of the large number of sheep and pashmina goats found in Ladakh, and especially in Changthang, wool processing activities and weaving have always been a customary way of life in the region. The next section explores references to these practices in the literature on Ladakh.

## 1.2 Sources

The reference material used for this thesis focuses on both the early and contemporary literature on Ladakh that is relevant to this work, and more specifically that pertaining to Rupshu. The material incorporated here includes descriptions and discussions on weaving, textiles, pastoral nomads, livestock, and trade relations. This

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<sup>14</sup> Pashmina shawls are something of a status symbol among urban Indians, but few seem aware of the source of the fibre and many are surprised to hear that it comes from a goat.

work also focuses on similar accounts from other Himalayan countries, mainly Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal. Further, references are made to the anthropological literature on weaving and nomadic pastoralism from other parts of the world, to both supplement and contrast my research.

Wool is recognised as an integral part of life in Ladakh, and its use is largely attributed to the severity of the cold climate. The Ladakhi scholar, Tashi Phunsog, writes that in Ladakh it is said that wool has "compassion", because it eases man's suffering whether he is a king, queen, or shoemaker: "Wool serves the same purpose for everybody" (1979-80: 77). Wool-oriented activities, from the herding of sheep and goats, to shearing, spinning, and weaving, are widely practised throughout Ladakh. These activities form some of the most obvious features of Ladakh and are among some of the first impressions travellers to the region have:

"Whatever else he may be doing, whether walking or sitting, the Ladakhi is always assiduously spinning coarse woollen thread; his little shuttle hangs from the end of the thread and revolves merrily under dexterous twists periodically administered, while a thick skein of crude wool is hung over his elbow. The finished thread is wound on a stick. In this way a continual supply of yarn is spun for weaving into clothes..." (Pallis 1939: 234-235).

This description is echoed by Kuloy who states that "those who travel in the Himalaya and Tibet will be struck by the fact that they always seem to occupy themselves with something useful; spinning wool while herding, making ropes, knotting rugs, weaving, etc." (1982: 22). Further, pashmina and wool were also always recognised as Ladakh's major trading items.

The literature on Ladakh is represented by a diverse field of authors, many of them being Ladakhi, Indian, British, and European. Early Western sources on Ladakh include gazetteers, geographical accounts and descriptions of Ladakhi customs and trade goods, besides concentrating on the author's harrowing adventures and heroic endeavours (Bray 1988: 3). References to wool-oriented activities, weaving, and descriptions of clothing in Ladakh are made in some of the early literature on the region (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841, Drew 1875, Galwan 1923).

Before 1947 Rupshu was visited by a few explorers, missionaries, and British officials who journeyed to Ladakh, because it lay along one of the major trade routes to Leh. This was the Leh-Punjab route, which for centuries has run from Yarkand via Leh and across the mountain districts of Rupshu, Lahaul, and Kulu, to the Punjab (Wessels 1924: 111).<sup>15</sup> Thus, Rupshu is discussed in the following early Western sources: Cunningham 1848, Shaw 1871, Francke 1910, Dainelli 1933. On the other hand, present-day references to Rupshu, and most of the rest of the Changthang, are limited. Since 1947 the region lies within Nyoma Block, which is a Restricted Areas Zone and is only accessible to Indian citizens holding valid permits.<sup>16</sup> Jina (1995) is

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<sup>15</sup> Not just Rupshu, but the whole of Ladakh was accessible by a number of trade routes that passed through it. Moorcroft observed that because of its "central situation" Ladakh was a great thoroughfare for trade between Tibet, Turkistan, China, and Russia on one hand, and Kashmir, the Punjab, and the plains of Hindustan on the other (1841: 346).

<sup>16</sup> In 1994 the Indian government opened all restricted areas in Ladakh to non-Indians. However, there are certain conditions regarding travel to these areas which continue to make them relatively inaccessible. Permits can only be procured through authorized travel agents in Leh, one has to travel in groups of four or more, and no group can stay in any one place for more than ten days.

one of the few Indian scholars who writes about Rupshu, but his work reveals several lapses and is critiqued here.

Weaving has not been a topic much researched and written about in Ladakh. According to Snellgrove and Skorupski, one of the reasons for this neglect is that the crafts of Ladakh were generally dismissed as inferior:

"In the past the people of Ladakh have obtained so easily by trade, whether from Central Asia, from Tibet or from India, all the articles they required, ... that there seems to have been little incentive for them to be creative themselves. ... The crafts of carpet-weaving, metal work and wood carving were inevitably neglected in a trading centre, where so much of the very best of its kind could be so easily obtained from outside. Thus Ladakh is now doubly poor in this respect. They cannot obtain those things, which were once so prized, and very few locally can now produce anything good" (1977: 136-137).

Their view is biased, as well as generalized, as there were and still are craftsmen in Ladakh who produce very good work. Pallis's observations on his trip through Ladakh contrast with the comments of Snellgrove and Skorupski: "The rich men of Leh gave their orders for plate to the silversmith of Chhiling, ... while to Rigzin, native of the small village of Kalatze, people applied from all over Western Tibet when they wanted the best paintings" (1939: 349). Asboe writes about the guild of potters that exists in Likir, and says there is a large demand in Ladakh for their earthenware pots, cups, and teapots (1946: 10). Likir continues to be renowned for its pottery, and fine metalwork still comes from Chilling. Further, while the old trade routes may have closed or changed, goods continue to enter Ladakh from other areas. Carpets come from the Tibetan handicraft centres now set up in India, brocade from Benares, saddle-cloths from Bhutan, velvet and silks from China.

The other reason for this neglect is that Ladakhi village textiles have never been seriously studied because general interest has favoured finely-worked cloth such as the *thang-ka* (silk scroll paintings), and monastic paintings and murals. Aziz argues that because Tibetology long remained essentially a study of the classicists concerned with material culture of the highest sort, art was defined as *thang-ka* painting, statuary, woodcarving, and architecture (1988: 31). These various forms of art were also all essentially created by men. Therefore, weaving, primarily a women's creative work, was not of much interest to them and neglected.

Contemporary studies have generally referred to weaving practices in Central and Lower Ladakh, where weaving is primarily a male profession (Tashi Phunsog 1979-80, Kaplanian 1981, Myers 1983, Rizvi 1990). None of these accounts discuss weaving in Changthang. However, inaccuracies arise in some of these works when they attempt to generalize for the whole of Ladakh, in spite of the fact that some of these writers are Indian and so could have had access to restricted areas within the region. Rizvi states that "in the whole of Kashmir and Ladakh, weaving is exclusively man's work" (1990: 37). She overlooks both the weaving done by nomadic women in Ladakh, and the weaving of shawls now being done by women who have trained at the various handicraft centres in Leh. In a book on the crafts of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh (Jaitly 1990), which devotes a section to nomadic crafts, nothing is said about those of Ladakh. Like Rizvi, Jaitly also errs by saying that, "as in Kashmir, Ladakhi women traditionally do no weaving although women do so in the neighbouring regions of Nepal, Spiti and Tibet" (1990: 31). In the same volume, Saraf, who writes about carpet-weaving in Ladakh, says that these are woven on easily portable, vertical

looms (1990: 94). Vertical looms for weaving carpets were only introduced into Ladakh some fifty years ago (cf. section 1.2.1), and are mainly found in the handicraft centres of Leh. Prior to this, there was only one man in Khalatse who wove carpets on such a loom. That Saraf has not ventured beyond the handicraft centres of Leh is apparent, because he says nothing about the fact that throughout Ladakh carpets were, and in some regions still are, largely woven in strips on backstrap looms. These strips were later stitched together.

While there has been no major documentation on the tradition of weaving in Ladakh, these early and contemporary accounts provide the background to the subject. They enable the documentation of the tradition in terms of the prevailing technique of production, variety of woven articles and their usage, form, patterns, and colours. Through them it is possible to discern changes in style, method, and application. Eventually, they lead to a study of change from within, and an examination of the outside influences on the prevailing tradition. However, they say little about the symbolic meaning of weaving, the loom, and patterns. Comparatively, there is much more literature on the weaving tradition in other parts of the Himalayas, mainly Tibet (Messinesi 1956, Denwood 1974, Kuloy 1982) and Bhutan (Myers and Bean 1994). Similarly, there are a few accounts of nomads in Tibet. Ekvall (1968) focuses on the nomads of North-East Tibet and is one of the few who did fieldwork before the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Goldstein and Beall (1990) and Clarke (1988, 1992) are among the few scholars who have conducted research on nomads in Tibet after its occupation by China. Their study examines both nomadic pastoralists in the "traditional society" (or "old society" as they refer to the period before 1959) and after

the 1959 uprising, as well as that following China's cultural revolution. They do not describe weaving in any detail, but it is their discussions on the traditional nomadic society of Tibet that are of relevance for this thesis.

In contrast, while the production of wool and tradition of weaving has not been given much attention in these studies, the trade in pashmina and wool is documented extensively. Without fail, most of the early and some of the contemporary sources contain some reference to trade, pashmina being the commodity in which they show greatest interest.

Present-day references to Changthang by Indian writers have also concentrated on pashmina, one of the most lucrative items of Ladakh's trade from Changthang. However, there is much confusion among them as to the source of the fibre. While Datta maintains that it is the "fine under-coat of Tibetan sheep and goats" (1970: 18), Mann claims that "pashmina is from sheep" (1986: 108). Jina first declares that, "in Chang-Thang yaks and wild animals have pashmina wool production" and then goes on to state that "pashmina is a soft fine wool grown at the root of long hair goats" (1995: 51). Though Jina may be right to say that yaks and other wild animals have this undercoat, he confusingly uses the same term for this and for pashmina proper. International law, though recognising that yaks, horses, and camels also have this undercoat, restricts the name "cashmere" to only the undercoat of goats, giving it much greater economic value (Goldstein and Beall 1990: 39). Similarly in Ladakh, as well as the rest of India, "pashmina" is used only to refer to the undercoat of pashmina goats.

Before proceeding to the practice of weaving in Rupshu the section below gives an overview of the origin and historical development of the tradition in Ladakh which sets the background to this thesis.

### 1.2.1 History of Weaving and Textiles

Little is known about the historical development of weaving in Ladakh, and few, if any, early sources and records exist on this subject. Efforts to date the origin of the loom, weaving, and textiles in Ladakh are difficult as archaeological excavations have yielded little information. The origin of weaving in Ladakh is closely linked with its origin in Tibet, and leads can be drawn from the research done there. Since the looms used in the two places closely resemble each other, it is commonly believed in Ladakh that weaving first entered the area from Tibet. On the other hand, weaving practices differ between the two places. Unlike Tibet, where only women weave, in Ladakh both men and women weave.<sup>17</sup>

Snellgrove and Richardson state that, "the weaving of carpets for Tibetan domestic use must have been a quite ancient Tibetan craft, just as was the weaving of woollen homespun for everyday clothes" (1968: 158). According to Myers, weaving of some sort probably extends as far back as one can chart human habitation on the

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<sup>17</sup> Aba Palle suggested that Kashmir, where only men weave, could have had some influence on the weaving tradition in Ladakh. There is no definite evidence to prove this one way or the other. However, Francke mentions that some people consider India to be Duguma's fatherland (1901b: 363). Thus, if Duguma is the model on which all weaving is based in Ladakh it could mean that weaving entered Ladakh from India and not Tibet.

Tibetan plateau since it is common to find clay spindle whorls at Neolithic sites in Tibet (1984: 21). She also mentions that according to popular tradition in Tibet looms were first introduced:

“... by the Chinese wife of Emperor Songtsen Gampo in the seventh century. ... Chinese annals of the same period, however, mention general weaving activity among the tribes of what is now Tibet” (ibid: 26).

Meanwhile, Kuloy suggests that while it is difficult to date the origin of weaving in general in Tibet, the production techniques of the carpet-making tradition can be dated back at least to the fifth century A.D. As evidence of this he mentions that a “10th Century silk *thanka* or temple banner from the Tunhwang caves shows two rugs or mats ...” showing us that the usage of rugs was not unknown (1982: 68).

In Ladakh it has also been suggested that the tradition of weaving is an ancient craft. Aba Palle talked of a time before weaving, when their ancestors wore clothes made from grass, leaves, and the bark of trees. Later they learnt how to spin and weave their own clothes. According to Tashi Phunsog, locally woven woollen cloth has been used there for many centuries and a study of the textiles stored in the monasteries of Ladakh would reveal this (1979-80: 78-79). He maintains that it is generally known that monasteries preserve the old clothes of lamas, especially the highly venerated ones. Further confirmation of the age of woollen cloth is also provided by the statues made and kept in monasteries to honour their head lama after his death; there are some very old ones clad in woollen cloth (ibid).<sup>18</sup> Tashi Phunsog

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<sup>18</sup> Tashi Phunsog's study though informative is generalized, and whether he actually attempted to date any of the textiles in the monasteries can not unfortunately now be known because he died some years ago.

seems to be implying that weaving in Ladakh is as old as the coming of Buddhism to the region.<sup>19</sup> However, without proper data the validity of his argument is inconclusive, and it cannot be proved whether or not there was some sort of textile production going on in Ladakh before the advent of Buddhism.

It is not until the arrival of missionaries, British officers, and explorers in the 1600s that written records and information concerning this subject emerges. The first European travellers to venture through Rupshu, en route to Tibet, were the Portuguese priests Azevedo and Oliveira in 1631 (Wessels 1924: 108). They followed the trade route up from the Punjab, and although Rupshu is only mentioned in passing, they do make one of the earliest references to Ladakhi woollen cloth. Francisco de Azevedo writes that on leaving Leh, the King, Senge Namgyal "... presented him with a horse very much like Don Quixote's, four pieces of woollen stuff, [and] two tails of hyacas [sic. yaks]" (ibid: 110). Gifts of cloth were important in Ladakh's history, and the most significant of these were made by way of the Lopchak Mission.<sup>20</sup> Although the quantity of presents to be given was not exactly specified the envoys from Ladakh to Tibet generally took gold, perfume, saffron, six rolls of cloth of Hor (Mughal or

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<sup>19</sup> According to Snellgrove and Skorupski, Buddhism first appeared in Ladakh from the Indian side long before the Tibetan rulers of Western Tibet gave it so great an impetus. This was during the time of the Kushana empire, from the first century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. (1977: 6). It cannot be said with certainty when the first monasteries were built in Ladakh but those still standing, or of which ruins remain, were built during the tenth and eleventh centuries under Rinchen Zangpo (ibid: 19).

<sup>20</sup> In 1684, under the Treaty of Tingmosgang it was decided that the King of Ladakh would send a triennial Lopchak mission to Lhasa (Bray 1991: 117). This carried with it a variety of gifts, which were offerings to the Dalai Lama for his protective blessings and to Tibet for the salutation of the New Year (Ahmed 1968: 354).

Mongol) manufacture and one roll of soft cotton cloth to the Treasurer of the Office of the Dalai Lama (Ahmed 1968: 354). However, it is interesting to note that local cloth was not included in these gifts and it is probably because imported cloth was always, and still is, considered to be of much higher value (cf. section 6.2.3).

After Azevedo and Oliveira, Moorcroft and Trebeck in 1820 were among the first to visit Ladakh and write about it. Moorcroft described the woollen cloth in the country as being thick and strong, but also soft, and of a regular thread and fabric (1841: 323). However, Moorcroft does not give a description of the kind of clothes worn at that time. One of the first of these is provided by Drew, Wazir-e-Wazarat (Urdu: governor) of Ladakh in 1871, who wrote:

“Their dress is simple; it is all woollen, of a coarse and thick, but not very closely-woven, home-made cloth, of a natural drab colour. The men wear a *choga*, or wide and long coat, folded over double in front, and confined at the waist by a woollen kamarband [belt], or scarf. ... The women wear a gown the skirt somewhat gathered into pleats, of vertical strips of woollen cloth, generally blue and red alternately but sometimes patterned, sewn together” (1875: 240).

Drew’s account is followed by Ghulam Rassul Galwan’s. One of the first Ladakhis to publish in English (albeit idiosyncratic English), he writes that as a young boy he wore:

“[a] long coat of wool of sheep, and one little long hat of lamb’s skin. ... I not had pants. For legs wore puttees [strips] of numdah [felt]. Sometimes local shoes wore, some Kashmiri, some times paboo [shoes] made with sheep-wool and goat-hair. ... Wore on shoulders the skin of goats we call lockpa” (1923: 9-10).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Galwan, born in 1878, came from a poor family and so to earn money worked for English and American travellers in the Himalayas, Central Asia, and Tibet. One such traveller, the American Robert Barrett, suggested to Galwan that he write about his life. Though draft versions of the book were edited and corrected by Barrett and his wife, they retained Galwan’s style and his idiosyncrasies in the use of English.

Apart from locally woven woollen fabrics, several other forms of textiles and garments also entered Ladakh through trade. Lying at the "Crossroads of High Asia" Ladakh was situated squarely between some of the great mercantile towns of South and Central Asia (Rizvi 1983: 75). Goods from China, Tibet, India, Kashmir, Yarkand, Kashgar, and Russia reached the markets in Leh and surrounding areas. Imported cloth such as European broadcloth, Russian velvet, Chinese satin and brocade, cotton stockings from Kashmir and Kabul, ornamented leather boots from Lhasa, and felt from Yarkand were some of the merchandise Moorcroft saw arriving on the caravans during his stay in Leh (1841: 322-326). This trade flourished over the years and new goods continued to come into the market. The Ladakhi writer, Joldan, mentions that from Central Asia items mainly meant for Ladakhi customers were "rough cotton cloth and some silk cloth, ready-made garments, mostly cotton-padded, long shoes called Charoks, saddlery items, ... warm sheep-skin garments, and big cotton bags and saddle bags" (1985: 70). From Sinkiang there was raw-silk thread, felt, carpets, cured lambskins, and manufactured silk cloth; from India there came chemical dyes of all colours, mostly German made, indigo, artificial silk cloths (mostly Japanese), muslin, velvet and cotton cloths, otter fur, beads, sewing machine needles, and threads (ibid: 71-72). However, the Ladakhis did have preferences and it is interesting to note that Johnson (Wazir-e-Wazarat of Ladakh in the early 1920s) mentions that English piece-goods, broadcloths and calicoes do not sell as well in Ladakh as cloth manufactured in Russia (1923: 8). Most of this trade was abandoned in the forties when fighting began in Central Asia, and later in the sixties when the Chinese occupied Tibet.

Some of the earliest accounts of Rupshu are those given by Moorcroft and Trebeck, when they travelled through the region on their way to Spiti. What first struck them was not so much the clothes of the people as their tents: "The tents of the Champas are of ragged black blanket, about four feet high, and open along the top. Their interior is furnished usually with abundance of dirty sheep and goat skins, some sewed into coats ..." (1841: 48-47). While travelling through Spiti, they provide one of the first descriptions of the backstrap loom and method of warping used there (ibid: 72-73). Both these descriptions are very similar to the technology found and still used in Rupshu. Cunningham was the next British officer to enter Rupshu in 1847, but he came via Lahaul and not Spiti. He reports coming across an encampment of "Nomad Tartars" living in black hair tents, each tent containing four or five people (1848: 224). It is Cunningham who provides the first detailed description of male and female apparel, though he says nothing about who makes them and how they are made:

"The men usually wear woollen great coats reaching below the knee. They wear leggings also, generally of thick coloured woollen, ... Their short boots are made of goatskin or sheepskin, with the hair or wool turned inwards, ... The cap is generally a piece of goatskin with the hair inwards, or else a woollen one edged with skin or coarse red silk. ... They [the women] frequently wear long great coats and leggings like the men; but I have seen them also dressed in three or four thick woollen petticoats, and a sheepskin jacket with the wool turned inwards over the coat. The men also wear sheepskin jackets when they feel cold ..." (1848: 224-225).

Shaw was the next to reach Rupshu after Cunningham, on his journey from Kulu to Ladakh in 1868, and he records stopping at "Camp Rookshin, a temporary camp of Tartars" (1871: 64). Then came Drew, who provides a fairly lengthy and vivid description of the tents used there (1875: 285). He was followed by the missionary Francke, by far the most prolific author on Ladakh, who lived both there and in Lahaul

from 1896 to 1908 (1910: 61-62). Neither Shaw nor Francke write about wool-processing activities, but they provide information relevant to Rupshu's history which is discussed in the next chapter. In 1930 came Dainelli, who is the first to mention the kind of loom used in Rupshu:

"When we arrived at Rukchen, domestic life was still going on busily outside the tents. Women were spinning wool; others were dyeing it that beautiful dark wine-colour which the fashion of Leh has brought even up here on to the Rupshu; others again were weaving on primitive looms placed flat on the ground" (1933: 287).

Dainelli was followed by Koelz in 1931, who led an expedition from Nagar in Himachal to Western Tibet, which included Rupshu. He said that they "have black yak hair tents and swarms of sheep and yaks and a few horses" (1931: 102). Koelz distinguished between the clothes worn by the rich and poor in Rupshu by stating that the poor wore sheepskin with the wool inside, while the rich or less poor, were dressed in cloth (ibid: 107). Prince Peter, who journeyed through Rupshu in 1938, is probably the last to write about the region before 1947.<sup>22</sup> He mentions that the men wore heavy sheepskin coats while the women were "wrapped in the conventional long coat tied at the middle, and they had a sheepskin, dyed in various brilliant colours, thrown over their shoulders, wool inside" (1950: 418).

Probably one of the most significant influences on the tradition of weaving in Ladakh was exercised by the Moravian Mission. The Moravian Mission, which began work in the area at the end of the nineteenth century, had a direct impact on the

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<sup>22</sup> Pallis, who never went to Rupshu, did make a short journey into the northern part of Ladakh's Changthang where he came across several encampments of Changpa and described them as being, "an unkempt, wild-looking people, extremely Mongoloid in cast, who in dress differ little from the Tibetans" (1939: 308).

woollen crafts of that region. It was in Kyelang, where the first station opened in 1856, that the wives of missionaries first organised knitting classes for the local women and then carried this on to Poo and Ladakh (Bray 1985: 52-53).<sup>23</sup> There are several elderly people in Leh today who recall their mothers having first learnt to knit when the German missionaries came there. In 1939 Walter Asboe, an English missionary who had some previous business experience, started a cooperative society known as the Leh Spinners Association (ibid: 53). He aimed to capture the raw wool trade for the Ladakhis and by the end of 1940 Asboe was able to record that the Association had bought some Rs.30,000 worth of wool from the highlands of Tibet and put the Kashmiri raw wool traders out of business (ibid). In the same year, Asboe also opened the Industrial School in Leh, with financial assistance from the Kashmir government.<sup>24</sup> His initial aim was to offset the increasing poverty occasioned through the cessation of Central Asian trade (because of fighting in China), but he had a larger ambition, namely that of establishing a woollen industry in Ladakh (Asboe 1940: 5).<sup>25</sup> It started with three instructors, eight apprentices and twenty-five spinners.<sup>26</sup> Asboe introduced a new design of loom, wider than the traditional Ladakhi version, to

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<sup>23</sup> Aba Palle's mother, Ama Rebecca, came from Kyelang and her daughter Ane Zilla recounted that she was specifically brought to Ladakh by the missionaries to help them teach the local women how to knit. Later she was married to a man from Khalatse, who was also a Christian, and the family settled in Leh (personal communication, Leh, July 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Asboe's Centre was situated within the same compound as the present Moravian Mission School.

<sup>25</sup> Asboe's purpose, through the School, was also to spread the Gospel in Ladakh (1940: 5; 1943: 11).

<sup>26</sup> I spoke with and interviewed two of these apprentices, Aba Palle and David Gaphael.

produce shawls, blankets, and broadcloth (Bray 1985: 53).<sup>27</sup> This was the fly shuttle loom, a more advanced version of the treadle loom. Apart from the looms kept at the School, Asboe also supplied looms to the neighbouring villages to further his objective of establishing a cottage weaving industry in Ladakh (Asboe 1942: 5). In addition two weavers from the School were sent to Srinagar for specialized training (ibid), and Aba Palle was sent to the Sir J. J. School of Arts in Bombay to study textile design.

Though Asboe's apprentices were mainly men, it was also for the first time that women in Ladakh came forward to learn on the treadle loom. Prior to this women had only been weaving on the backstrap loom, as there were traditional prohibitions on their using the treadle loom. Though very few women came forward to weave at that time, Asboe's students say that he had taken a bold step. Gaphael remembers that:

"Yes, there was plenty of talk in those days when the women first came to weave, but Asboe started his place here in Leh where the people were a little more educated. So people didn't talk much."

The school also trained a number of apprentices in Tibetan carpet-weaving on the frame or vertical loom. Earlier the only carpet weaver in Ladakh had been a man from

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<sup>27</sup> Aba Palle recalled that they wove blankets with wool from Changthang which would be sent to Germany, France, Switzerland, and America. However, Asboe writes that the blankets were woven for the war effort and were popular among army officers serving in the foothills of the North-West Frontier of India (1942: 5), and they supplied the Indian Red Cross Society (1943: 11).

Khalatse who had learnt his trade in Tibet.<sup>28</sup> In the rest of Ladakh carpets were woven on the backstrap loom in strips which were later stitched together.

While it is certain that in Ladakh carpet-weaving on the frame loom came from Tibet, there is debate as to whether or not Tibetan carpet-making originated there or in China. Kuloy states that it was Marco Pallis who first acknowledged that Tibetan rug-making was an indigenous Tibetan art technically totally different from the Chinese tradition (1982: 36). However, Lorentz differed with Pallis and stated that rug-weaving in Tibet came from China because the designs used in some Tibetan rugs closely resemble Chinese rugs while others show a mixed style and therefore, Tibetan rugs are fundamentally Chinese rugs with a difference (1973: 156).<sup>29</sup> What Lorentz fails to recognise is that the knots used in Tibetan and Chinese rugs are technically different, and so it is unlikely that one originated from the other.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, Denwood states that Tibetan carpets were most probably derived from Central Asia or the Middle East, and later modified and standardised by the Tibetans (1974: 83).

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<sup>28</sup> Pallis also mentions that the only man with any reputation for weaving rugs lived at Khalatse (1939: 296).

<sup>29</sup> Though Kuloy does recognise that certain design elements in Tibetan rugs are Sino-Tibetan, he states that these influences could have entered Tibet through trade goods such as brocade, porcelain, pottery, bronzeware, and painted scrolls (1982: 45).

<sup>30</sup> While the Chinese use what is known as the Persian or Senna knot, the Tibetans use an entirely different knot and knotting technique, the technical name of which is the Senna loop (Kuloy 1982: 36).

The Industrial School closed down in 1947 and Asboe handed all his equipment over to the Indian government or gave it away to some of his instructors and students. In 1955 it was eventually replaced by a government-sponsored handicrafts training centre, many of whose instructors had first learnt their skills from Asboe. The handicrafts centre carried on much of what Asboe had started, but they also began processing pashmina, though on a marginal scale. In the early seventies, this centre split into the Cottage Industries (also known as the Handloom Development Department) and the Central Handicrafts Department. While the former now teaches shawl weaving and tailoring, the latter is concerned with carpet-weaving, woodcarving, and painting. In 1979, David Gaphael began the Handicrafts Industrial Co-operative Society, a semi-government organisation, which does both shawl and carpet-weaving. All these centres train and employ both men and women, but it is interesting to observe that now many more women than men train there.

Over the years the tradition of weaving and textiles has changed in Ladakh. Some of these changes have occurred from within, and others have been imposed or influenced by external developments. One instance of change is the wearing of traditional costume, which is on the decline. Unlike Bhutan there is no national decree stating that they must wear their traditional clothes.<sup>31</sup> However, many Ladakhis say that it is the weather that ensures they continue to wear their traditional woollen clothes. "For those of us who are not able to migrate to Delhi every winter,"

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<sup>31</sup> In 1989, the King of Bhutan issued an edict whereby "the traditional dress should be worn by all citizens in dzongs, monasteries, government offices, schools and institutions, and at official functions and public congregations" (Pommaret 1993: 1).

a friend in Leh remarked once, "it is just so cold at that time of the year that we have no choice but to wear our own clothes. They are the only thing that keep us warm." A similar observation was also made by Myers: "Homespun is always worn in winter" (1983: 1). However in summer, Punjabi-style outfits can be seen alongside denim jeans, imitation leather, and gortex jackets. Synthetic fabrics, such as polyester and corduroy, are now widely used to make local dress, but according to traditional patterns. While most men wear western dress, women wear Punjabi-style cotton pants under local dress.

In Rupshu, most of the nomads no longer wear sheepskin in summer, a detail observed by many early travellers who passed through the region at that time of the year. Sheepskin is now kept primarily for wearing in winter, while in summer they wear local Ladakhi dress, usually made from synthetic fabric and purchased from Leh or Manali. Tibetan styles have also influenced Rupshu since 1959, and women have taken to wearing the sleeveless robe (*chu-ba*) over a long-sleeved blouse. Further, few women feel the need to dye their fabric as coloured wool is now easily available in the market.

Apart from transformations in the traditional costume and practice of weaving, there have also been changes in the region that have affected the trade of wool and pashmina from Ladakh. Pashmina primarily has been a major factor in political and economic struggles throughout the history of the region and commercial relations are examined here in view of the effect they have had on the present pashmina trade in

Ladakh. The changes in this trade have had a direct influence on Changthang, and Rupshu in particular, and therefore it is discussed in the next section in some detail.

### 1.1.2 Trading Relations along the Ladakh-Tibet Border

Political and commercial relations along the Ladakh-Tibet border, which Changthang covers, have always been a matter of great concern for the rulers of Ladakh, Tibet, Kashmir, and British officials. It was the trade across this border that was of importance to them and for which they needed a peaceful frontier. On the whole, from 1842 when the Tibetan government signed a peace treaty with Jammu, until the outbreak of war between India and China 120 years later, the Ladakhi-Tibetan frontier was free from military conflict (Bray 1993: 1). However, there were occasional local issues along the border that disrupted peaceful relations between the two sides. One of these disputes concerned Rupshu, and was over the grazing rights of pastoralists living on either side of the border (ibid: 11).<sup>32</sup>

The most lucrative of the trading activities around this border centred around the trade in pashmina, as Changthang is the main source for the supply of this fibre. Though it was known that areas within Ladakh, such as Rupshu, also bred the pashmina goat, it was said that the finest wool came from Rudok and Ngari in

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<sup>32</sup> In 1935 the chief of Rupshu was suspected of the murder of a Tibetan lama who was arbitrating in the grazing dispute, and the Tibetans threatened to cut off the salt trade with Ladakh until justice was seen to be done (Bray 1993: 11).

Western Tibet (Cunningham 1854: 214).<sup>33</sup> While Western Tibet was the main source for the supply of pashmina, Kashmir was home to the vast shawl-producing industry.<sup>34</sup> Ladakh, lying between these two areas, had a strict monopoly over the trade in pashmina. It was under strict treaty rights that Ladakh gained the monopoly of Western Tibet's pashmina and not, as Lamb claims, a result of custom or usage (1960: 58).<sup>35</sup> In 1684, under the Treaty of Tingmosgang, concluded after the Tibeto-Ladakh-Mughal war, it was agreed that the Tibetan authorities undertake to supply the entire wool and pashmina of this region to Ladakh (Petech 1977: 77).<sup>36</sup> At the same time, Ladakh, under a separate treaty with the Mughals, undertook to supply all this wool,

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<sup>33</sup> Drew also recognised this for he wrote: "It must not be supposed that the greater part of the shawl-wool used in Kashmir comes from Rupshu; the greater quantity and that of better quality comes either from the Chinese districts beyond the boundary of Ladakh, or from the Amir of Kashgar's country" (1875: 288).

<sup>34</sup> Though no one is certain when this trade first started, Ghani Sheikh writes that according to old legends, pashmina of Western Tibet and Ladakh was exported to Kashmir during the period of the Kaurava and Pandava dynasty (1996: 1). Further, during the reign of Ashoka, shawls were being woven from pashmina in Kashmir. The Hebers mention that when the Mughal Emperor, Mirza Hedar (Akbar's grandfather), came to Ladakh the King presented him with some homespun pashmina and he admired it so much that he introduced the import of the wool into Kashmir (1978: 122). Hedar is also credited with having had the first two shawls woven out of pashmina.

<sup>35</sup> In 1684 relations between Ladakh and Lhasa were increasingly hostile, and further acerbated when Ladakh intervened in a quarrel between Tibet and Bhutan, supporting the latter, resulting in the fifth Dalai Lama declaring war on Ladakh (Petech 1977: 70-71). The Ladakhi King, Deldan Namgyal, lacking the strength to fight the Tibetans asked for and obtained the intervention of Ibrahim Khan, the Mughal Governor of Kashmir, who succeeded in stopping the Tibetan advance (ibid: 74).

<sup>36</sup> Under the same treaty it was also specified that nowhere but via Ladakh shall rectangular tea-bricks from Tibet be sent (Marx 1894: 97). This resulted in the "Chaba", the annual trade caravan from Lhasa, and consisted of two hundred animal-loads of tea which crossed the frontier only at Demchok (Bray 1990: 78). In return for this the King of Ladakh sent the triennial Lopchak Mission to Lhasa.

along with its indigenous produce to Kashmir (ibid: 75). This practice appears to have been followed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

As a luxury fibre the trade in pashmina had several commercially profitable possibilities and, therefore, interest in this trade was also expressed by the British and Sikhs who hoped to break the monopoly established by the Treaty of Tingmosgang. New weaving centres had opened up in the Punjab and they wanted pashmina.<sup>37</sup> Moorcroft, superintendent of the military stud of the Company near Patna, who came to Ladakh on the pretext of buying horses for the British, actually came to investigate the possibilities of diverting part of the pashmina trade to British India and establishing a shawl industry either there or in Great Britain itself (Rizvi n.d.1: 11). However, his attempts were futile as he did not get full support from the British government.<sup>38</sup> The next attempt to break into this Ladakh-Kashmir monopoly was made by Gulab Singh, the King of Jammu, who sent Zorawar Singh to conquer Ladakh in 1834 (ibid: 1). From the moment he took Ladakh, Gulab Singh then set envious eyes on Western Tibet as he hoped to secure a monopoly over the entire

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<sup>37</sup> In the early nineteenth century Kashmir was ruled by the Afghans, and because of their oppression many Kashmiris were compelled to leave the valley (Datta 1970: 19). Among them were skilled shawl-manufacturers, who took refuge in the towns of Punjab and set up their own weaving centres there (ibid: 21).

<sup>38</sup> Moorcroft writes that he managed to secure from Tsepel Namgyal, the King of Ladakh, a commercial agreement to trade with Ladakh and, through it, with Western Tibet (1841: 42). However Tsepel Namgyal, owing to fear of the Sikhs, offered allegiance to the British through Moorcroft, who, not competent himself to deal with political matters, forwarded the proposal to Calcutta, which rejected it (Rahul 1964-65: 148). According to Petech the rejection was because the Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, had lodged a protest with the British government against Moorcroft's activities, and the governor-general did not wish to offend him (1977: 131).

shawl-wool trade (Lamb 1989: 357).<sup>39</sup> However, Zorawar was defeated and in 1842 a second treaty, known as the Treaty of Leh, was signed between Tibet, Ladakh, and Jammu. This Treaty guaranteed the Tibetans the annual export of wool, shawls, and tea by way of Ladakh according to old established customs (Petech 1977: 151). In practice, however, the monopoly established at the Treaty of Tingmosgang could not be fully re-established by the Treaty of Leh and pashmina from Western Tibet began to be diverted to the weaving towns of Punjab (Rizvi n.d.1: 20). Pashmina thus started flowing into channels other than the old and customary ones of the Treaty. As a result, the British government renewed their interest in pashmina and in 1847 they sent Cunningham, along with Strachey and Thomson, to investigate the line of trade between Ladakh and Tibet (Rahul 1964-65: 150).<sup>40</sup>

The Ladakhis maintained a well-guarded monopoly on the pashmina produced in Western Tibet, and any attempt to export this article to areas other than Ladakh was severely punished by both Ladakhi and Tibetan authorities (Datta 1970: 18). The practice, outlined in the Treaty of Tingmosgang, was such that only Ladakhi traders were allowed into the pashmina-producing areas to purchase the fibre, while their

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<sup>39</sup> Datta cites another reason for his invasion of Western Tibet which was that the Sikhs were anxious to counter the British policy of encirclement by entering into alliance with Nepal, the other largely Hindu and the only powerful state on the Indian sub-continent (1966: 529-530). It was said that one of the objects of Zorawar's invasion of Western Tibet was to build a chain of forts from Ladakh to the border of Nepal, on the other side of the Himalayas, and thus to effectuate the much desired alliance with Nepal (ibid: 530).

<sup>40</sup> One of the objectives of Cunningham's trip was to locate trade routes used by smugglers in the hope that the same routes could be accessed by the British. He mentions finding one of the principal routes used by the smugglers of pashmina between Rudok and Lahaul (Cunningham 1854: 219).

Kashmiri counterparts met them in Spitik or Leh (Petech 1977: 77).<sup>41</sup> In Ladakh most of this trade in pashmina from Western Tibet was controlled by a group of traders known as *mkhar tshong-pa* (palace traders), who received certain privileges, such as exemption from tax and homes in Rudok, in return for some service to the royal family.<sup>42</sup> The Kashmiri traders who came to Ladakh once a year for the purpose of purchasing pashmina were known as Tibet Baqal.<sup>43</sup>

While most of the attention of these pashmina traders was focused on Western Tibet, there was another group of smaller traders who purchased their pashmina from pashmina-growing areas within Ladakh, such as Rupshu.<sup>44</sup> These were not the palace traders, who went only to Western Tibet, but farmers from villages in Lower Ladakh and traders from Himachal. The quality of this pashmina was said to be inferior to that from Western Tibet and therefore little interest was shown by the palace traders in the fibre from these areas.<sup>45</sup> Local traders to Rupshu recall that just before the border

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<sup>41</sup> Petech states that under the Treaty of Tingmosgang, for the purposes of the wool trade, only four Kashmiri merchants were appointed, and they were settled at Spitik (1947: 191).

<sup>42</sup> In effect, there were eight families in Leh who were appointed as the palace traders: Relee, Shanku, Khalsawar, Sotay, Benares, Hangol, Gutu, and Gerapa (Ghani Sheikh n.d.: 2). The first seven of these families were Muslim, and the last was Buddhist. The Muslim traders were originally of Kashmiri origin, having migrated to Ladakh in the early seventeenth century and been given land to settle permanently in Leh by the King Jamyang Namgyal (ibid).

<sup>43</sup> Shahad Bhai, an Urdu teacher, informed me that the word Baqal is derived from Arabic and means trader (personal communication, Bombay, September 1996).

<sup>44</sup> Livestock for the meat shops in Leh was always purchased from these areas in the past, and this continues to be the practice today.

<sup>45</sup> Tonyot Shah, one of the last envoys on Ladakh's Lopchak Mission to Tibet, dismissed the region of Rupshu as being too close to Leh; therefore, how could its pashmina possibly be good?

between Ladakh and Tibet closed, in the early 1960s, a kilo of pashmina cost Rs.2.<sup>46</sup> In comparison at that time a kilo of pashmina from Western Tibet cost between Rs.10 to Rs.15. While the local farmers still sold their pashmina to Kashmir, traders from Himachal sold theirs either to Kashmir or to the weaving centres in Punjab. This trade between Lower Ladakh (or Sham) and areas within Ladakh's Changthang, such as Rupshu, is documented and still remembered by elders from both places. In a semi-fictional novel written by Ribbach, a missionary who lived in Ladakh from 1892 to 1914, the preparations made for the trading journey to Changthang are described:

“... when the fields were sown and the corn was sprouting out of the soil, the Dragshos family and their relatives in Teya-Tingmogang planned to make a trading expedition. They would exchange goods with the nomads of Changthang, ...” (1986: 144).

Grist mentions that each man took as many as twenty donkeys or more sheep loaded with their merchandise, and they would usually go in groups of ten traders and return in autumn with their loads (1985: 92-95). However, the bulk of Rupshu's wool and pashmina was picked up by the traders who came from Himachal, who regularly met at a place known as Dozum where an annual fair was held, usually in August.<sup>47</sup>

Cunningham was the first to write about this fair which was attended by shepherds and traders and held at a level spot near the bridge with the name of Patseo (1848: 214). Koelz also stopped here and he observed, “swarms of sheep and goats, on which the greatest part of the merchandise arrives, through the hill sides ...” (1931: 92-

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<sup>46</sup> Between the years 1992 to 1996, one pound sterling ranged in value from Rs.50 to Rs.55. In the past, weights were calculated in terms of *ba-ti*. However, the kilogram is widely used in Ladakh today and it is this measure I have referred to in the thesis. One *ba-ti* is approximately two kilograms.

<sup>47</sup> To Ladakhis this place is known as Dozum, and in Hindi it is Patseo. Both names refer to the term “stone bridge”. Today it is called Mandi Nagar.

93). Dainelli also mentions Dozum, and he wrote "it is here, in the summer, that the trade-caravans exchange their merchandise: the Changpa go no farther down, and the Lahulis go no farther up" (1933: 296). Further, he mentions that the traders from Himachal carry rice, sugar, and cheap cotton goods to Rupshu and bring back salt, wool, and pashmina (ibid: 294).

Apart from the lucrative pashmina trade that crossed Changthang, and equally important, was the salt trade from Tibet. Traditionally, Tibet has supplied most of the Himalayan region with salt. However, Field writes that it is extraordinary that not one of the countless political commentators has noticed the geo-political importance of salt throughout this salt-scarce region, because historically both the Tibetans and the East India Company have used salt as an indirect weapon to influence both trade and politics (1959:460-461). The trade in salt in Ladakh was such that Tibetan Changpa would bring it to Ladakh,<sup>48</sup> or the Changpa within Ladakh, from places such as Rupshu, would go to Tibet to collect salt. Each year, after New Year (*Lo-gsar*) the Rupshupa would make the journey to the salt lakes in Western Tibet.<sup>49</sup> Once back in Rupshu they would take this salt to trade in exchange for barley grain (*nas*) in Zanskar, as well as the fair at Dozum. Rupshu's salt did not stop in Zanskar, but eventually found its way as far as the Kashmir Valley and Skardu in Baltistan (Rizvi n.d.2: 4-5).

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<sup>48</sup> The fair at Chemdi in Ladakh is widely remembered for the presence of Changpa from Tibet who mainly brought salt to trade.

<sup>49</sup> The names of the salt lakes were given to me as Mindum and Kyeltse.

All trade along the Changthang suffered heavily after the extension of Communist China's rule over Tibet in 1950.<sup>50</sup> However, it continued to operate, albeit under strain, until it came to a standstill in 1959 following the flight of the Dalai Lama to India and the total occupation of Tibet by China (Warikoo 1994: 861). The Chinese wanted to control Western Tibet and made efforts to push into the north-eastern areas of Ladakh, first in 1956-57 and then again in 1962 (Fisher and Rose 1962: 28). Once China successfully achieved this it saw the end of Ladakh's trade with Western Tibet.

With the complete closure of the border between Western Tibet and Ladakh, the Kashmir shawl industry had to turn elsewhere for its raw material. They turned to the pashmina-producing areas within Ladakh, of which Rupshu was one, and had to make do with whatever amount of pashmina was produced there. The people involved in this trade soon adjusted to the changed circumstances and the pattern of trade that followed continued to have some resemblance to that observed in the past. Only Ladakhis, acting as middlemen, are allowed to directly purchase pashmina from these areas. Acting to some extent as their predecessors, the Tibet Baqals, had done, the Kashmiris come no further than Leh to pick up their supplies. While some of the

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<sup>50</sup> The Chinese occupation of Tibet had an adverse effect on the entire trans-border trade of the Himalayas, and in some areas the effect was traumatic. Events, similar to those taking place in Ladakh, also occurred in Nepal where Nepalese and Tibetan traders were no longer allowed to engage in border trade (see Fürer-Haimendorf 1978, Rauber 1981, Fisher 1990, Jest 1993, for similar accounts). The scene was also similar in the Garhwal and Kumaon regions of North India (see Brown 1984). Fürer-Haimendorf reports that one of the effects of the Sherpas' dwindling trade with Tibet has been a decrease in their import of Tibetan wool (1974: 104). As a result one rarely sees women weaving there today, and there is a shortage of warm, woollen cloth (ibid).

palace traders have continued with this trade, new contenders have also entered the market.' The present status of the pashmina trade is discussed in Chapter Nine.

One of the first effects of this increased demand for pashmina in Ladakh's Changthang, was a rise in its price. Whereas the highest price for the sale of pashmina from Western Tibet quoted for the period before 1962 was Rs.15 per kilogram, by 1970 the price of local pashmina had risen to Rs.300. The new wealth in Ladakh's Changthang was noticeable, and Tonyot Shah remarked:

"Those people from Rupshu they have a lot of money now, they were never very rich before even though they used to sell their sheep and goats, and pashmina. But now the border is closed and so everybody has to go to them. And so the price of their pashmina has gone up."

Ever since 1953 the Government of Jammu and Kashmir has attempted to control the pashmina trade and break this nexus between the Changpa, Ladakhi middlemen, and Kashmiri traders. They set up the Jammu and Kashmir Wool Board which via the Raw Pashmina Wool (Control) Order gave them the right to prescribe the price and also forbade the export of pashmina outside the State without prior permission (Rizvi n.d.1: 32).<sup>51</sup> Thus, licences were required to trade in pashmina. According to Dr Mohammed Deen Darokhan, a former Director of the Sheep Husbandry Department in Leh, the Wool Board was set up with the exclusive purpose of increasing the status of pashmina in Ladakh, since before this the price of pashmina was even lower than that of wool. The Wool Board would set the support price for pashmina and the

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<sup>51</sup> At around the same time the Ladakh Pashmina and Wool Syndicate was founded with a Rs.700,000 loan from the State government (Beek 1996: 237). This local organisation was formed with the purpose of helping the Changpas with their sale of wool and pashmina, but it soon failed because of charges of corruption and mismanagement by those in charge.

Changpa were told to sell only to those who gave them this, or a higher, price.

Initially, however, local traders were unable to meet the high prices quoted by the Wool Board and the Changpa began to sell their pashmina to the Wool Board.

However, Deen Khan from the Save the Children Fund (SCF) remembers that this trend did not last for long because the Changpa had problems realizing payments from the Wool Board:

“These were never made on time, and the Changpa were running from one government office to the other. They had to give bribes to the revenue officers in the Treasury to make them pay them on time. Frustrated and annoyed by the workings of the Wool Board, the Changpa reverted back to selling to the local traders, who at least kept their word when it came to making payments.”

Since then the Wool Board has been more or less obsolete and local traders, who are now in a position to quote higher prices, no longer perceive the Wool Board as a threat to their business because they are not able to match their prices. In 1986, under an order by Jagmohan, at that time the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, the operation of the Pashmina (Control) Order was suspended, licences were no longer required to trade in pashmina, and the free movement of pashmina was allowed. However, the export of raw pashmina is still not permitted.

The closure of the Ladakh-Tibet border not only affected trade in the region, but also led to the building of roads; the consequent introduction of vehicular traffic led in turn to the abandonment of the old trading routes. At the same time, ration depots were opened, stocked with foodgrains and sea salt brought up from the plains and sold at highly subsidized rates. The first of Rupshu's trading journeys to cease was the one to Tibet for salt. However, though they turned to salt-producing lakes

within Rupshu, they no longer felt the need to make the journey to the fair at Dozum, as foodgrains and other commodities now came to them via the ration trucks. The farmers from Lower Ladakh also gradually stopped coming to Rupshu, and the few that do, now make the journey by jeep. The trade with Zanskar was the last to stop and continued for another ten to fifteen years, ending as recently as the late eighties.<sup>52</sup>

The discussion on the previous literature and documentation on the subject of wool and weaving in Ladakh sets the background to this thesis, and the final section of this chapter turns to look at the field experience.

### 1.3 Inhabiting Rupshu

I lived in Rupshu for a total of twelve months between 1992 and 1995.<sup>53</sup> I did not do fieldwork in the conventional sense, i.e. I did not stay in the field for a concentrated period of time of a year or sixteen months. I chose to do my fieldwork in this manner for a number of reasons. The first is that weaving is a seasonal activity and largely takes place during the summer, usually beginning in May or June and ending by October or November. Further, all weaving is done outside the tent and therefore it is practically impossible to weave during winter when temperatures plunge

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<sup>52</sup> James Crowden, a researcher based in Zanskar, recalled that though the trade had already started dwindling in the eighties, the turning point came in 1987 when winter arrived earlier than expected. That year it suddenly snowed as the Rupshupa were leaving Zanskar with the result that most of their livestock perished. After this disaster they decided not to go to Zanskar any more as it was dangerous as well as futile now that they had the road (personal communication, Leh, August 1993).

<sup>53</sup> I returned briefly in 1996 for some final clarifications before the completion of this thesis.

to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The Rupshu remark that it is simply too cold for the hands to move at that time of the year. This is unlike spinning and twisting which can be done throughout the year. On the more personal side, I found the cold unbearable as by October the temperatures were already down to  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  and it was not unusual for it to snow even in June.

Furthermore, I was not new to Ladakh. I first went there in 1987 and stayed for six months during which time I taught at the Moravian Mission School and studied at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies. I returned again to do fieldwork in 1989 for my M.Phil thesis which was on village oracles and healing. In 1990 I spent four months in Leh, taking language lessons and talking with various people in connection with my intended work in Rupshu.<sup>54</sup>

In Rupshu I stayed with Nawang Tharchen and his younger brother Angchuk, their wife Tashi Zangmo, and five children.<sup>55</sup> Tashi Norbu, a medical assistant from the Leh Nutrition Project (LNP), introduced me to the family and requested Tharchen

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<sup>54</sup> I spent most of 1991 learning to weave in Bombay, while I waited for financial assistance towards my D.Phil to come through. I learned from the late Nelly Sethna, one of India's well-known contemporary weavers, and her assistant Roshan Mulla.

<sup>55</sup> Fraternal polyandry is commonly encountered in Tibet (Goldstein 1971a). It is also prevalent among people of Tibetan origin (Aziz 1978, Levine 1988), such as the Sherpas (Brower 1991), and other Himalayan groups (Berreman 1962). However, in Ladakh polyandry is in fact banned. In 1941 the Kashmir government passed the Polyandrous Marriages Act which formally outlawed polyandry in Ladakh (Bray 1991: 121). However, though the practice is on the decline today polyandry still continues in parts of Ladakh, and in 1994 there were eight fraternal polyandrous marriages in Rupshu.

to let me stay with them.<sup>56</sup> Though I had my own tent, pitched beside theirs, I spent most of the day in and around their tent, ate all my meals with them, and moved camp when they did. Camp sizes varied and though we usually lived with the whole camp consisting of about eighty tents, there were also periods when we would be ten or fifteen tents, and on one occasion we were just one of two tents. This meant that there were both lengths of time when I lived and associated with the entire encampment, and times when I interacted only with Tharchen's family.

Tharchen was in his early forties when I first met him, knowledgeable yet humble, and gentle. His father had died when he was very young, leaving him, the eldest son, to support a mother and eight brothers and sisters. Though his father's younger brother was also married to his mother, he left her and married a woman from Kharnak. The family was not well off and so Tharchen began to undertake small jobs, such as herding, stitching, and repairing horseshoes, to support his family. For these services he would be paid in cash or kind. As he and his brothers grew older, they all worked for periods of time in the army kitchens in Leh in return for a small income as well as a steady supply of food at home. It was also here that they learnt to speak Hindi.

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<sup>56</sup> The first year I stayed with the family I made monthly payments, because this was the arrangement Tashi Norbu set-up. However, this was not practised in the following years because Tharchen and his wife said I was like a member of their family now. I helped out in other ways and always brought rations into the tent, helped with medical expenses, contributed towards Tharchen's eldest son's monastic studies, and sponsored one of his younger son's schooling in Leh.

Tharchen is a religious man of sorts and would tell me that in most ways he tried to live as a lama (*bla-ma*); "See, I never wear black, I always wear red, maroon, or yellow. A lama's colours. Also I never drink alcohol." His name was originally Dorje Gyaltzen until he suffered a prolonged illness some fifteen years ago, which was cured by a Tibetan lama. The lama then gave him the new name Nawang Tharchen, and he claims never to have fallen ill since that day.<sup>57</sup> Tharchen prays for an hour, morning and night, and would often say that if he did not have a family to look after he would have gone and joined the monastery. Over winter, when there is less work to do, he usually goes into retreat for two to three months. In the absence of a lama in Rupshu, Tharchen often officiates as one and he recites the necessary litany at weddings and horse-races, does divination, and bestows names on new-born babies. Tharchen's spirituality is said to endow him with the power of healing, and people often come to him when they are ill. He has also acquired the reputation of being a proficient craftsman and highly skilled tailor, and is one of the few men in Rupshu who can do appliqué work, which he learnt from a Tibetan. Tharchen regularly gets orders from people to make them hats for an upcoming wedding, help stitch their tents, or carve prayer stones when a member of their family dies. Consequently, Tharchen plays a pivotal role in life in Rupshu and is essential to people there because they depend on him to fulfil a variety of their needs. Further, he is well-respected because of his religious learning. Thus, Tharchen's network stretched throughout Rupshu, and this gave me access to several families and events there.

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<sup>57</sup> It is common for a person to have two formal names when they have suffered from serious illnesses, especially as children, and the old personality of the child is exchanged for a new one, more compatible with its life force, *srog* (Aggarwal 1994: 76).

Angchuk, on the other hand, does not have quite the same versatility as his older brother, and relations between the two are often tense. Tharchen would often complain and say that Angchuk was lazy and spent most of the day sleeping. Had he been a good man and a hard worker, Tharchen would have left the tent and joined the monastery. However, he did not think Angchuk was capable of the responsibility of taking care of everything, including the children. Angchuk is also notorious for walking out on the family, for months at a stretch, after fights with Tharchen and their wife.

Angchuk's own position within the family seemed ambivalent, and it was clear that he had very little say in its affairs. These frustrations of his would occasionally surface, and once when I asked if he would join in the horse-race, he replied, "Probably not, it all depends on the boss. He owns everything, I have nothing. One day I'll go away from here and ..." - he stopped in mid-sentence: Tharchen had appeared. At one point I enquired from Tharchen if Angchuk had ever wanted to marry his own wife and have his own tent. Tharchen had laughed and said sarcastically, "No, Angchuk is like a girl. He's too weak and has no guts. He's also lazy and would never survive on his own. Now he's too old, so who will marry him?" I also observed that Angchuk is made to do all the "polluting" work for the family. This largely included killing and castrating livestock. He also has no control over the family's finances, as it was Tharchen who managed all the selling of their pashmina, wool, and livestock.

Tashi Zangmo, or Ama (*a-ma*, mother), as I fondly referred to her, is the centre of all activity in the tent. She moves with a quickness and agility that seldom give away her tiredness. "There is always so much to do," she once told me, "how can I stop and rest?" Ama is hard-working and exacting, with a great sense of humour. She also has her foul moods, during which she swears at her husbands and pinches or throws stones at her children. I ensured I kept out of her way on these occasions.

Being a single woman in Rupshu made my position with Ama ambiguous and it probably also made it difficult for her to explain my presence in her home to other women in Rupshu. Her sexual banter was fairly prolific, and often she would tease me in the presence of other women. Her jokes would vary from a comparison of the size of male genitalia in Bombay and Rupshu, to what it was I did sitting with Tharchen in the tent the whole day. Once when Ama's seven-year-old son's pants fell off and I offered to tie the belt up because it was snowing outside and cold, she loudly remarked, "Why are you shy? What are you scared of his little thing for? Your husband is fat and so he must be big. Why are you afraid of this little guy?" She would also often ask, "Why don't you marry Tharchen?" If I protested and said, "but I already have a husband," she would reply, "what's one, you can have two!" Her repeated attempts at shocking me are reminiscent of Caplan's experience among Swahili women, where their determination to astound her with graphic details was probably one way they had of coping with an anomaly such as herself - "an unmarried woman in her early twenties" (1988: 11).

At first Ama could not understand what it was I was doing there. Once when I recorded songs and then played them back in the tent she snapped, "Oh, she has time to waste taping songs, what else has she got to do here?" But gradually as Ama and I got to know each other better, her sarcasm abated and so did her derision for my work. In her own way she showed me kindness and patience as I fumbled through the language, became responsive to my work, and began to actively participate in it by keeping me informed about activities in various parts of the camp. She still jokes occasionally about Tharchen and me, but now it is more with reference to when I first came - I suppose I have stopped being a threat to her.

Fights between the three of them are not infrequent, and they are usually between Ama and either of her husbands against the other. Ama and Tharchen would often complain that Angchuk was idle and did not help much around the tent. But Ama and Angchuk also resented the work that Tharchen did for other families in Rupshu, especially when he did not get paid for it. Angchuk would retaliate by saying that Tharchen worked for others but never did any work at home. Tharchen's youngest brother, Skarma, was quite poor, and Tharchen often helped him out by giving him food, such as an extra sack of barley or a packet of butter. He did this on the sly and was always worried that if Ama or Angchuk found out they would be angry with him.

Tharchen, Angchuk, Ama and their children constituted most of my social world in Rupshu. They were my centre of learning - the perpetual sources of support and encouragement during my time there. I once asked Tharchen if he got tired of all

the questions I asked, and he replied, "But not before you get tired of asking all your questions." After them came their extended circle of relations in Rupshu and Leh, who were all my friends, teachers, and informants (see Family Tree, Appendix 3). Since, like all anthropologists, I spent a great deal of time writing, this made other people in the tent curious. Skarma once commented:

"Why do you always write so much? Every time I see you you are writing, tell me what are you writing about? What are they going to give you when you finish, a *kha-btags* (ceremonial white scarf)? That's what they give our lamas when they complete their religious studies."

I do realize that most of my information came from Tharchen and his family members, especially his mother, who were all actively involved in my work. Clifford points out that while doing fieldwork it is important not to mistake our informants' voices for "cultural truths"; we need to realize that what they say are circumstantial responses to the ethnographer's presence and questioning (1986: 107). Aware of the danger, I attempted to speak with as many people in Rupshu as possible on similar themes. Some of these discussions were held as formal interviews, while others were casual conversations. While most of the young men in Rupshu could speak Hindi, the women and older men could not. Tharchen accompanied me to all interviews and translated when it was necessary. He would also add his own opinions later. I also conducted interviews in Leh with government representatives, non-government organisations, former traders and present pashmina contractors, and weavers. These interviews were usually held in English or Urdu (the official language of Jammu and Kashmir). This enabled me to gain a sense of the larger picture of weaving and trade in pashmina and wool in Ladakh, and of Rupshu's place within this.

To others in Rupshu I was initially a vague persona. Behind my back I was called Tharchen's *chun-ma* (younger wife), as I found out quite by coincidence one day when some children were gathered outside the schoolmaster's tent. "*Chun-ma, chun-ma, you are Tharchen's chun-ma,*" they cried out to me. I turned to the schoolmaster and asked him what it was they were saying. He replied, somewhat self-consciously, that they were calling me Tharchen's younger wife. Their parents were never quite so direct in my presence though they would ask, somewhat derisively, if Tharchen was my "good friend" and what it was we did spending so much time together. Ama would say that they were just jealous because everyone thought that I was giving them a lot of money and presents. In their own way, Tharchen and Ama were also a little possessive of me and inquisitive of my movements. On my return from other people's tents I would be questioned as to where I had been, what had we talked about, and what had they given me to eat. Ama would ask if they had gossiped about her, and if they had said any bad things about their family?

As happens to most anthropologists in the field it was not long before my continued presence in Rupshu was questioned. One afternoon, a few weeks after I first arrived, Tharchen returned to the tent looking very worried and said that people had been asking him who I was and why I was staying with his family for so long. They wanted to know what my real work was, and insinuated that perhaps I was a spy. Further they claimed that I did not look like an Indian, as no person from "down" (as the plains people are referred to in Ladakh) would stay in Rupshu for so long. The questioning, Tharchen related, was instigated by the trader from Manali, Nawang Dorje. He had said that no girl from Bombay would ever come and stay here for so

long.<sup>58</sup> The rest of the people were in consensus with Nawang since he was the most travelled of all present, and had been to Bombay once himself.

Explaining one's reasons for staying can always be complex, and according to Cohen many anthropologists with fieldwork experience cope with this aggravated sense of self-consciousness by resorting to all sorts of more or less honourable devices (1989: 1). The fact that I had a permit from the District Commissioner's office in Leh that allowed me to stay in Rupshu, a restricted area, seemed to support the fact that I must be Indian. Otherwise how could I have got by the check-post at Upshi? At the same time I knew I did not fit their stereotypical image of a woman from "down", especially since their contact had been limited to Indians they had seen in Leh, such as army officers' wives and film heroines, nurses and the occasional tourist who passed through Rupshu. During the course of the same conversation with Tharchen, Skarma remarked:

"But why aren't you like all the other tourists who come through here? Everyone wants to know why you're not the same. They stay for a few days, take a lot of photographs, and buy up all our old things."

I explained that I was a student (*slob-phrug*), and had come to learn and write about their way of life. I wanted to record their old stories (*bdan-don*), and songs (*glu*). In

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<sup>58</sup> Nawang was at first hostile towards me and responsible for inciting some of the people in Rupshu against me, and so initially I tended to avoid him. Though his nephew would often come and talk to me, Nawang would stay away. Watching me return to Rupshu each year and seeing my friendships grow with people there he began to be congenial. He was also quite close to Tharchen and I discerned he held a certain amount of respect for him. In retrospect, Nawang probably saw me as a threat as he was the only outsider who stayed for lengths of time in Rupshu. Therefore, who was I to stay longer? With all the uncertainty in the pashmina business, Nawang may have also thought I was a prospective buyer and thus his competitor. There had once been an individual from Bombay who had come to buy pashmina from Rupshu, but no one was able to tell me more about him.

addition I was interested in learning to weave, and knowing about their old trade routes to Tibet, Zanskar, and Himachal. The question that invariably followed from this would be: for whom was I writing? Many people thought that it must be for the government, and asked if I would tell the officials about their grievances and how hard life was for them.

I also began fieldwork in the thick of a confrontation between the Buddhists and Muslims in Ladakh. Since 1989 the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) had been calling for separation from the state of Jammu and Kashmir and demanding that Ladakh should come under direct administration of the central government at Delhi. Although Ladakh was by far the largest district in the State in terms of area, its population was small and it had only two seats in the Kashmir State Assembly (Bray 1991: 123). There had been a spate of violent clashes between the Buddhists and the State police. The LBA had also expressed its resentment towards Muslim Ladakhis, alleging that the State government favoured, patronised and indulged them over the Buddhists in Ladakh.<sup>59</sup> In retaliation, the LBA had called for a social and economic boycott throughout Ladakh, directing Buddhists to cease all associations with Muslims. The LBA had also begun a programme of social reform in the area. Their policies included an end to the custom of polyandry and encouraged Buddhist women to have more children.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "It was claimed that Muslims had been given a disproportionate number of government jobs because of their shared religious affiliation with Muslim officials in Kashmir" (Bray 1991: 127).

<sup>60</sup> Sridhar Kaul, a Kashmiri Hindu, who had embraced Buddhism in 1934 was one of the founders of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (the predecessor of the LBA). He was a reformist and promoted the view that polyandry was wrong because

With a Bengali name like Monisha I had presumed that I could get away unnoticed in a predominantly Buddhist populated area. However, during the course of the same conversation to determine who I was, I was also asked about my religious background and it was suggested that perhaps I was from *Kha-cul* (Kashmir), because I sometimes wore a *phiren* (Urdu for Kashmiri-style poncho) and therefore must be Muslim. I was emphatically told that if I was a Muslim I could not stay in Rupshu, because the boycott prevented them from allowing Muslims into Buddhist areas. In fact, Tharchen said that some of the men had threatened to beat me up and throw me out if I was a Muslim. In the face of so much hostility and to avert any danger to myself I tried reasoning with them and began by saying: were Muslims bad people? Were there not Muslims in government and non-government organisations, such as LNP and SCF who regularly came to Rupshu and did good work there, especially medical work? In spite of the boycott, they had not been stopped from coming to Rupshu. I attempted to list the Muslims they had contact with, but though they agreed with me, they reiterated that if I was a Muslim I would have to go. I was told that there was a large group of LBA activists in Rupshu who were determined to implement the organisation's policies. I realized they were scared, not so much by my presence as of the LBA. I then mentioned that five years ago I had taken Buddhist vows under Drukchen Rinpoche and that he had given me the name Jigmet Geki

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it was immoral in itself and because it kept the Buddhist population down (Shakspo 1988: 34). Taking his lead, the LBA attempted to dissolve all existing polyandrous marriages in Ladakh, and prevent new ones from occurring. The LBA had once approached Tharchen, insisting that Angchuk should have his own wife. He had replied that they had been living like this for over twenty years and were not going to give it up so easily, and anyway they were old now. The LBA then threatened to fine and ostracize them from the community. Neither actually happened.

Choden. This seemed to pacify them somewhat, but then they enquired what I had been before this? I disregarded that last question and just declared that my husband was a Hindu. This went a long way towards resolving the matter, because they figured that I had to be Hindu to marry one. Soon after this there was the annual prayer ceremony in Rupshu at which Drukchen Rinpoche presided. His presence and my familiarity with him, and close contact with his lamas, helped defuse the situation. And gradually the questions ceased.

My "opening" remarks were, in the words of Georges and Jones, "a strategic combination of revelations and concealments" (1980: 54). I had stated that I had a Buddhist name and that I was married to a Hindu. Both statements were factually correct, but I was also concealing the fact that I had been born into a Muslim family, for fear that "Muslim" was a marked category among Buddhists in Ladakh, and might affect how people responded to me. Though I am aware of the ways in which I fell short of complete honesty, I was not prepared to give up my research because of religious sentiments. I continue to feel uneasy about the religious dichotomy, and often wonder what others would have done in my place or how far one can or should go in explaining oneself in the field. Hastrup describes fieldwork as a personal adventure, belonging somewhere between autobiography and anthropology (1989: 9-10). This implies that the ethnographer is a person with a distinct biography, and therefore it is difficult to separate the personal from the professional when it comes to the actual work in the field (ibid). In retrospect, I realize that some of my perceptions were coloured by my personal circumstances and this had certain repercussions with respect to my work. Religion was a delicate subject which I evaded during the

boycott, because quite often conversations would turn to myself. I also avoided talking about their contact with Muslims. The other fact I concede is that I did put Tharchen and his family at risk on my account. From then on, every time I went to a new tent or saw a new face, or travelled to another place, introductions on my behalf would have to be made. I now left these entirely to Tharchen.

Towards the end of 1993 the LBA called off the boycott, and in the following years I felt more comfortable in discussing some of these issues with them, the main one being the trade in pashmina between Rupshu and the Muslim Ladakhis, which had been suspended as a result of the boycott (cf. section 9.3). Although the boycott has been lifted by the LBA, I have stopped trying to explain my religious background. I usually do not respond when asked: what religion are you, are you Hindu? My silence is usually taken as consent. It is easier, simpler, and less complicated.

To Ladakhis from Leh and neighbouring villages, Rupshu appears a desolate and remote place. I was often asked why I wanted to go there, and was told that there was nothing there and that the people were very dirty.<sup>61</sup> There were no vegetables there, no fruits, and what would I do on my own? However, they added, there was

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<sup>61</sup> Just before my first trip to Rupshu, Tashi Cho, a nurse with LNP, said she had two pieces of advice to give me. The first was that I must never lean back against the woven cloths draped over the sides of the tent because then I would surely pick up lice, and the second was to be careful of their dogs. It is interesting to note that when traders from Sham would make the trading journey to places like Rupshu they would ask monks to prepare special amulets to protect them from the hefty mastiffs (Ribbach 1986: 145).

plenty of meat and milk there so perhaps it was not such a bad place.<sup>62</sup> Grist makes an interesting observation when she states that in Ladakh the Changpa are looked down upon and in some ways considered as being a lower class as a result of their greater involvement with the slaughter of animals (1985: 99). At the same time, Changpa are also envied by other Ladakhis because they are said to earn a lot of cash from their sale of pashmina, something a farmer could seldom aspire to.<sup>63</sup> In the first two years of my fieldwork there was no local transport to Rupshu, and I would occasionally get a ride with LNP or hire a jeep. The taxi rank at Leh never knew how much to bill me, since Rupshu was not a standard tourist route. This changed after 1994 and now that the area is open to tourists, the rate card has a round trip which includes Kharnak-Rupshu-Tsomoriri, and my fare has tripled.

Apart from LNP doctors and fieldworkers, the other outsider who is a constant, though infrequent, presence in Rupshu is the schoolmaster, Sonam. My presence baffled Sonam and he would make several trips to my tent to keep me company, convinced that I must be bored and lonely. "How can you possibly bear to live here with these people?" he once asked me. He was certain I was employed by the government, and was surprised to learn that I had come out of my own choice. Sonam was from Stok, a village very close to Leh, and told me that the first day he

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<sup>62</sup> It was interesting to observe that when I did bring meat back to Leh and gave it to Buddhist friends they would not eat it because it was not *halal* (Urdu for the Muslim way of cutting meat by slitting the throat and draining the blood), which they said they preferred, it was cleaner.

<sup>63</sup> It could be that attitudes in Ladakh are changing towards the Changpa after the value of their pashmina has increased and that Grist's observations refer to an earlier period.

reached Rupshu he cried and wondered where in the world the Education Department had sent him. On his transfer from Rupshu in 1993, Sonam suggested that two teachers be sent to Rupshu instead of one so that they could keep each other company.<sup>64</sup> His suggestion has since been approved and implemented.

Other frequent visitors to Rupshu are the traders from Manali, Nawang Dorje being the most consistent of these. He is an elderly man with many friends in Rupshu and an understanding of the place, unlike his nephew who accompanies him and whom he is training to take over the business. Nawang Tsering is young and has little of his uncle's sensitivity, besides he laments that he misses the life in Manali. He often complained about Rupshu and would say that the people there were filthy; he wondered how they could possibly never have a bath in their whole lives. He mocked them and insisted that even when they blew their noses they wiped the snot on their clothes instead of throwing it on the ground - "They treat the ground as if it is precious or something." He reproached them for spending all their money on religious activities, which he scorned and claimed that they never performed from the heart, and then coming to his uncle to borrow more money when what they had was finished. He concluded by saying, "I don't know if I'll come here any more, I'm tired of this place, I know my fathers have been coming here for generations, but I don't think I want to come here any more."

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<sup>64</sup> The other reason for his suggestion was that since this is a mobile school, the schoolmaster is always required to move with the chief. However, there are times in the year when the entire camp does not live together and then only those children who live in the vicinity of the chief's tent are able to attend school. Sonam felt that if there were two teachers one could stay near the chief's tent, and the other could move to another camp. It is interesting to note that by 1996 Rupshu had three teachers.

Repeated trips to Rupshu, on an annual basis, enriched my field experience and have had their own appeal. For Rupshu it has served to show that I am committed, as each year I returned in spite of their reservations. This was reflected most in my relationship with Tharchen and his family. When I returned to Rupshu after the bomb blasts in Bombay in 1993, they were all a little surprised to see me, and said that they thought I was not coming back. They said they heard all about the bombs on the radio and Ama had cried, certain that I must have died. "Then Tharchen said his prayers and did *mo* (divination)," Ama related, "and we knew that you were still alive." Further, Tharchen was convinced that because I was married I would not return to Rupshu each year because my husband would not let me. Angchuk was perhaps the most indifferent about my comings and goings, and he said, "When you left we remembered your big eyes and fair skin. The family thought about you for a week, and then well, we went back to our lives."

In the long run it is important to know how Tharchen and his family first viewed and related to me. As we got closer and inhibitions dropped, Tharchen told me that he had been reluctant to let me stay with his family, and it was only because Tashi Norbu from LNP had requested him that he agreed. He had his own reservations and these ranged from "how will we feed her, we are not a rich family," to "we have so many children and they make a lot of noise, she will get disturbed." His main concern was that I would not be able to cope, especially when they moved camp, which involved getting up as early as three or four in the morning. Another anxiety had been food, but when they saw that I also contributed by bringing rations into the tent their worries were allayed. They continue to complain that I have too

much luggage, but now they try to accommodate me. Ama comments that I change my clothes too often, and that I wash too much. But over the years we have come closer, and grown receptive to each other's temperaments.

Over the last five years I have seen Tharchen's family grow and in small ways I have been involved in that growth. On our trip to Duppock Gompa in 1993, Tharchen had requested the Rinpoche to take his son Norgey as a lama. In 1994 he was ordained and his new name is Thinley Zangpo. Rinchen, Tharchen's only daughter, at first wanted to be a nun: she used to say, "A-ba (father) cut my hair, give me *jo-mo's* (nun's) clothes to wear," and would come crying to my tent because Angchuk would not allow her to become one; but now she says she would like to get married. Norbu has successfully completed two years at school in Leh, and his parents are proud of him. Tharchen now talks about giving his two younger sons, Chogyal and Tandin, to the monastery, but his wife is not convinced. Tharchen and Angchuk have had no major fights for some time now, and the latter has had no reason to leave. On our last trip to Leh in 1995, Tharchen got himself a sewing machine which means that he will be doing much more stitching. Now that the area has opened to tourists, he is convinced that with the sewing machine he can stitch a lot of things to sell to them.

To have someone living with them who has come all the way from Bombay never ceased to amaze the family. Tharchen, however, explained it in terms of a karmic link and said that I must have been his sister in a previous life. He is convinced that otherwise we would never have met under these circumstances in this

lifetime. Tharchen now wants to come and visit me in Bombay, though he is apprehensive about how he will cope with the heat.

Without the assistance, support, and kindness of Tharchen and his family members none of what appears on the following pages would have been possible. It is to them that I remain indebted.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CREATION OF RUPSHU AND THE CYCLE OF ANNUAL MIGRATION: LEGENDS, HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS, AND PRESENT PRACTICES

“When I was born we were all living right here. I suppose this has been going on for years. Our people are born here, they have children and their children have children. They become old and then they die here. It has been going on for as long back as the first person was here...,”

Meme Sonam Angchuk related the above as we sat around the fire one night exchanging stories about the creation of Rupshu and Bombay.

The inhabitants of Rupshu claim that their history begins with the arrival of Pulon Rigpachen (Pu-lon Rig-pa-chen).<sup>1</sup> A popular narrative of theirs relates how he created the first men and women.<sup>2</sup> It is said that he first made a man out of gold (*ser*), but when he called out to him the man did not reply. Then Pulon Rigpachen made a man out of silver (*ngul*), but again when he called out to him the man said nothing. Finally Pulon Rigpachen made a man out of mud (*thal-ba*) and when he called out to him the man replied. “This is how man first came to be,” Meme Sonam Angchuk related, “and we are all descendants of that man. How do we know this? Look, if I

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<sup>1</sup> Rigpachen means great knowledge. However, no one was able to tell me what Pulon meant and I have not been able to find out elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Tibetan mythology contains a number of beings who can be called the First Man, and in general these First Men are just names, rather than characters (Allen 1976: 71).

scratch the skin on my arm like this, you see a pale brown colour underneath. This is the mud from which we were created."<sup>3</sup>

It is commonly believed that the greater part of Ladakh and Tibet, in the most ancient period, was inhabited by nomads.

"Philological reasons compel us to believe that in the times of Herodotus ... an ancient tribe of Tibetan nomads tended their herds on the plains and hills of Western Tibet. Their life probably in no way differed from that of Tibetan nomads of the present day. They lived in tents of yak-hair, on the produce of their numerous herds of yaks, goats and sheep ..." (Francke 1907: 17).<sup>4</sup>

According to Snellgrove and Richardson, the origin of the Tibetan people is generally sought among the nomadic, non-Chinese Ch'iang tribes, who herded sheep and cattle in eastern Central Asia up to the furthest north-west borders of China many centuries before the Christian era (1968: 21). They, like Francke, assert that the most obvious part of this legacy is the large number of true nomads surviving today, depending entirely on their flocks of sheep and goats and their herds of yaks (ibid). Thus, it is claimed that at one time all the people living on the Changthang were nomadic pastoralists, but while it is not known when nomadic pastoralism first emerged there,

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<sup>3</sup> "Myths of creation all over the world render the notion of mortals being fashioned out of clay" (Shah and Sen 1992: 132). Further, the Hindi word for clay (*maati*) also means man or flesh (ibid). In a variation of this story collected by Dracott in Simla, in the beginning of this century, man is said to be created from ashes, and "even to this day, if a man should scratch himself, a line of white ash of which he was made is seen" (1992: 5).

<sup>4</sup> Used in a broad cultural sense the term Tibet covered a far wider area than was ever subject to the administration at Lhasa; Ladakh, the most western of the nations of the Tibetan cultural world, was often referred to as Western Tibet (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: xii).

Goldstein and Beall state that it is doubtful that large-scale nomadic pastoralism was possible prior to the domestication of the wild yak (1990: 41).<sup>5</sup>

Anthropological literature traditionally deals with two kinds of nomadism: pastoral nomadism and the nomadism of hunting and gathering peoples which are both understood as ideal types (Salzman 1980a: 5).<sup>6</sup> Changthang's nomads, who practice nomadic pastoralism, are included in the first type. Although the term nomad and its derivatives have been applied to all groups who employ spatial mobility, it is generally accepted that nomadism is not the same in various civilizations and can occur as an answer to both economic and political pressures (Gellner 1973: 8-9). Therefore, nomadism can now no longer be seen as a response to the physical environment alone, but to the "total environment" (Rao 1987: 3).

Goldstein and Beall define nomadic pastoralists as people who subsist by raising livestock and move with their herds to different pastures during the year, normally living in tents (1990: 12). In Ladakh's Changthang, both nomadic populations and those practising agriculture exist with the latter shifting between a

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<sup>5</sup> However, Ekval had earlier suggested that the domestication of the yak came later, as "there is some evidence that the Tibetans possessed common cattle before the yak, and that such possession suggested, or stimulated, domestication of the latter" (1968: 11).

<sup>6</sup> Another group of nomads are the peripatetics who combine "spatial mobility and non-subsistent commercialism at the economic level with endogamy at the social level" (Rao 1987: 3). Some anthropologists have also used the term "nomadic traders", where trade and not pastoralism is their full-time "profession" (Rauber 1981: 143). An example of the former could be the gypsies.

pastoral and an agricultural role.<sup>7</sup> The Changpa themselves see this contrast, and are quick to differentiate and state that they are not all nomads. They emphasize that the term Changpa, apart from defining one who lives in the north, also refers to one who owns sheep and goats. Therefore, though everyone who lives on the Changthang is a pastoralist, they are not all nomads. There are Changpa who have a fixed village space and practise agriculture. Further, a distinction is made between those Changpa who have fields and those who do not. The former are also known as Rongpa, where *rong* refers to one who has a field, and the latter are Changpa.<sup>8</sup> A village in Ladakh is *yul*, and the Rongpa are said to live in *rong yul*, while the Changpa inhabit *byang yul*. Thus, the Rongpa practise a mixed economy based on a combination of agriculture and pastoralism. The entire population does not move with the herds, but only a section and this is mainly the young men and women. Thus, in the entire Changthang today, the only group of Changpa who are in a sense "pure" nomads are those from Rupshu.<sup>9</sup> They are the only ones who do not practise agriculture, continue to live in

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<sup>7</sup> Most writers on the Changthang have presumed that all Changpa in Ladakh are nomads: "The Chang-pa of Ladakh, ... continue to lead a nomadic lifestyle that differs little from that of their forefathers, moving their animals from one pasture to another" (Commonwealth Secretariat Report 1993: 1).

<sup>8</sup> In Ladakh *rong* refers to a deep gorge and not to a field. However, in Tibet *rong* refers to areas within which agriculture can be practised (Downs and Ekvall 1965: 179). The Rupshupa use the term to refer both to the Changpa who practise agriculture, as well as those who live along the Indus valley in Changthang.

<sup>9</sup> When talking about Changpa in Ladakh, those from Rupshu, Kharnak, and Korzok are often put together and it is said that they are all nomads. However, differences are evident between the three: both the Kharnakpa and the Korzokpa practise agriculture (Korzok's fields are said to be among the highest in the world), and for the most part of the winter the Kharnakpa live in houses at Dat. Small houses are also present at a few other campsites in Kharnak. A rejoinder to this could be that the Rupshupa have small rooms at Thugje and Noruchen. However, these rooms are specifically used to store provisions, and they rarely live in them. When they camp at these sites the practice usually followed is to pitch the tent up alongside their room.

tents during the entire year, and have no fixed village space to which they return to periodically.

This chapter begins with a look at the mythological creation of Rupshu. Though a large part of this is attributed to Pulon Rigpachen, the intervention of another person, Yulsa Gespo (Yul-sa Rges-po), is also acknowledged. The first section of this chapter describes their contributions to the founding of Rupshu. However, yet another figure, Jang Gyapo (Jang Rgyal-po), is also recognised for his part in the establishment of Rupshu, and the second part of this chapter pertains to him. It presents his arrival from Tibet to Rupshu and the building of the monastery at Korzok. The chosen site is said to be an anthropomorphic vision of the land of Rupshu, as the monastery is conceived as being in the navel of the goddess Dolma.<sup>10</sup> Jang Gyapo and his heirs became the rulers of Rupshu, and they bore the title of the Rupshu Goba.<sup>11</sup> For almost six hundred years his family ruled over Rupshu, but as recently as the late forties their power began to decline. The events that led to this and the subsequent split within Rupshu are discussed here, leading up to matters relevant to Rupshu today. This chapter closes with an outline of the present route of migration followed in Rupshu, briefly mentioning the changes that have occurred there. However, all moves continue to be based on the availability, or lack of availability, of grass and water for the sheep and goats.

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<sup>10</sup> Dolma, also known as Tara, is the Tibetan Goddess of Mercy.

<sup>11</sup> *Go-ba* refers to a chief. However, the word may also be used as a title and this is usually when the position is hereditary. At other times, there have been chiefs who have held the post for several years at a stretch, and so they have appended the word to their name or the name of the village they are chief of. A current example is the Thiksey Goba, who has been chief of his village for over thirty years.

## 2.1 The Draining of Tso Kar

Pulon Rigpachen, along with Yulsa Gespo, is said to have been responsible for the creation of Rupshu. In fact, the Rupshupa profess that Pulon Rigpachen, apart from creating men and women, established the whole world within which Rupshu exists. He created the mountains around them, and gave them their sheep, goats, horses, and yaks. He taught them how to herd livestock, construct tents, and make the loom. Everything they have and know about is attributed to him.<sup>12</sup> They claim that he came when nothing was there and taught them everything they know today. To some people Pulon Rigpachen is a god who came in the guise of a lama, to others he is just an ordinary man who had been ordained.<sup>13</sup> Though his antecedents remain disputed, the Rupshupa unanimously acknowledge that he had been there right from the beginning.

While local knowledge attributes the creation of everything within Rupshu to Pulon Rigpachen, there is yet another account which mentions the subsequent

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<sup>12</sup> All questions concerning the origins of certain objects or pieces of information were regularly met with the same reply: "Pulon Rigpachen showed us," or "Pulon Rigpachen told us how."

<sup>13</sup> Nawang Pema, the head lama at Korzok Gompa, said that he was an emanation of Chenrezig (supreme Protector and patron deity of Tibet), who came into the world in the guise of a minister (*blon-po*). On the other hand, Aba Palle said he had heard of a Lonpo Rigpachen who was a great learned man and wondered if they could be the same person. He is believed to have lived in a village near Mulbeg, in Lower Ladakh, probably before or around the same time as the building of Alchi Gompa. Snellgrove and Skorupski suggest that Alchi may have been constructed around the eleventh or twelfth century (1977: 79). When Lonpo Rigpachen was young he studied in Tibet, and it is likely that on his journey back to Ladakh he travelled through Rupshu and taught people there; perhaps that is how they remember him.

appearance of Yulsa Gespo and the draining of the lake Tso Kar.<sup>14</sup> It is claimed that at one time the entire area of Tso Kar was covered with water, and the lake Tsomoriri did not exist at all.

“It was as if Tsomoriri were Tso Kar,” Tharchen commented, “Yulsa Gespo drained the lake to give us a place to live. He did this because we were good to him and the people at Korzok were not, and so he liked us.”

Accounts of the draining and flooding of lakes by celestial beings are not unusual in the Himalayas. The Tibetans also believe that their land was once covered by a large sea or lake, whose waters receded because of divine assistance (Stein 1972: 37-8). The history of Achinathang, a village in Lower Ladakh, also commences with the flooding of land by the waters that swept through the terrain from Lamayuru during the time of the Kashmiri Buddhist saint Naropa, A.D. 956-1027 (Aggarwal 1994: 53-54). Allen discusses whether local topography and myths of drained lakes relate to each other, and suggests that the best argument in favour of this point of view is in instances where the last line of the story is: “And that is why the landscape is as it is” (n.d.). In the case of the draining of Tso Kar, though this is not the last line of the story as I was given it, I was always told that it was because of the draining of the lake that the Rupshupa were given a place to live in the valley.

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<sup>14</sup> All government records and most previous literature on the area have given the spelling of the lake as Tso Kar (*mtsho-dkar*). This has led many people to refer to the lake as “White Lake” (Cunningham 1854: 140, Francke 1910: 61). However, the Rupshupa said that they never referred to the lake by that name and it was only because everyone else called it this that they also began to do so. There are two lakes in the area, and according to them they distinguished between the two lakes by calling them fresh water lake (*slam-mtsho*), and salt water lake (though salt water is known as *tshwa-chu*, the lake is called *dug-mtsho*). The name Tso Kar came about as the result of the word they used to refer to the path between the two lakes, which is *mtsho-gar*. However, this thesis follows the convention and refers to the lake as Tso Kar.

While some people said Yulsa Gespo was a lama, according to Nawang Pema he was not a human but a being who inhabits the world of supernatural deities and spirits. He generally lives in the mountains, and cannot be seen by humans. He is said to see what good or bad things people do, and then respond depending on their respective actions. A person who does a good deed is rewarded, and one who is bad will be severely punished. The narrative below illustrates this.<sup>15</sup>

Yulsa Gespo took the form of a poor, old man and decided to go to Korzok because there was a *zhabs-bro* (song and dance) going on there. He very much wanted to join in the dancing, but none of the girls would give him their hand or play with him. Instead they made fun of him because he was dirty and poor, and he smelt a lot. At this he got very annoyed and thought that these girls are very rude. There was only one girl there who was nice to him, and gave him some food to eat.

He left Korzok and went to Rupshu. When he reached Tso Kar, he saw that there was also a *zhabs-bro* going on there and decided to join in. The girls gave him their hands, and they all danced and played with him. Yulsa Gespo was happy. Then he thought to himself and said, I must teach those girls at Korzok a lesson.

It is said that at that time there was a huge lake at Tso Kar. There was so much water that this entire valley was covered in it. Yulsa Gespo swallowed up all this water and started to walk towards Korzok. At Polo Konka he turned around to see what he had done and he laughed at the thought of his action. His nose itched and suddenly he sneezed. Some water came out from his nostrils and formed the two small lakes that are at Tso Kar today. One is fresh water, the other salt.

As Yulsa Gespo walked on his way he got tired and thirsty, and decided to stop for a rest. He made some tea, and as he was pouring it into his cup some of the tea spilt on to the ground. This formed the lake, Khajang Kuru.

Finally he reached Korzok. He searched for the only girl there who had been good to him and told her that her uncle, who lived at the top of the mountain, was calling her, and that she should hurry up and go

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<sup>15</sup> This account is not from any one person, but pieced together from several versions heard in Rupshu and Korzok as people in both places are familiar with it.

to him.<sup>16</sup> Then he walked up another mountain, called Tsag-shang, and from the top of it he let out all the water from his mouth. Everybody at Korzok drowned, except for the girl who had been kind to him. And that was how Tsomoriri was formed.<sup>17</sup>

Korzok, which had once been in the valley, was later rebuilt along the side of a mountain overlooking Tsomoriri, and that is where it stands today. The lone girl who survived the flood was responsible for giving birth to the next generation of people at Korzok. Meanwhile Yulsa Gespo travelled around the region till he eventually reached the village of Gya. He crossed the river a little below Gya and entered the mountain there. It is said that he will emerge from the mountain only when he is needed. On a journey from Leh to Rupshu, Tharchen pointed out to an impression in the rocks and said, "There, in that mountain, is Yulsa Gespo resting. How do we know that is him? By the large nose, he is said to have had a very large nose" (Plate 1).

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<sup>16</sup> The mountain which the girl ran up is called "A-jang ri" ("Uncle's mountain").

<sup>17</sup> There is another local legend that tells how the lake Tsomoriri acquired its name. There was once an old woman (some say a nun) who was riding on her yak. They were going along the shore when suddenly the yak decided to go into the lake. The woman tried to stop the yak and she kept shouting *ri-ri*, the expression used to stop a yak. But the yak did not listen to her, and continued to go into the lake. Eventually both the yak and the woman drowned, and the lake was named after that event. The suffix *mo* refers to the woman, and *ri-ri* to her call. This story is the same as that reported by Cunningham (1854: 138-139). However, he translates the name of the lake as "Mountain Lake", saying that *tsho-mo* refers to the feminine aspect of the lake (where running water is considered male, and still, female), and *ri* to mountains.



1. Prayer flags mark the site where Yulsa Gespo is said to have entered the mountains between Gya and Meru.

After Pulon Rigpachen and Yulsa Gespo, the next prominent figure in Rupshu's history is the Rupshu Goba. The following section turns to a discussion of him and his family.

## 2.2 The Founding Chief

While Rupshu's creation is attributed to Pulon Rigpachen and Yulsa Gespo, for some Rupshupa their history commences with the arrival of the Rupshu Goba and the building of the monastery (*dgon-pa*) at Korzok. The chronology of events leading to the rule of the Rupshu Goba's family in the region runs parallel with that of the establishment of the Korzok Gompa, which is said to be nearly six hundred years old.<sup>18</sup> Both the monastery and the Goba's home, which is often referred to as a palace (*mkhar*), stand beside each other (Plates 2 and 3).

Local tradition says that a man called Jang Gyapo, who came from a noble family in Lhasa, left the city because of a rift in his family and eventually reached

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<sup>18</sup> Koelz, who passed through the area in 1931, writes that a lama accompanying him learnt that the monastery was built in the time of the present chief's grandfather (1931: 112). However, the monastery was perhaps only rebuilt at that time since earlier records show it to have been built approximately six hundred years ago. On the other hand, Nawang Pema was reluctant to show me the written documentation pertaining to the monastery and another research scholar from Delhi, who had spent a few months in Korzok, faced the same difficulty. It could be that he was apprehensive of outsiders to Korzok as it had only been two years since the area opened up, and thefts from monasteries in Ladakh are not unusual. However, since he knew Tharchen well he was helpful in relating most facts connected with the monastery, as he had studied the contents of the records. His information agreed with that of members of the Rupshu Goba's family, and the mother of the recently consecrated Rinpoche at the monastery.



2. Korzok Gompa, while renovations were in progress, in 1993.



3. Home of the Rupshu Goba.

Rupshu.<sup>19</sup> His arrival in Rupshu is also said to have occurred roughly six hundred years ago, but definitely before the building of the monastery. He was accompanied by a few of his family members and a large retinue of servants. All these people eventually settled in Rupshu along with him, and that is how the inhabitants here originated. Jang Gyapo's family ruled over Rupshu and all his heirs were given the title of Rupshu Goba.

At the time of Jang Gyapo's arrival in Rupshu, there was a Rinpoche (*rin-po-che*) called Kunga Loto Nyingbo living nearby. Kunga Loto, said to be an emanation of Karmapa, was the third reincarnation in this lineage. The line began with Jetsun Rangri Rachen and the present Rinpoche, Jigthal Kunzang Langyang, was instated in 1994 and is the seventh in succession. The first Rinpoche is said to have built a monastery, known as Langna Gompa, near Mount Kailash in Tibet.<sup>20</sup> Later Kunga Loto built a monastery, known as Chumur Dechen Ling, at Chumur in Ladakh. However, many lamas died there, and so Kunga Loto thought that there must be something inauspicious about the place: probably the ground was not good. He went

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<sup>19</sup> Though *rgyal-po* is the word for king, Nawang Pema said that he came from an aristocratic family but was not a king. Tashi Rabgyas, a Ladakhi scholar, also mentioned that he thought the Rupshupa must have migrated from Tibet but he could not say for certain which part of Tibet they came from.

<sup>20</sup> The term Langna is said to be derived from the word *glang-po-che*, meaning elephant, and in Tibet the site where the monastery is built is said to resemble an elephant. Thus, Tibetans know him as Langna Rinpoche and Ladakhis as Korzok Rinpoche. Prince Peter writes that when he visited Korzok Gompa it was presided over by a Tulku known as Lang-na Rinpoche, meaning "Precious Elephant Trunk", and was dependent on the lamaist hierarchy in far-off Bhutan, where the Drukpa sect is dominant (1974: 309). However, in an earlier article he mentions that the incarnate lama who met him wore the traditional hairdress (a matted pile on top of his head) and robes of the Nyingmapa, old, unreformed, red sect (Prince Peter 1950: 419).

to the Rupshu Goba and said that a new monastery had to be built. Jang Gyapo had by this time died, and the new Rupshu Goba was Tsering Tashi. Kunga Loto requested Tsering Tashi to go to Tibet and consult the lamas there to decide on a site for a new monastery. Tsering Tashi went to Lhasa and is said to have met a big lama there.<sup>21</sup> The Lama told him to conceive of building the monastery in the navel of the Goddess Dolma. The resulting sanctified quality of the local environment would mean a pure setting for the building and remove the misfortune that prevailed at the present site at Chumur. The Lama told Tsering Tashi that in Rupshu there is a mountain in the shape of the Goddess Dolma, with her left leg outstretched and her right leg folded in (Plate 4). There in the centre of her navel he was to build the monastery. Tsering Tashi replied that there are so many mountains - how would he know which one was Dolma? The Lama then gave him a statue of Shakyamuni (i.e. Buddha) and said that it would assist him in his search. The statue of Shakyamuni would recite the prayer "*ma-ha mu-ni yes so ha*" all the way till they reached the place designated for the construction of the monastery.<sup>22</sup> The Goba did as the Lama said, but when the statue stopped chanting he noticed that a man had just been cremated at that site.<sup>23</sup> He hesitated and wondered how he could build a monastery there. The statue of Shakyamuni replied that it was the chosen spot, and that it was a good place

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<sup>21</sup> No one could remember his name, though they did put emphasis on the fact that he was very "big" (i.e. important).

<sup>22</sup> This statue of Shakyamuni does not lie in the monastery, but in the private chapel in the home of the Rupshu Goba. Its mouth remains open, as if frozen in speech, and this is taken as a sign that it must once have talked.

<sup>23</sup> Cremations, as well as sky burials, were always held in Rupshu. However, the former was reserved for Rinpoches, senior lamas, and people of high stature. Tharchen also mentioned that cremations were mainly held in summer, and sky burials in winter when it was harder to find brush wood for the fire.



4. This statue of the Goddess Dolma, in the main chapel of Korzok Gompa, is said to resemble the landscape within which the monastery is located.

because the man who had just been cremated there was a good person, he had a "good bone" (*ru-shod*).<sup>24</sup> It was from this "good bone" that Rupshu derives its name, which refers to the place of the good bone. Most people say that now only the clergy continue to refer to the place by its old name *Ru-shod*, of which Rupshu is the modified form and the one most widely used today.<sup>25</sup> Korzok is said to have derived its name from two words: *kor* (*dkor*) which refers to livestock owned by the monastery,<sup>26</sup> and *zok* (*zog* or *mdzod*) which refers to a place or room where goods are stored.

Once the monastery was built, Korzok became the focal point of the region of Rupshu and the Rupshu Goba its chief authority.<sup>27</sup> At that time Rupshu covered such a large area that for the purpose of administration the Rupshu Goba divided the region into two areas: Sadod (*Sa-stod*) and Samad (*Sa-smad*).<sup>28</sup> Sadod referred to the upper

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<sup>24</sup> In Rupshu, it is believed that at conception a substance, described as bone (*ru*), is passed from the father to the child. This belief provides the basic patrilineal connections of individuals and proscribes endogamy between those related through bone. It is said that marriage between people related through the same bone for nine generations should not take place. People who practise this are said to have a "good bone", those who do not have an inferior bone. Beliefs about bone are a central component of kinship theories not only in Ladakh and Tibet, but also among Tibeto-Burman groups and elsewhere in Asia (Levine 1981: 72).

<sup>25</sup> Marx, in a list of Ladakhi place names, gives the spelling of the place as *Ru-shod* (1891: 130).

<sup>26</sup> The monastery owns livestock to ensure a supply of butter for the oil lamps, and the sale of pashmina and wool goes towards the expenses of the lamas and maintenance of the structure (cf. section 8.3.2).

<sup>27</sup> Drew also mentions that Korzok is the headquarters of Rupshu (1875: 307). However, Datta cites Hanle as the headquarters of Rupshu (1969: 85), and Jina writes that the Rupshu Goba's regime extended up to Rupshu, Korzok, Hanle, and Nyoma (1995: 42).

<sup>28</sup> *Sa* refers to place or ground.

areas, and Samad to the lower ones. Since Korzok lay within Sadod the Rupshu Goba was directly in charge there and for Samad he appointed a chief, lower in rank and status to him, who was answerable to him. Since Sadod was always identified with Korzok it came to be called by that name, and Samad was referred to as Rupshu. Thus, the terms Sadod and Samad are rarely used these days and instead the two areas are commonly known as Korzok and Rupshu respectively. Thugje Gompa was later built in Samad, and till today remains under the authority of the Rinpoche at Korzok.<sup>29</sup> It was in the vicinity of these two monasteries or within them that the people began storing the goods they did not require when they were on the move. Surplus stocks of grain, winter clothing, or unsold wool and animal skins would be stored away so that they were less hampered during moves. Initially they used small caves or dug pits in the ground (*phu-'u*), and it was only recently (perhaps within the last thirty years) that they have begun to build one-room structures using stones and bricks to store their goods. This practice, Ekvall observed, was also common among Tibetan nomads who used the monastery as "a place where they may store valuables and other belongings with some relative monk who has a safe space between walls and within doors which can be locked" (1968: 82).

Though Trebeck was the first European to visit this area, he only writes about the lakes Tso Kar and Tsumoriri and makes no mention of the monasteries (Moorcroft

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<sup>29</sup> Thugje is also known as Rale, which refers to the imprint of a goat's hoof that is said to be found engraved in the cave around which the monastery is built. It is said that years ago a lama came and told the people that they should build a monastery at that site. He threw some barley in the air, and where it landed there emerged the imprint of a goat's hoof. The lama then vanished. Some people say the lama was Chenrezig, and that is how the monastery got the name Thugje which is another name for Chenrezig.

and Trebeck 1841: 47-51). The monastery at Korzok is first mentioned by Cunningham, who remarks that there was only one lama there, but he makes no reference to the Rupshu Goba's house (1848: 228). Drew refers to both the house and the monastery, and says that the former "belongs to the chief man of the district and of the tribe" (1875: 307). He goes on to write that the monastery is for about thirty-five lamas, and is the only one to report that there are also eight to ten small houses in the area where some old and sick people remain (ibid). Koelz also mentions both the monastery and the Goba's house: "A huge building appears on the hillside to the left and beyond it a rather pretentious two storied structure, ... The larger building is the monastery and the other the Thakur's house" (1931: 110-111). It is strange then that Prince Peter who reached Korzok seven years after Koelz mentions that he was met by a lama from "the only building in the place, the Korzot gompa (monastery), so small that it could only house six monks" (1950: 417). He describes the monastery as "a small, white-washed, flatroofed, square building" (ibid: 419). On the other hand, he mentions being entertained in the Goba's tent (ibid).

Thugje Gompa was visited by both Francke and Koelz. Francke writes that he was told "the present buildings were erected only a few years ago, instead of an older establishment which consisted mainly of cave dwellings" (1910: 61). Koelz, who describes the monastery as a small building, says that "since ancient times a cell has existed on the lake according to tradition, and now one lama is said to perform worship in the building" (1931: 105). Neither of them mention any other buildings or store-rooms in the vicinity of the monastery.

As the status of the Rupshu Goba grew in prominence, so did the titles and tales that went along with the position. This rise was promoted when the King of Ladakh, Senge Namgyal, married Skalzang Dolma, a daughter of the then reigning Goba. While Petech writes that the King married a lady from Rupshu in the early 1600s, he does not mention that she is from the family of the Rupshu Goba (1977: 55). However, members of the Goba's family in Korzok recount the event, and state that as a result of this relationship with the royal family their importance and power increased within Ladakh.<sup>30</sup> The alliance gave the family royal patronage and support, especially since Senge Namgyal was also one of Ladakh's most powerful kings. Some people in Korzok refer to the lineage as being equal to that of a king: otherwise, they say, why would Senge Namgyal have married a girl from that family?<sup>31</sup> He also gave the Rupshu Goba a house below the palace in Leh. In the old days this site was reserved only for family members of the king, ministers, and other aristocracy within Ladakh.<sup>32</sup> The great strength and heroic deeds performed by those who held that title are recounted with great passion both in Rupshu and Leh.<sup>33</sup> The son of the last Goba

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<sup>30</sup> Local scholars in Leh, such as Tashi Rabgyas, corroborate this.

<sup>31</sup> When talking about the Rupshu Goba in Korzok and Rupshu, they also referred to him using the Hindi word for king, *raja*, as well as the Urdu term *badshah*. Koelz mentions being received by the *thakur* (Hindi: village headman), who he says is also known as the "Raja of Rupshu" (1931: 110).

<sup>32</sup> Ghani Sheikh informed me that previously there was a large building, known as "Rupshu palace", in place of the house. This was later destroyed by the Dogras when they attacked Leh, and the present house was built in its place (personal communication, Leh, August 1994). While some claim that the house is now sold, the late Rupshu Goba's son, Tsering Dorje, says that his family still have the house, and though it remained empty for a long time they have now rented it out.

<sup>33</sup> In discussions about the Rupshu Goba it is sometimes a little confusing to discern whether people are speaking about one particular person and if so who, or if they are referring to all the men who held this title. Much as I tried to question them, it seemed difficult for people to make this distinction. Further, all the family's written

to have held this title showed me a sword that belonged to the Rupshu Goba and said that he was so strong that when he went to war he would roll it up and carry it in his pocket (Plate 5).<sup>34</sup> Tashi Rabgyas related that it was said that the Rupshu Goba would grab a snow leopard by its tail and turn it around his head to frighten off his enemies. Aba Palle said that he had heard that if the Rupshu Goba went to battle and bullets were fired at him, he never died. When he returned home he would just shake out his clothes and all the bullets would fall out of them.

The Rupshu Goba is probably best thought of, not as a king but a nobleman who became a petty ruler of a district. He most definitely must have been a local chief whose strong position acquired a hereditary basis, as Marks accounts for other districts in Ladakh (1977: 49). Dainelli mentions that the head of Rupshu "is not, in fact, a *lambardar* (which is something like a mayor), but is a *zaildar*, which in the region of Ladakh means the head of a group of villages" (1933: 286). He also did not rule in isolation, but was part of the political hierarchy that prevailed in Ladakh at that time. Petech writes that the king drew his food from the districts under his direct government: "He was supplied with corn, butter, wood, and grass for four months in the year by Nubra; for two months by Rupshu; and for four months by Tankse" (1977: 159-160). Thus, the Rupshu Goba was subservient to the king of Ladakh and paid taxes to him. He was also one of the chief suppliers of meat to the king's household,

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records are in Spiti, as the widow of the last Rupshu Goba lives there, and she took with her all her husband's possessions when she left. Perhaps a trip to Spiti at a later date will clear some of the uncertainties.

<sup>34</sup> Though I was shown the sword and allowed to photograph it, I was not allowed to touch it as it is said that a woman's touch would destroy its power.



5. The Rupshu Goba's sword and shield.

the other being the meat provider of Alchi (Carrasco 1959: 166). Thus, being a chief or village headman, he was at the lowest level of political organisation within Ladakh. At the same time he is held in such high esteem that he must have had some position of prominence within Ladakh. He must therefore have been higher than a headman, with the status perhaps of a petty local official or minister.<sup>35</sup> Since the 1940s the hold the Rupshu Goba's family had over Rupshu has been steadily weakening, and today the power they once exercised in Rupshu is gone. The next section looks at the events that led to this decline.

### 2.2.1 The Decline of the Rupshu Goba

The Rupshu Goba was a hereditary position, and one which remained in the family for several generations until certain events led to the end of their rule in the region. Today their home, once lauded as a palace, stands in ruins and the present occupants only reside in four of the fifty rooms it is said to have had. However, the last vestiges of wealth and power of that era are still evident in small ways. Visitors to Korzok regularly call on the home and pay their respects to the family, and at the annual monastic festival family members are given a special seat of honour (Plate 6). Norzin Angmo, the widow of the last Rupshu Goba, now lives in Spiti. Their son, Tsering Dorje, works for the government, and his wife (Dechen Dolma), who is also from Spiti, is an instructor at the Handicrafts Centre at Nyoma.

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<sup>35</sup> Carrasco writes that remote pastoral areas, in Ladakh and Tibet, were more loosely integrated into the political structure of the various states than the agricultural areas (1959: 221).



6. This velvet robe embroidered with gold thread belonged to the Rupshu Goba.

While there are discrepancies as to when actually this downfall occurred, many people in Rupshu say that it was about forty or fifty years ago.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, Jina mentions that the Rupshu Goba ruled till the seventeenth century (1995: 42). However, there are elders in Rupshu who remember that when they were young the Rupshu Goba's family was still very much in power and their chief at Rupshu was subordinate to him. Various reasons have been given for the decline of the position of the Rupshu Goba and his family. Some elders said it was because it was getting difficult for the Rupshu Goba to manage the affairs of the growing number of people under him. Others said it was because the increasing number of livestock was putting pressure on the land, and that is why they divided up so that they could branch out to other grazing areas. Nawang Dorje, the trader from Manali, stated that after India's independence in 1947 the new government made all petty rulers give up their power. Thus, the area governed by the Rupshu Goba was divided into many small village level administrative units each ruled by their own chief. Tsering Dorje, the second son of the last Rupshu Goba, appeared most familiar with the events that took place in his family, and they are related here.

In 1945 the last Rupshu Goba, Tsewang Urgyal, died at the age of thirty-seven. Though he had two sons, they were both too young to take his place. Tsering Dorje recalls that he must have been around five then and his elder brother, Rangdol Dorje, not much older. Their grandfather, Kunzang Namgyal, became the Goba once more.

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<sup>36</sup> Sonam Phunsog, a schoolteacher who was posted in Kharnak between the years 1955 to 1959, recalls that during this time the reign of the Rupshu Goba was already over. Though he is not clear as to when or why this happened, he remembers the people there telling him that this took place recently.

However, he was too old to govern and so their mother, Norzin Angmo, took charge and began to help him out. At this the people protested and said: "How can a woman rule us!"

"In fact," Tsering Dorje maintained, "there had always been people in Rupshu who were jealous of our family and did not like to see us always holding this position of power. They saw this turn of events as their opportunity to take this power away from us and break away from our family's rule."

Soon after the death of Tsewang Urgyal, a man called Skalzang Sonam began to grow powerful in Rupshu and gain the support of the people there. He challenged the family's rule and said that since there was no man in the Rupshu Goba's family to take charge, elections must be held and the people allowed to choose their own chief. Naturally, Sonam became chief, but things did not go well for him. He died soon after, and the people once again requested the Rupshu Goba's family to resume their place as chief. Rangdol was old enough by then, and so he took over, but the damage to his family's authority had already been done. In the intervening years several villages, such as Hanle and Nyoma, which had been under the Rupshu Goba's rule, broke away and elected their own chiefs. There was no one person strong enough to prevent all these splits from occurring, and Rangdol was not able to bring all the Rupshu Goba's territories together again. Though the Rupshu Goba's family was back in power, their rule now only extended over Korzok.

After Rangdol died in 1986, his son was not old enough to take over. Tsering Dorje had a job in Leh, besides he said he had never really been interested in being the Goba. Thus, the people reverted to electing a chief from among themselves, and the position of chief in Korzok is now held by a man who is elected for a three-year term.

While the chief of Rupshu is no longer subservient to the one at Korzok, the two areas continue to have mutual ties. These relations are largely reinforced through the monastery, as Thugje Gompa comes under the authority of Korzok Gompa.<sup>37</sup> Young boys, aspiring to be lamas, are sent from Rupshu to Korzok for training and studies.<sup>38</sup> At weddings, funerals, and religious ceremonies held at Rupshu, lamas have to be called from Korzok. The Rupshupa also continue to make regular contributions to the monastery at Korzok. However, these contributions vary, and people living in Korzok usually give more than those in Rupshu.<sup>39</sup>

With the decline of the Rupshu Goba, and the breaking away of villages and land once under his rule, Rupshu's territory has been reduced. In fact, Nawang Skalzang said there was a saying, "Rupshu is larger than Kashmir, only it is not as green." However, Korzok has grown over the years, and today there are thirty houses apart from the monastery and the Rupshu Goba's home.<sup>40</sup> These changes have also

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<sup>37</sup> Hemis, one of the largest monasteries in Ladakh, has gradually taken over all the monasteries in this area except for Korzok and Thugje. There are some people in Rupshu who recall the time when Hemis once tried to take them over, but say that they had a very strong chief at that time who prevented this from happening. Kharnak, on the other hand, is under Hemis and in Rupshu they derogatorily speak of them as Hemis Gompa's Shepherds. However, in small ways Hemis continues to make itself felt at both monasteries and demonstrate that it has a following in the area.

<sup>38</sup> Korzok does not train nuns, who go instead to Dubbock Gompa.

<sup>39</sup> In 1992 plans were made to repair and expand Korzok Gompa. It was stated that Rupshu would contribute one-third of the amount towards this and Korzok two-thirds.

<sup>40</sup> Harjeet Singh, a geographer from Jawaharlal Nehru University, said that when he visited Korzok in the early seventies there were only nine houses (personal communication, Delhi, 1994). This means, looking at Drew's recordings a hundred years ago, that very little change has occurred in the intervening years.

affected the course of migration, and the last part of this chapter sketches the annual route of migration followed in Rupshu today.

### 2.3 "We are the People who Move Behind the Sheep and Goats"

Each move to a new campsite is typically carried out early in the morning, just before sunrise, as later in the day it is too hot to walk.

It was four in the morning and preparations were under way to move to Norchen. It was dark outside, cold, and windy. Ama quickly lit a fire and made tea. Tharchen and Angchuk took the tent down, folded it lengthways, inserted the poles in the middle and rolled it up. The yaks were rounded up and loaded. Carpets and blankets were first laid across their backs, and over this the stove (*thab*), butter-tea maker (*ja-ldong-mo*), hand-mill (*rang-'thag*), and other utensils. One yak carried the steel trunk holding Tharchen's prayer books and altar things, another carried the tent. One of the more docile yak was chosen for Chogyal to ride on, and a seat fashioned for him among the luggage. He cried as he was lifted and strapped on to the animal's back, but a few sweets placated him. By five o'clock, Norgey left with the sheep and goats. The horses were saddled next, and an hour later the camp was ready to move. As the snow-capped mountains shimmered in the sun's first rays, the caravan gradually snaked out of Rina (Plate 7). The caravan spread over at least one to two kilometres and within this the pack animals of each tent were kept close together. The yaks were driven in the front, followed by the women and children.



7. The Rupshupa moving camp.

Dogs glided in and out, barking at the yaks to ensure they kept moving. The men, some with their radios slung over their shoulders, were in the rear leading the horses. Behind them lay just a flat stretch of land, a few stone walls, and smoke rising from the burning embers.

"Look at the kind of life we lead," Tharchen once remarked between moves of the camp, "always moving, always packing, never staying in one place."

"We have to keep moving," Skarma pointed out, "After all, we are the people who move behind the sheep and goats."

The annual route of migration followed in Rupshu today varies slightly from that observed in the past. The changes are largely due to the influx of Tibetan refugees into Ladakh since 1959, and a loss of a part of their lands in the Indo-Chinese war of 1961.<sup>41</sup> Over the last ten to fifteen years, Kharnak has also encroached on parts of Rupshu's lands that lie in the west, and the Rupshupa say they have not been able to do anything to prevent this. Thus, an increase in population followed by a decrease in land has meant they have had to make adjustments to their migratory pattern.

Apart from changes in the route, the pattern in which they moved has also altered slightly. The pattern they follow today remains the same during winter (*dgun-ka*), when the entire camp is together, and spring (*spyid-ka*) when they are camped in smaller groups. The only difference occurs in summer (*dbyar-ka*) and autumn (*ston-ka*). "We were not all living together as we do now, nor did we all move camp

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<sup>41</sup> This is the area known as Kangyung to which they usually went in March and where they camped for three months. When Trebeck visited Tsomoriri in summer, he mentions the Rupshupa having just arrived "from Kag-jung, only a few hours before us" (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: 47). Koelz also refers to Kangyung: "In winter these people go to Kagzhung with their flocks" (1931: 102).

together," remarked Meme Sonam Angchuk as he recollected the differences in the pattern of migration followed during summer and autumn. At that time of the year the Rupshupa would move in two groups, divided according to the rank of one's tent, age, and marital status. The elders (*lung-yen*), along with their unmarried children, formed one group, and the younger adults (*khral-pa*) the other. *Khral-pa*, who were casually referred to as being the young married adults, is the word for taxpayer in Ladakh (cf. section 8.1). The elders were said to inhabit the "small tents", and young married adults the "big tent" (cf. Chapter Seven for a discussion on tent division). The first group, because of their age, usually stayed at one camping ground the whole length of the summer right through till the end of autumn, and at the most made only one move. They kept a limited number of sheep and goats for their own use, so that they could get milk and make a little butter and cheese. Meanwhile, the second group was constantly on the move between camping grounds, as it was their responsibility to tend the vast herds of livestock. However, since the early sixties the Rupshupa have been moving as one group during summer and autumn as well, and the last section outlines their current route of migration.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The presence of Tibetan refugees in Rupshu effected certain changes in the pattern of migration. When the Tibetans first came, problems arose over the route of migration they followed. It appears that the Tibetans would just go wherever they pleased and not follow the route laid out by the Rupshupa. This put a strain on Rupshu's resources of grass and water, and relations between the two sides became tense, often leading to blows. Finally Rupshu took the Tibetans to court, and in an agreement drawn up between the two parties on 5 October 1985 it was stated that: "In future the movement of livestock from one pasture to another and timing for grazing will be decided by the local Nambardar [chief] which will be conveyed to the Tibetan Refugees through their Nambardar. Whosoever, among the Tibetan Refugees violates the above mentioned regulations after thorough enquiry if he is found guilty of such violation shall be ousted from that place."

### 2.3.1 The Annual Route of Migration

It was the end of July and the Rupshupa were headed for Norchen. Four months had lapsed since the entire camp had last been together, and people who had not met each other since then renewed contacts and exchanged news. Every year at around the same time, but always after the sheep have been sheared, the Rupshupa hold a large prayer ceremony known as the *Ma-ni Dung-'phyur*.<sup>43</sup>

“At least once a year we are all required to participate in a prayer ceremony together,” Nawang Chogyal narrated, “It is for the good of our people and our animals. To protect us all, cleanse us of our sins, and eliminate all the evil in our community.”

The Rupshupa usually move camp about ten times in the year, but the period of time spent at any one place is not fixed.<sup>44</sup> Each move, they will say, depends on when all the grass in one place is over and the water is down to a trickle. However, the availability of grass takes precedence over water when contemplating a move. At one campsite, Debring, the only source of water, was a walk of two to three kilometres, up a steep mountain. A journey to fetch water would take about an hour,

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<sup>43</sup> This prayer ceremony consists of the recitation of the mantra “*om ma-ne pad-me hum*” a hundred thousand times. The ceremony is held towards the end of July or beginning of August, and can last for ten days or more. A high lama or a Rinpoche usually presides over the event, and may come from Korzok Gumpa or elsewhere. In 1992 Drukchen Rinpoche presided over the prayers, and between 1993-96 Dubbock Rinpoche has been attending the ceremony.

<sup>44</sup> Jina states that the Changpa of Rupshu make only four moves during the year and their stay at each camping ground is nearly two to three months on an average (1995: 56-57). Drew made the same observations more than 120 years ago (1875: 287). However, things have changed since Drew’s days, but Jina makes no mention of this.

sometimes more, and some people would do this three or four times in a day. With twenty-litre jerrycans on one's back this is not an easy task.<sup>45</sup>

Further, moves of the camp are not whimsical decisions randomly taken by individuals, but are collectively decided on by all. The children who take the livestock out grazing will tell their parents that the grass on the mountains is virtually exhausted, and the women will grumble that the flow of water in the stream has ebbed. These complaints are eventually conveyed to the chief, and he tells his helper, the *kotwal*, to call all the men to a meeting outside his tent. As soon as the day for moving is decided, then individuals are chosen to fetch the horses and yaks who are grazing in the high valleys. The animals are usually brought down to the camp a day or two before the Rupshupa move.

Once the day for moving has been fixed, each family prepares itself for the journey. Bags are taken out and examined for tears and holes. Clothes are washed if the stream in the next campsite is going to be far away. Horseshoes are examined and repaired.

The journey to a new campsite is typically done in two stages. A day or two before the actual move a part of their belongings precedes the move of the entire camp, and this is known as '*or-len*'. The main reason behind this is that most families

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<sup>45</sup> When questioned about why they would choose to camp so far away from water, Tharchen and others in Rupshu replied that it was always more important to be living close to good pasture - no matter that once the grass nearby was exhausted the shepherds had to walk long distances for pasture in any case.

in Rupshu do not have enough yaks and horses to carry all their possessions at one go. Therefore, part of the load is taken on a first trip and the rest follows on the appointed day. Two or three members of the family accompany the first load, and while some stay back to watch over it one person returns with the yaks and horses. Tharchen and Skarma usually help each other move their belongings. It was generally Skarma and Padon who went with the first load and remained with it for the night. Tharchen and Ama would come with the rest of the two families' possessions on the second day.

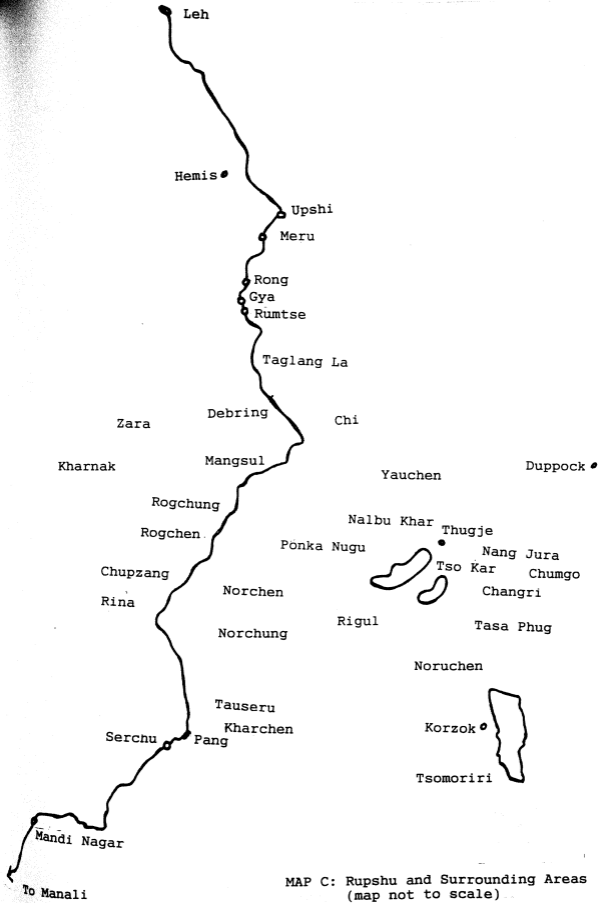
The Rupshupa generally follow the pattern of movement given below (the places can be found on Map C).<sup>46</sup> The dates and length of stay at any one place are an estimate, as the Rupshupa follow no hard and fast rules when they move. The route begins with New Year, as it is always celebrated at Ponka Nugu.<sup>47</sup>

<u>Timing</u>	<u>Place</u>
End of November to end of December	Ponka Nugu
After New Year to middle of January	Nalbu Khar

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<sup>46</sup> This was the route they followed in 1992. Variations depend on the availability of grass and water.

<sup>47</sup> Unlike the Tibetans who celebrate New Year towards the end of February or early March, the Ladakhis observe it on the first day of the eleventh lunar month, usually in December. This is due to the fact that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the King Jamyang Namgyal decided to go to war against Baltistan he was advised to wait till after the New Year celebrations (Rizvi 1983: 215). Being unwilling to submit to the two or three months' delay this would mean, he advanced the date of the New Year festival so that his men could participate in the celebrations before they went to battle. Thus, the Ladakhis have continued to celebrate New Year two or three months in advance of the Tibetan date.



MAP C: Rupshu and Surrounding Areas (map not to scale)

End of January to beginning of May	Tasa Phug Nang Jura Chungo
May to end of July	Dispersed in small groups at several places: Norchung, Rina, Tauseru, Rogchen, Rogchung, Changri, Mangsul, and Kharchen
Last week of July to end of August	Norchen
End of August to beginning of September	Rogchen and Rogchung
First to last week of September	Debring
First week of October to first week of November	Zara
First to third week of November	Rogchen and Rogchung

While there are few if any variations to the route given above, there are differences in the length of time spent at any one campsite. For instance, some families may camp at Norchen for a month before the prayer ceremony, while others only arrive there a few days before the prayers begin.<sup>48</sup> Other campsites, such as Zara, are divided into three sections: upper (*phu* or *gong-ma*), middle (*bar-ba*), and lower (*mdo* or *yog-ma*). After Debring the Rupshupa usually go directly to Zara Barba. However, depending on the length of time spent at Debring they may not go to Zara

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<sup>48</sup> In 1995, because of the shortage of grass around Norchen, the Rupshupa took the decision that no one would be allowed to camp there prior to the prayer ceremony.

Barba, and instead may first go to Zara Do.<sup>49</sup> They might spend one month at Zara Do, followed by three weeks at Zara Phu. This means that they will only leave for Rogchen in the third week of November. Their length of stay at Rogchen is determined by the date given for New Year, which can be any time during the month of December or January. Because New Year is always celebrated at Ponka Nugu, the Rupshupa must arrive there at least a week before the celebrations to give themselves enough time to prepare for them.<sup>50</sup>

It can be observed from their migratory pattern that during summer and autumn the Rupshupa generally live together as one large encampment. It is mainly during winter and spring that they tend to divide up and live in smaller encampments of five, ten, or fifteen tents. The main reason given for this variation in the camp's structure is the scarcity or abundance of water.<sup>51</sup> In winter and spring, water is generally in short supply and there is a tendency to spread out into smaller groups to

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<sup>49</sup> Since the last ten years, the Kharnakpa have also started camping at Zara and this is usually for three weeks during the month of June. Rupshu's decision to camp at one of the three sections at Zara also depends on where the Kharnakpa camped.

<sup>50</sup> In the past, New Year was celebrated at both Tasa Phug and Thugje Gompa, and not at Ponka Nugu, as is the practice these days.

<sup>51</sup> Rupshu's migratory pattern is also reflected in configurations which are both circular and linear. Tharchen explained this as follows: "In winter we all move separately, therefore we move in a circle. In summer we all move together, therefore we move in a straight line." It appears that in winter they move in a circle, in a clockwise direction, around Tso Kar. As spring approaches they leave this circle and move in a straight line right through till the end of autumn. Today that straight line runs parallel with the Leh-Manali road, and they may camp on either side of this, or branch off from it. They also move up and down the line several times. It is difficult to infer what, if anything, these configurations imply for the Rupshupa, and more research is needed into patterns of migration to explain these phenomena.

decrease the pressure on the water supply.<sup>52</sup> Snow, melted down into water, is the Rupshupa's main source of water during winter and spring when the rivers remain frozen. However, even this supply becomes acute during spring when the sun begins to melt the snow but not the ice. For the rest of the year there is plenty of water, with glaciers as the main source. Rupshu is dotted with small glaciers, an ever-renewing source of fresh water, and these fulfil the people's water requirements. While every summer large quantities of melt water flow from them, every winter fresh snow is added. Thus, maximum run-off from the glaciers is from July to October, and that is when the entire encampment lives together.

Seasonal dispersal and coming together of tents is a recognisable annual social pattern of transhumance, reminiscent of the Eskimo described by Mauss (1979: 36). A distinct seasonal morphology is also typical among other nomadic pastoralists. The Basseri nomads of South Persia follow a pattern similar to that of the Rupshupa. They are concentrated in summer and autumn, and disperse in winter and spring (Barth 1961: 5-6). However, the reason cited by Barth for this is not water but grass: "A short-term balance between pastures and herds is maintained by the pattern of migration, whereby the herds are dispersed or concentrated according to the productivity of the pastures, and utilize widely separated pasture areas at their different periods of productivity" (ibid: 125). Pastoral practice among the Kalasha, an agro-pastoral group in the Hindu Kush, is also identically dichotomised into

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<sup>52</sup> In fact, the water in the streams starts freezing right from October, and ice or snow is melted down and used as water for drinking and cooking. Flowing water is again only available in the streams in late June.

contrasting summer and winter periods. However, Parkes states this contrast is even more radically expressed because social life is affected, as "it cuts across individual families by gender, so that men and women tend to inhabit distinct and geographically remote spheres of activity for some five months of the year" (1987: 644-645). Among the Buryat of Mongolia, before collectivisation, most families moved at least twice a year, from the winter settlement to the summer pastures and while in the summer they lived in tents, in the winter they had more or less permanent wooden houses (Humphrey 1983: 272).

It is largely accepted that all nomads follow some sort of specific migratory pattern. "True nomads, in the sense of people on the move wherever their fancy takes them, are rare" (Clarke 1988: 89). The main reason for the movement of pastoral nomads is their herds, and the next chapter presents livestock management and pasture organisation in Rupshu.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE LIVESTOCK OF THE GODS

"My elders once told me," Abi Yangzom narrated as we sat in her tent and waited for the livestock to return, "that in the beginning our sheep were all different colours (*tshos*). These were mainly white (*dkar-po*), red (*dmar-po*), and blue (*sngon-po*). Some people say there were other colours also, like green (*ljang-khu*), yellow (*ser-po*), maroon (*smug-po*) black (*gnag-po*), and brown (*kham-po*). One day a princess from a neighbouring kingdom came and she decided to take all the sheep for a walk.<sup>1</sup> Along the way she came to a big river, and she made all the sheep walk through it. As a result, the water washed away all their colour and since that day we have only white sheep."<sup>2</sup>

The Ladakhi pantheon is represented by a hierarchically structured three-tier division of the world.<sup>3</sup> The uppermost tier is *lha-yul*, inhabited by the gods (*lha*), and the lowest is *yog-klu* where the *klu* dwell.<sup>4</sup> People live between the gods and the *klu*

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<sup>1</sup> Abi Yangzom could not remember the name of the Princess, nor the kingdom she came from. A similar story of there once being sheep of all the colours of the rainbow, and of how they fell into a river and were homogenised is told in Bhutan (Myers 1994c: 190-191). In this case, it is said that the sheep were stolen by Ashi Jyazum, the Chinese bride of the seventh century King Songtsen Gampo, because she was angry with her parents for sending her so far away from home. When her mother discovered that the sheep were gone, she spat in the direction her daughter had gone and her spittle turned into a river that ran across the girl's path. "As the girl led the flock across the bridge, it collapsed and the sheep fell into the river" (ibid: 191).

<sup>2</sup> Though there are also black and brown sheep in Rupshu, she is referring to the fact that majority of the sheep are white in colour.

<sup>3</sup> This is widely documented by other scholars writing on Ladakh (see Kaplanian 1981: 207, Day 1989: 69, Aggarwal 1994: 99).

<sup>4</sup> *Klu* are spirits that inhabit both the aquatic and subterranean worlds. These beings correspond to the Sanskrit *naga* (serpents), and in general indicate the powers of the earth and of the waters (Tucci 1970: 222).

in *bar-btsan*, a world which is also inhabited by the *btsan*.<sup>5</sup> The corresponding world is also depicted by a system of colours: white for heaven, red for earth, and blue for the subterranean world.<sup>6</sup> That Rupshu's sheep were once mainly these colours is not, therefore, coincidental.<sup>7</sup> As a result, sheep are intrinsically sacred animals bestowed upon Rupshu by the gods through Pulon Rigpachen. They remain a link between Rupshu and the gods, and are a means through which the Rupshupa receive divine blessings. Their presence is also a constant reminder that the world of the gods, *btsan*, and *klu* have to be constantly revered.

In Ladakh, an individual's relationships are affected by both the favourable and auspicious gods on the one hand, and the hostile and harmful spirits and demons on the other. Each one of them must be nourished and worshipped, and those who neglect to do this can be sure of their revenge. Repeated offerings and propitiation mean protection against forces of decay and destruction, i.e., the demonic and polluting influences that are thought to be inherent in domestic life. The gods, who are always peaceful beings, are kept appeased through offerings. Although the *btsan*

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<sup>5</sup> The *btsan* are demonical deities, generally associated with the female form and the colour red. From the front they are very beautiful women, but if seen from the rear they are said to have no back and their insides: heart, lungs, vessels etc., are visible (Kaplanian 1981: 213).

<sup>6</sup> In a song recorded by Francke in Lower Ladakh, relating the origin of the world, there is the same division of the world into three levels, each with the corresponding colours: white, red, and blue (1907: 69-70).

<sup>7</sup> In the story from Bhutan, mentioned in footnote 1, there is no parallel with sheep being sacred animals bestowed by the gods as there is in Rupshu. Instead, Myers mentions the moral of the story which is "to obey your parents and not incur their wrath" (1994c: 191), referring to the fact that it was wrong for the girl to have stolen her parents' sheep.

and the *klu* can be touchy, quick to anger if disturbed or polluted in any way, and demand constant respect and veneration, they are normally benevolent. Their violence is only awakened in response to specific slights, usually neglect of their offerings or violation of their environment, but with proper care and feeding they can be satisfied and rendered peaceful (Ortner 1978: 273). The *klu* are offended by the pollution of their environment. They are known to be responsible for a number of diseases, especially those of the skin such as leprosy, boils, and abscesses (Dollfus 1989: 110), as well as impotence, sterility, paralysis, and fever (Ahmed 1990: 32).<sup>8</sup> It is said that there is a close connection between man and the *klu*, and if for example, a man through his negligence causes the illness of a *klu*, then the offending man will meet the same fate (Tucci 1970: 172). The *btsan* are responsible for premature deaths, and a typical illness they were known to cause in Tibet was colic (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 175). Thus, these local deities are constantly invoked and appeased by the people, and one way by which the Rupshupa do this is through the propitiation of their sheep, goats, yaks, and horses.

The term for livestock is *tsho*, and they consist mainly of sheep (*lug*) and goats (*ra-ma*). A ram is known as *khel-ba*, and a ewe as *ma-mo*. A male goat is referred to as *ra-po*, and the female as *ra-ma*. Although the herd may collectively be called *ra-lug*, an array of terms is used to classify livestock according to sex and age (Table 1). Apart from sheep and goats each family also owns a few yaks (*g.yag*) and *'bri-mo*

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<sup>8</sup> Amongst the Sherpas as well, the *klu* are said to cause ailments that almost always involve unpleasant visible corruptions of the body, such as sores, physical deformities, swelling, and, in some severe cases, even blindness and insanity (Ortner 1978: 279).

Table 1      Different Terms for Livestock According to Age and Sex

<u>Animal</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Both Male &amp; Female</u>
<u>SHEEP</u>				
	At birth	--	--	<i>lu-gu</i>
	1 year	<i>lag-pu</i>	<i>lag-mo</i>	<i>lag-po</i>
	2 years	<i>thong-pa</i>	<i>tsher-mo</i>	<i>thong-ser</i>
	3 years	<i>khel-ba</i>	<i>ma-mo</i>	--
<u>GOAT</u>				
	At birth	--	--	<i>ri-gu</i>
	1 year	<i>phur-sing</i>	<i>mur-sing</i>	<i>sid-pu</i>
	2 years	<i>ra-tong</i>	<i>gri-mo</i>	<i>gri-mo ra-tong</i>
	3 years	<i>ra-po</i>	<i>ra-ma</i>	--
<u>YAK</u>				
	At birth	<i>phu-bes</i>	<i>mo-bes</i>	<i>bes-to</i>
	1 year	<i>phu-cor</i>	<i>mo-cor</i>	<i>ya-ru</i>
	2 years	<i>dya-'u</i>	<i>cor-mo</i>	<i>ye-'u</i>
	3 years	<i>g.yag</i>	<i>'bri-mo</i>	--
<u>HORSE</u>				
	At birth	--	--	<i>thur-ru</i>
	1 year	<i>phu-thur</i>	<i>mu-thur</i>	--
	2 Years	<i>phu-cob</i>	<i>mo-cob</i>	<i>co-ba</i>
	3 years	<i>co-ba</i>	<i>co-'o</i>	<i>co-ba sga-rgyab<sup>1</sup></i>
	4 years	<i>pho-rta</i>	<i>rgon-ma</i>	--

<sup>1</sup> The word *sga-rgyab* refers to the saddle, as a horse can usually be ridden by the time it is three years old.

(female of the yak species), and one or two horses (*rta*). Dogs (*khyi*) are also highly prized domestic animals and they are kept to protect the tent and livestock.<sup>9</sup> Most families will own one, if not two, dogs.

In Rupshu, livestock are a source of devotion, pride, wealth, status, and income. Tashi Phunsog comments that in Ladakh it is often said that sheep are like ornaments adorning their mountains (1979-80: 78). The first part of this chapter discusses the symbolic link the livestock have with the world of gods and spirits. This is only possible because of the sense of intimacy the Ladakhis have with the pantheon that enables the gods and spirits to influence the world of men and women (Ahmed 1990: 10). The second part describes patterns of livestock rearing, and includes a look at breeding, branding, castration, and culling practices. The last section of this chapter presents the role of the sheep herder, and describes grazing and milking practices. Also included here is a discussion on Rupshu's system of pasture organisation.

### 3.1 Dedications to the Gods, *Btsan*, and *Klu*

Livestock symbolism and the Ladakhi pantheon are closely linked, and this is amply demonstrated in Rupshu. Sheep are the focal point of this supplication of the

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<sup>9</sup> Dogs from Changthang are referred to as *byang-khyi*, and are renowned for their ferocity and loyalty. Thus, they make the best watch-dogs and people come from Leh, and even Lahaul, Spiti, and Manali, to purchase these dogs. Walking through the encampment, one has to be constantly on the look-out for these dogs, and it is not possible to directly walk up to another person's tent. The practice is to stop a generous distance away from the tent and get the inhabitants attention by calling out "*khyi khog*" (tie or hold the dog). Only once the owner has tied or held his dog can one safely approach the tent.

gods, *btsan*, and *klu* inhabiting this pantheon. However, this is not the case only in Rupshu. Beliefs and values differ among pastoral societies where livestock are essentially sacred animals. According to Tambiah, "animals are effective vehicles for embodying highly emotionally charged ideas in respect to which intellectuality and affectivity cannot be rigidly separated as representing human and animal modes of conduct" (1969: 457). Therefore, animals in a society that depends solely on pastoralism become a crucial link between man and the gods. The offering of livestock to the gods is a gesture of piety and of self-interest in anticipation of blessing. "Yet it seems also to be an unwitting making of amends, and an acknowledgment that domestication of the very livestock on which pastoralism depends, and which, by their mobility, make that society nomadic, is an infringement of natural rights as first willed by the gods" (Ekvall 1968: 30). However, in most cases the animals are transmitted from the gods to man. In Rupshu, it was Pulon Rikpachen who first introduced sheep and goats to the people there. In Mongolia, notions related to sheep have numerous purposive links with the other world and the assurance of prosperity in this world can be attained by appealing to that other world (Sokolewicz 1981: 133). Among the Bedouin, the flock occupies an important place in the network of cultural symbols and patterns of beliefs, and these customs strengthen not only the Bedouin's identification with his fellow-Bedouin, but also his concept of the bond between the righteous man and God and the Prophets (Abu-Rabia 1994: 3).

In the section above it was emphasised that the gods, *btsan*, and *klu* have to be constantly supplicated and appeased. One manner in which this is done in Rupshu is

through the dedication of a sheep to each of the three beings.<sup>10</sup> These sheep are known as *lha lug dkar-po* (white sheep of the gods), *btsan lug kro-'o* (red sheep of the *btsan*)<sup>11</sup> and *klu lug sngon-po* (blue sheep of the *klu*).<sup>12</sup> A further two sheep that are also dedicated are known as *mgen-po gnag-po* and *mis-ga khar-rgya*. The former is a sheep with a white body and black outlining its eyes, and is dedicated to a god known as Genpo.<sup>13</sup> The latter is a sheep with a white body, yellow legs, and yellow outlining its eyes. It is not dedicated to a particular god, but is primarily kept for expelling curses (*mis-ga*) or bad luck that may befall individuals. It is said that when a person is cursed by another, then to get rid of the curse, and the ensuing bad luck, offerings of incense (*sangs*) and prayers recited over this particular sheep ensure that the spell is broken.

Each herd should contain the above five types of sheep, and they are generally always male. However, if families so desire they can also dedicate ewes. These are then known as *lha-mo dkar-po*, *btsan-mo kro-'o*, *klu-mo sngon-po*, and *mgen-mo gnag-mo* respectively. There is no *mis-ga* amongst the ewes. Some families also

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<sup>10</sup> The word dedication does not refer to a sacrificial offering. Instead, I use it here to refer to livestock that have been consecrated or blessed in the name of the gods, *btsan* and *klu*.

<sup>11</sup> While the Ladakhi word for red is *dmar-po*, the word *kro-'o* refers to a red tinge visible in sheep that have an all-white body.

<sup>12</sup> In the spring myth of the Gesar saga which Francke collected in Lower Ladakh, horses are referred to in a similar manner. Just before Duguma is to become Gesar's bride there is a horse-race in which two of the riders with their horses are referred to as the Earth-Mother riding the red Earth-Horse, and the Water-King riding the blue Water-Horse (1901a: 339).

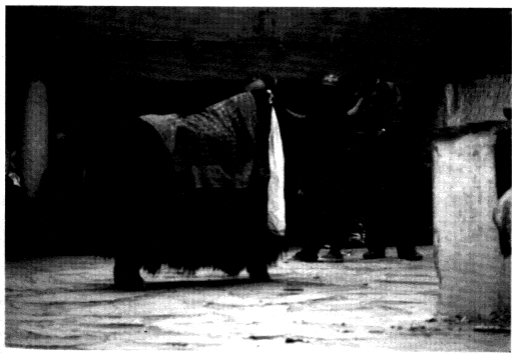
<sup>13</sup> Tharchen described this god as having four heads and six hands, and said there was a statue of it in Thugje Gompa.

dedicate goats, but this is not always customary. In this case owners dedicate their goats to the gods, *btsan*, and *klu*. Male goats are dedicated to Genpo, but female goats are not, and neither male nor female goats are appointed as *mis-ga*. Further, male horses and yaks are also dedicated to the gods, *btsan*, *klu*, and Genpo. Individual herds will not contain these horses and yaks, because it is highly unlikely that owners will have animals representing all three worlds, and it would also be difficult for them to afford this. Instead, these horses and yaks are the property of the monastery, usually Korzok because Thugje is too small, and are propitiated once a year. This is at the beginning of the annual monastic festival held at Korzok, which generally takes place during the month of July. At this time the monastery's rams and male goats dedicated to the gods, *btsan*, and *klu* are also propitiated. All the animals are brought into the centre of the monastery's courtyard, where they are blessed by the Rinpoche and his lamas before the monastic dances (*'cham*) begin (Plates 8 and 9).

The sheep and goats dedicated to the gods, *btsan*, and *klu* are regularly propitiated by their owners. Each morning, once their owners offer incense in their tent, it is then taken outside and offered to the livestock. At the time of shearing particularly, special reverence is shown to these animals, as described in the next chapter. These sheep and goats are never killed or sold to butchers. When they grow old and eventually die, other young sheep and goats take their place. This is effected by tying a tuft of wool from the old sheep onto the back of the new one. In the case of goats a bit of goat hair from the old goat is tied onto the new one's back. No special prayers are held at this time.



8. These horses are brought into the courtyard of Korzok Gumpa and dedicated to the gods, *btsan*, and *klu*.



9. A *kha-btags* is tied around the ear of this yak dedicated to the *btsan*.

Among nomadic pastoralists in Tibet animals can also be devoted to a deity and even be presented to a Living Buddha (Carrasco 1959: 73).<sup>14</sup> However, these animals offered to the gods are not always sheep but may be male yaks, which in this case are called *lha g.yag* (god yak):

“... these animals are set completely free and may not be used or even handled by anyone. They are free to go as they please, but if they follow the community in its seasonal move it is a good omen. If they choose to wander off by themselves, no effort is made to control them, but the community does seem to protect them from harm or outside interference and, thus, communally acts as guardian of these livestock of the gods” (Ekvall 1968: 29-30).

Tucci mentions that nomadic pastoralists in Tibet possess a special pantheon of their own at whose centre stand the “Seven Brother Gods of the Herds”, namely, the horse-god, the god of the yak, the god of the tame domestic yak, the god of the *mdzo* (yak-cow cross), the god of oxen, the god of sheep, and the god of goats (1970: 205).

Apart from the sheep left for the gods, *btsan*, and *klu*, there is yet another section of livestock dedicated to the gods, and they are referred to as *tshe-thar* (literally “to save a life”). This category includes not only sheep, but also goats, horses, and yaks, and either gender is acceptable. While yaks, sheep, and goats are made *tshe-thar* from a young age, horses are only made so when they are much older. These animals are chosen by their owners who take their prayer beads (*khri-ma*), and throw them high in the air. The animal on which the beads fall is then appointed as the *tshe-thar*, and prayer flags (*dar-lcog*) or a *kha-btags* (ceremonial white scarf) are

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<sup>14</sup> Tibetans in Rupshu said they also offered livestock to the gods, *btsan*, and *klu* in the same manner as the Rupshupa. However, this practice could have been acquired by them from Rupshu because other studies on nomadic pastoralists in Tibet make no mention of it.

tied around its back. Later these animals must be blessed by a Rinpoche, and this is usually done at the annual prayer festival, *Ma-ni Dung-'phyur* (cf. section 2.3.1), held in Rupshu in the first week of August. The Rinpoche blesses these special animals, offers each of them *kha-btags* and ties a religious thread (*sru-nga*) around their necks. They are then considered to be *tshe-thar* and are auspicious beings. Their main purpose in this world is to remove sin (*sdig-pa*) and ease suffering. Sometimes these animals are bestowed upon particular individuals, especially those who have been ill for long periods of time. In his flock, Tharchen has one *tshe-thar* for Angchuk, two for Ama, and one for Norgey. Angchuk has one because he is quick to pick fights and was once stabbed by a Tibetan, and Norgey because his eyesight is bad. Ama has two because there was a time when she was very sick and now she needs all the blessings and protection she can get. The *tshe-thar* are never killed, though when they die naturally, their meat is eaten. Further, they are always well treated, loads are never put on their backs, and the horses will never be ridden. However, pashmina and wool are removed from them. Once a *tshe-thar* dies, then it is not immediately replaced like the livestock dedicated to the gods, *btsan*, and *klu*. If families feel that they still need the *tshe-thar*, or individuals continue to require protection and are still ill, then other animals are offered. These animals are regularly blessed by their owners, as well as the Rinpoche presiding over the annual prayer festival at Rupshu.

*Tshe-thar* are also common in Tibet and Nepal. Tucci writes that in rituals involving the healing of a sick person, whose illness is usually said to be caused by a god or demon, a *rtsam-pa* (barley flour) figure is made of the sick man, smeared with his sweat or spittle, and around this are placed his shoes, his hat, and a living animal

which has been specially liberated in order to free it from being killed (1970: 190-191). "This living animal or *tshé thar* is usually a white lamb" (ibid). Brower states that "Sherpas value their livestock for yet another purpose: as ritual objects," and they "have the option of designating any of their livestock as *tshetar*, or dedicated animal" (1991: 108). However, a woman's *tshetar* will be a female, a man's male. The reverence accorded to these animals is similar to that practised in Rupshu and they are never killed, and seldom used to carry loads (ibid). Further, the males are not castrated (ibid: 136). Sokolewicz mentions a similar practice followed by pastoralists in Mongolia, whereby certain sheep, mainly rams, are selected to accompany their owners throughout their lives, and their presence is said to be a good omen of peace and wealth (1981: 132-133). It is said that the ram's illness foretells the illness of his master, and if he is well taken care of, then no harm will come to his master (ibid: 132). The practice differs among the Bhotias of North-West Nepal where a yak represents a deceased, and not a living, person and participates in the ritual journey of the deceased (Allen 1974: 12). Its sex corresponds to that of the deceased. Eventually, the animal is killed and eaten by low-casts Bhotias or Tibetans, though among the Chaudans it is allowed to roam free in the mountains (ibid).

A third dedication to the gods is made via the yak and '*bri-mo*, which are specifically kept to appease the gods. The yak is referred to as *mgon-po* and the '*bri-mo* as *mgon-mo*, and there are special guidelines by which they are chosen for these dedications. The criteria which are followed are: the animals must be well built with nicely shaped curved horns, and totally black in colour. These animals are well-

treated, and while their wool is removed, their hair is never cut. Unlike the *tshé-thar*, loads may be put on their backs but these goods must not be dirty or polluting.

“We cannot put a woman’s things on it, especially the clothes she wears below the waist, and you cannot put a woman’s loom. But we can put a man’s loom, and our religious things, and also very good clothes,” Tharchen declared.

Beliefs concerning notions of purity and pollution, and gender relations in Buddhism, are discussed in more detail in Chapters Five and Six. Once a year, usually at New Year, these animals are propitiated. Offerings of butter (*yar*) are placed on their horns and forelegs, and prayer flags are draped over their backs.<sup>15</sup> A small bit of each of the five prayer flags is also strung through their ears to distinguish them from other yaks and *'bri-mos*.<sup>16</sup> A red powder (*tshag*), mixed into a paste with water, is applied on their horns, forelegs, down their back and along the sides of their body. While not everyone possesses a *mgon-po* or *mgon-mo*, they can appoint one from among their yak and *'bri-mo*. “It is considered good to have one,” Tharchen explained, “good for the family, for the other yaks, and it will also bring forth more yaks.” Unfortunately, he says, he does not own a well-shaped yak or *'bri-mo* to offer to the gods, otherwise he would have made such a dedication long ago.

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<sup>15</sup> Though the word for butter is *mar*, offerings of butter are referred to as *yar*.

<sup>16</sup> Prayer flags always come in sets of five colours; these are: green, blue, red, white, and yellow. These correspond to the five elements: wood, water, fire, iron, and earth, respectively (Myers and Pommaret 1994b: 146). The colours are also representative of the Five Buddhas: Amoghasiddhi - dark green, Akshobhya - blue, Amitabha - red, Vairocana - white, and Ratnasambhava - yellow (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 10).

While sheep, along with yaks and *'bri-mos*, have always held a positive ritual value among the Rupshupa, this has not always been the case with goats.<sup>17</sup> Goats were evidently regarded as inferior livestock and said to evoke a negative attitude, in contrast to sheep which evoke positive attitudes.<sup>18</sup> This is demonstrated in several ways. Initially, Rupshupa rarely dedicated goats to the gods, *btsan*, and *klu*, as they were not considered auspicious animals. Further, it is said that shepherds prefer sheep to goats. The former walk slowly and so the shepherds are able to keep pace with them, but the latter tread quickly and are therefore difficult to tend. It is declared that shepherds are always relentlessly swearing (*smon*) at their goats, never at the sheep, because they have to run to keep up with them. Fatigued, the shepherds usually curse the goats, calling out "*ra-ma ba-bud lang*" (may all you goats die). Goats also appear in verbal insults and the Rupshupa abuse each other saying "*khyed-rang ra-nad*" (may your goat fall sick). Thus, the positive ritualistic value of sheep among the Rupshupa, and the contrasting negative evaluation of goats as impure animals, are reflected in their attitude towards their livestock. To some degree this has changed today, because the economic value of goats has increased. Almost all tents in Rupshu now also dedicate goats to the gods, *btsan*, and *klu*. New-born kids are especially well looked after because they assure a future increase in the family's supply of pashmina. Thus,

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<sup>17</sup> In some cases it is said that yaks and *'bri-mos*, along with the horses, seem to lie outside this hierarchy.

<sup>18</sup> The animals concerned may vary among pastoralists. Sheep have an equivalent value in Rupshu's livelihood and experience to goats among the Kalasha, or cattle among the Nuer and Dinka. In Kalasha society, goats comprise the most important cultural goals, and this ritual premise is founded upon the welfare of sacred herds transmitted from gods to early ancestors (Parkes 1987: 645).

the ritual evaluation of livestock seems to correspond to their economic value. While the ritual value of sheep has not decreased, that of goats has most certainly increased.

Whether or not ritual attitudes associated with particular livestock have any relevance to sacrifice (*dmar-mchod*) in Rupshu is difficult to say. Parkes maintains that among the Kalasha, "the ritual evaluation of goats as sacred animals must also be related to their sacrificial role as primary offerings to Kalasha deities" (1987: 646). It has been suggested that at one time sacrifice of livestock was held in parts of Ladakh, including Changthang.<sup>19</sup> Asboe observed the sacrifice of a sheep at the harvest festival celebrations held near Leh (1938: 386). In 1938, when Prince Peter visited Korzok, he writes that he was invited to "attend the ceremonial sacrifice of a goat, or *Zor* ceremony," for which a real goat was slaughtered (1974: 309-310). His article includes a photograph of the event showing the goat and lamas presiding over it, but unfortunately he does not say much more about the ceremony.<sup>20</sup> Kaplanian writes that he heard that in earlier times the sacrifice of goats took place before the *lha-tho* (shrine to the gods), and in some places in Ladakh this practice continued to be observed as recently as just fifteen years ago (1981: 210). Sonam Phunsog, the teacher who worked in the late 1950s in Kharnak near Rupshu, said he once saw the sacrifice of a goat at a *lha-tho*. This practice has since been stopped by Drukchen Rinpoche who has told the Kharnakpa to offer incense instead of a goat.

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<sup>19</sup> Sonam Phunsog, paper presented at International Association of Ladakh Studies conference, August 1993.

<sup>20</sup> I attended the same ceremony in 1995 at which only an old goatskin was used. Though I tried to talk about this to the lamas and to other Rupshupa, they either said they knew nothing about such things or appeared reluctant to discuss the matter.

Thus, livestock husbandry does have a paramount ritual significance in Rupshu where transhumant herding is almost the sole subsistence occupation. Its symbolism constitutes a highly idealised ritual representation of Rupshu's links with the gods and the supernatural world. It is evident that the pastoral ideology inherent in Rupshu is one that reflects their practical dependence on livestock husbandry. The next section turns away from the gods to a discussion of livestock management practices in Rupshu.

### 3.2 "Livestock are our Wealth"

The prosperity of a family is determined by the livestock they possess. Wealth (*nor*) is defined in terms of sheep, goats, yaks, and *'bri-mos*. "I have no *nor*," Abi Yangzom once told me when I asked how many sheep and goats she had. Horses are not included in this. In contrast, in Tibet and amongst Tibetans in Rupshu, "horses, sheep, and common cattle are enumerated as such, but yak, male and female in one category, are simply labelled *Nor* (wealth)" (Ekvall 1968: 14). This fact is also conveyed by Clarke (1988: 95) and by Goldstein and Beall (1990: 95), who write that the nomads' generic term for yak is not yak at all but *nor*, a word that normally translates as "wealth". Thus, the general attitude is one in which the accumulation of livestock itself is of value, an expression of well-being and prosperity, a form of wealth.

Though yaks are worth more than sheep and goats, the latter are far more important as far as the overall economy is concerned, because they yield pashmina and

wool. A single yak is worth roughly nine sheep or ten goats.<sup>21</sup> A horse is not equated with sheep and goats, or yaks, and Angchuk stated that: "If a man has the money he will buy a horse, but if he doesn't have the money then he won't be able to buy one. It is as simple as that."<sup>22</sup>

Overall livestock population in Rupshu in 1990-91 was 22,423, with sheep numbering 8,745 and goats 12,978. However, most herders stated unequivocally that there are more livestock in Rupshu than the official count.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to get families to disclose the exact number of livestock they own, and most are suspicious of such inquiries, as they are wary of the questioner's intentions.<sup>24</sup> Tharchen summed up the spread of wealth throughout Rupshu, and according to him:

"Out of the seventy or so families in Rupshu roughly forty would be said to be wealthy. Then there are about fifteen or twenty families, like mine, who are neither rich or poor, and have just enough to eat. We would come in the middle. The rest are poor. They own very small

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<sup>21</sup> In Tibet roughly six sheep or seven goats were traditionally bartered for one yak (Goldstein and Beall 1990: 82).

<sup>22</sup> These value classes constitute what anthropologists have conventionally called "spheres of exchange", where the natural world is arranged into value classes for exchange (Parry and Bloch 1989: 15).

<sup>23</sup> These figures are from the Sheep Husbandry Department of Leh District, and government officials stated that there is only a slight variation in the numbers from year to year. However, the Rupshupa themselves claimed that these figures were too low, by at least 50%.

<sup>24</sup> This was the reaction to all outsiders, government and non-government, who came collecting livestock figures. It was a problem for me as well. Fortunately, I had Tharchen's help in corroborating the information, and once we returned to his tent he would say, "Tsewang Rigzin told you he had only hundred and ten sheep and goats, that is too few, he has many more, probably hundred and fifty, but not more than two hundred;" or, "Tashi Dolma told you she has only fifty sheep and goats, but for sure she has more than hundred. Also, she told you she has only nine yaks, she must have twenty;" or "Tashi Tondup, he told you correctly, he gave you the right number."

flocks of sheep and goats, and maybe only one yak or a horse. In the past everyone was more or less equal, now with the new wealth people here are becoming bad. No one even listens to the chief any more."

An affluent family in Rupshu is defined as one that owns about three hundred head of sheep and goats, thirty to thirty-five yaks, and four to five horses. An average-income family would have a hundred to hundred and fifty livestock, ten to twenty yaks, and one or two horses. A poor family may own as little as thirty to forty sheep and goats, one yak, and a horse if they are fortunate enough to have the money to spare.

Livestock composition has changed in Rupshu over the last forty to fifty years, and this is directly responsible for the "new" wealth that Tharchen is referring to. While the number of yaks has declined, that of goats has increased, and the number of sheep has remained roughly the same. At one time yaks had the highest value among all livestock, but with their decreasing number this position is slowly being usurped by the sheep and goats. Today, this increase in value is more particularly being appropriated by the goats. When Cunningham travelled through Rupshu he observed that there was about one yak for every ten sheep (1854: 210). On an average today, there would be one yak for every twenty to thirty sheep, if not more. Prince Peter, who was in Rupshu less than fifty years ago, stresses the ubiquitous presence of yaks: "They lived off their yaks which we could see all around us" (1950: 418). However, he makes no mention of such a large presence of sheep and goats. Several elderly Rupshupa mentioned that in the past they kept a lot more yaks, and wealth was determined not by the number of sheep and goats one kept, but by the number of yaks and *'bri-mos*. Sonam Rinchen remembered that when he was a young boy his father owned as many as seventy to eighty yaks, while today he has only eight.

Apart from changes in livestock composition, the overall size of herds has also dropped. It is said that in the old days, or till the Tibetans came, families like Meme Chogyal's, which were amongst the richest in Rupshu, owned more than a thousand head of livestock. However, today he and others like Tashi Tondup are still considered affluent even though their herds have dwindled to three hundred.

Several reasons are cited for this shift in livestock composition. The main ones are a decrease in pasture, and a rise in the price of pashmina. Yaks consume far greater quantities of grass than sheep and goats: one yak is said to eat the equivalent of about five sheep. Thus, since there is less grass available in Rupshu nowadays, families keep fewer yaks. Rupshu's access to grazing lands has reduced significantly, and the reasons for this are transformations in their trading patterns (cf. section 1.2.2), and a decrease in the size of their territory (cf. section 2.3). Since they no longer go on long trading journeys with vast numbers of their livestock, they no longer have access to the grazing lands along the way. The other reason for a strain on their pasture resources is the immigration of Tibetan refugees into Rupshu.

Another change in livestock patterns mentioned in Rupshu is that these days people keep more goats than sheep, and this is attributed to the increase in the price of pashmina.<sup>25</sup> In the past, sheep made up a larger portion of the herd, because wool was a guaranteed source of grain, and pashmina had very little value. Today, pashmina commands such a high price, and now that most deals are cash transactions as

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<sup>25</sup> Goats also yield more milk than sheep, which implies more butter and cheese, but few if any people mentioned this as a reason for the shift in livestock composition.

opposed to barter, they find it more advantageous to have the money. Further, barley no longer constitutes the bulk of their diet as they can now purchase other food items, such as rice and lentils, from government ration depots. Rizvi also noticed this change and states: "Chang-pa informants confirm an increased demand for pashm, agreeing that whereas earlier they kept more sheep than goats, today the situation is precisely the reverse" (n.d.1: 32). This shift from sheep to goats is observed in Tibet as well:

"Since the price of cashmere is rising much faster than wool, goats may well end up the basis of a new affluence for the nomads. This is already being reflected in herd composition. Whereas there were three sheep for every two goats in 1981, in 1988 the ratio was one to one" (Goldstein and Beall 1990: 105).

Taxes ('*bab*'), are paid to the government once a year for grazing their livestock on State land.<sup>26</sup> They are usually collected in September or October, but always after the harvesting in Lower Ladakh is over. The responsibility for collecting taxes falls on the local chief, who then passes the money on to the Patwari's (Tax Collector) office in Leh. The structure of payments is given below, and according to the Rupshupa changes in them have been negligible since they were first enforced in 1947. The first ten goats are exempt from tax, and the remaining goats are taxed ten paise each. For each sheep that they own they are charged fifteen paise. The first horse is exempt from tax if it is kept for personal use, and any horse owned after that is taxed Rs.2.50. The tax is sixty-five paise per donkey. Yaks, '*bri-mos*', and cows are exempt from tax. While there is resentment in Rupshu concerning payment of taxes

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<sup>26</sup> Taxes are also called *ra-'bab* (goat tax), but include tax paid on both sheep and goats.

because as far as they are concerned this is "their" land, they comply because they do not see any way out of it. "Also the amounts are not so large," Skarma said, "so we just pay them and keep our mouths shut."

The Rupshupa also do a bit of their own tax collecting. Taxes are collected from the Tibetan refugees who graze their livestock on Rupshu's lands. In this case, the Tibetans pay taxes in the month of January after the chief has taken a count of all their livestock. Rupshu's taxes are higher than the government's, and even yaks are not exempt. For each sheep and goat the Tibetans own they are charged twenty-five paise, and the tax levied on the possession of a yak is Rs.1.50.<sup>27</sup> The money collected is either divided up among all the tents or kept by the chief for community use - mainly for hosting prayer ceremonies or entertaining visiting dignitaries.

### 3.2.1 Livestock Management

Patterns of livestock rearing and management differ little in Rupshu from those practised in the past. Livestock management refers to breeding, rearing, culling, and herding practices. In his study of Lapp reindeer management, Paine establishes a distinction between the concepts of herding and husbandry and suggests that they be examined separately, prior to an understanding and knowledge of overall herd management (1964: 88). "Herding and husbandry are the components of herd management and its form is a function of the relationship between them; to

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<sup>27</sup> These figures vary with those stated in an agreement made on 5 October 1985 between the Tibetan refugees and the people of Rupshu which says that they will pay fifty paise per yak. Few people in Rupshu mentioned this increase.

understand changes in herd management one must look for the changes in this relationship" (ibid). While this section looks at the concept of husbandry, the last section presents herding practices.

The Rupshupa rarely purchase livestock, and instead prefer to breed their own. They are quite emphatic in declaring that: "We never buy any, we keep our own." Once when they were camped at Debring, a man from Hanle drove up with a truckload of sheep and goats, intending to sell them in Rupshu. Quite a commotion arose at the presence of the truck, and Skarma was later proud to announce that they had driven him out. The Rupshupa are adamant in stating that since it is widely recognised that their pashmina and wool is among the finest in Ladakh, it is in their best interest to retain the purity of their stock. Livestock from outside may spread disease among their own animals and contaminate the fine breed they possess. The second reason for not bringing livestock in from outside is that they need to limit themselves to a certain number of livestock, otherwise overpopulation will lead to over-grazing. Shortage of fodder in winter is said to be one of the main constraints on increasing the number of livestock. The third factor is that they find it is very expensive to buy livestock these days.

The peak period for lambing and kidding is between February and April. The *'bri-mo* also give birth during this time, but some may deliver in summer (Plate 10). The ewes usually begin in February and the female goats follow a month later. The sheep are pregnant for the longer period: as the Rupshupa say, "*ra-ma lnga, lug drug*" (goat five [months], sheep six). Lambs and kids born in winter are suckled at the start



10. In late July this *'bri-mo* gave birth to a calf.

of the day, then left behind in an enclosure of stones, *chor-khang*. Early weaning is achieved by not allowing the lambs and kids to graze together with their mothers, or by temporarily placing them in a different flock from that of the mother. Mortality amongst livestock is the highest among lambs and kids, especially since most births take place during the latter part of winter. Herds are also subject to irregular losses from disaster and pestilence; mainly heavy frosts leading to malnutrition, foot-and-mouth disease, and other contagious animal diseases. Veterinary facilities provided by the government are rarely used because of lack of conviction about their usefulness and the distances at which they are situated. Though the government has set up a feed bank in the area, inevitably there is a shortage of fodder during winter.

However, contrary to what they claim, the Rupshupa do purchase some livestock. Prices vary depending on the age and gender of the animals, young males costing more. In 1994, Tharchen purchased twenty-two female goats, twelve from Kharnak and ten from Dubbock. The price varied from Rs.800 to Rs.1,200. He preferred female goats over the males, in spite of the fact that the latter yield more pashmina, because the females give milk. These days livestock is also brought from outside for breeding purposes, and the government has started supplying male goats (but not sheep). These goats are reared at the Government Pashmina Goat Farms at Upshi and Nyoma.<sup>28</sup> The goats are specially bred here with the intention of increasing the pashmina production per animal, producing pashmina that is uniformly white in colour, and increasing the diameter and length of the pashmina fibre. Each family is

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<sup>28</sup> These Farms were set up in 1972, and their aim is to increase the population of high quality pashmina goats and to study problems related to feeding, management, combing, and mortality among these goats (Sheep Husbandry Department 1993: 3).

usually given one male goat by the government, and these vary in age from two to four years.<sup>29</sup>

The only animals regularly purchased are horses and yaks, and these usually come from Zanskar. Yaks are usually in the price range of Rs.6,000 to Rs.10,000. While yaks are also bred in Rupshu, horses are always purchased from outside. Tharchen recalls that soon after his marriage to Tashi Zangmo he bought two yaks and two 'bri-mos, each for about Rs.6,500. While one 'bri-mo remained barren (*di-kam*), the other had calves, and the five yaks he has today are her progeny. In addition he had bought a horse for Rs.4,000. She was pregnant, but both mother and foal died.<sup>30</sup> A good horse from Zanskar can cost around Rs.12,000 to Rs.15,000, while those of lower quality are about Rs.7,000 to Rs.8,000. However, the price always depends on the age of the horse. Tharchen bought both his horses in Leh roughly five years ago, and remembers that the black horse was cheap, only Rs.8,000, while his red horse cost Rs.15,000. Horses also come from Spiti, but these are more expensive than the ones from Zanskar, and prices range from Rs.25,000 to Rs.30,000. Spiti horses fetch higher prices because they are much bigger, taller, have a better gait, and also run

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<sup>29</sup> However, the government has been inconsistent in supplying the Changpa with these animals. Further, when the animal dies the officials insist on seeing its carcass before giving them another one, otherwise they do not believe them and think they have sold it. This becomes difficult, especially as government officials so rarely visit remote places such as Rupshu.

<sup>30</sup> The price of pregnant mares and foals is always low, because they are easy prey for predators, and therefore the Rupshupa generally do not like purchasing them.

faster. However, few people in Rupshu can afford them because of the exorbitant price.<sup>31</sup>

Sheep, goats, and yaks are branded, and each family will have their own mark to distinguish their livestock from those of other families. Though the herds may be large, adults have a remarkable ability to recognize individual animals; and marks are used more as proof of the identity of lost sheep and goats *vis-à-vis* outsiders than to distinguish the animals of different owners who camp and/or herd together. Tharchen proudly stated that if all Rupshu's livestock were to be mixed together, within minutes they could be sorted out (because of this ability with which they could discern their own). Horses are never marked, and this is because there are so few of them, maybe only hundred in all, that they can easily be told apart.

Marks are not inherited, and they can be changed at random as long as another family's marking system is not duplicated. It is common practice for the child who inherits his father's tent to follow his marking system, but this arrangement is flexible and he can also change his father's marks. Further, brothers frequently maintain their father's brand when dividing the flock, but modify the marks. Yet, there is no great emphasis on lineal continuity of marks, and men sometimes arbitrarily decide to change their mark.

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<sup>31</sup> In 1995, two men from Spiti came with seven horses and wanted to exchange them for old items equivalent to the price of the horse. Tharchen said that they were especially interested in old brocade and eventually they got four pieces, but he commented that these were all new.

There is no special time for marking the animals, but it is preferably done when they are small, because then there is less blood. Branding can consist of a mark or a slash on the ear, or an incision on the horn. The animals are marked either by notching or cutting (*nem-zen*), which is usually done to the ear, or with a piece of coloured cloth, thread or wool, and this is referred to as *neb-tu*. These markers are usually strung through a hole made in the animal's ear, either as a tassel or plaited. Some families, like Tharchen's, follow both methods, and he cuts the left ear and inserts a plait of black and white wool through the right one. Branding by fire (*me-tam*) is only permitted for the livestock belonging to the monastery. These animals are known as *dkor*, and consist mainly of goats (cf. Section 8.3.2). The brand marks are made on the goat's horns, by the chief and a lama from Korzok Gompa. This is done once a year, usually in the month of June, and old marks may also be renewed at this time. In the rare event that the goat has no horns, no alternative mark is made on that animal, yet it is included in the monastery's count of its livestock.

Castration (*cha-cho*), like branding, is also carried out soon after the young are born. All male animals, apart from those meant for breeding, are castrated. Through a carefully worked out system, they select which animals to keep as breeding stock. The decisions are taken on the basis of the quality of the pashmina or wool, and the preference is for those that are white in colour. The preference is stronger for goats; black sheep are also kept for breeding purposes, as black wool is used for weaving. For every fifty ewes a family owns they will have one ram who is the stud (*ru-po*), and for every thirty to fifty female goats they keep one male goat (*pha-ra*) for breeding.

Few yaks are kept for breeding purposes, and families usually share them. They are known as *khyu-ba*.<sup>32</sup>

Castration is considered defiling in Rupshu and most men prefer not to have anything to do with it. Instead, they try to get someone from the lower caste, usually a Mon, to perform this. The Mon belong to the lowest strata in the Ladakhi social hierarchy and are associated with carpentry and music-making (Erdmann 1983: 152). However, no Mon live in Rupshu and they have to be called from neighbouring villages and lured with the promise of gifts. They usually come in summer when the passes are open, and their arrival in Rupshu is announced by the sound of the *sur-na* ("oboe", a wind instrument).

It was the month of August when the *sur-na* could be heard in the distance, announcing the arrival of the Mon from Martselang. He had come specifically to castrate the horses, and charged between Rs.100 and Rs.300 per horse. The price varied depending on the age, size, and strength of the animal. In addition to the money, he collected gifts such as butter, cheese, wool, and meat from each family.

Mon are mainly called to castrate the horses and yaks, and it is, in fact, quite common for the Rupshupa to castrate their own sheep and goats. This difference is explained in terms of the larger number of livestock, and the Mon's charges would be too much for most families to bear. On a hot morning in June, Tharchen was

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<sup>32</sup> In Tibet the term yak actually refers to castrated males, and *bo-a* is the term for uncastrated breeding males (Goldstein and Beall 1990: 185).

absorbed in his astrology book, which stated that that particular day was a good one to castrate the lambs and kids. So when the sheep and goats returned in the evening, the male lambs and kids were quickly separated from the rest of the herd, and placed in a smaller stone pen. Angchuk wrapped a *kha-btags* round his head, as he was going to do the cutting and so had to ensure he had divine blessings bestowed upon him.

Tharchen seized the first lamb and held open his rear feet. Angchuk put some butter on the animal's forehead and then a bit on his own head. The butter is meant to signify the offering to the gods. He drew out a new blade, and began work. From then on the air was rent with the animals' squeals and yelps.

That night, in the tent, there were two pots boiling on the stove. I knew one was dinner, but pointing to the smaller of the two pots, I asked what was in the other. Ama shook her head saying "you do not want to know, it is dirty." It transpired that the severed penises were simmering away right next to the dinner. At first Ama joked and said that they would eat it. Then she declared that actually Angchuk would be the one eating them, as he had done all the cutting, and then whatever sins he had accumulated by performing the castration would go away. Later, Tharchen explained that if they did not cook them, the dogs would eat them and that would bring misfortune upon the family. Once sufficiently boiled, the contents of the pot are buried in the tent below the hearth.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The explanation for burying the contents of the pot below the hearth is that this was the one place the dogs would not be able to reach.

### 3.2.2 Meat Eating

Buddhism imposes taboos that prohibit the eating of ten kinds of meat: human, horse, dog, tiger, snake, crocodile, elephant, monkey, leopard, and otter (Tambiah 1969: 424). The Rupshupa have their own dietary rules relating to the animals they eat and say that they only eat those which have hooves (i.e. ungulates). The practice is similar among Tibetan nomads who eat the meat of animals that have hooves as well as horns (Dorje 1985: 18). There are also strong Buddhist prohibitions against killing, and the slaughter of animals is not encouraged. In Leh, and other villages in Lower and Central Ladakh, these rules are circumvented because of the presence of Muslim butchers (*sha-tshong-pa*, the Urdu word *kasai* is also commonly used) who do all the slaughtering. Since all Rupshu's inhabitants are Buddhist, they have no choice but to kill their own animals.

Meat (*sha*) is central to the Rupshupa's diet and their livestock, apart from being a source of pashmina and wool, give them an abundant supply of this.<sup>34</sup> Since

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<sup>34</sup> Vegetables (*tshod-ma*) generally do not grow in Rupshu, and the only ones available are those that come from Leh. Nawang Dorje, the trader from Manali, also brings onions and potatoes with him. The Rupshupa also search their own surroundings for edible greens, collecting stinging nettle (*zwa-tshod*), a kind of sweet pea (*gye-re*), and a certain dry grass or herb which they say is like their onion (*kod-se*). In 1992, when Drukchen Rinpoche preached in Rupshu, he told the people that they must stop eating meat as it was against the principles of Buddhism. Soon after he left, the Rupshupa discussed this amongst themselves and wondered what they were to eat instead. There were no local vegetables, and they could not possibly keep importing them from Leh. However, Drukchen's sermon strongly influenced some people; Norgye was one of them and he stopped eating meat. Already frail, he grew weaker and two years later his parents had to insist he start eating meat again. Lamas and nuns in Rupshu eat meat, but do not participate in the killing.

the number of animals killed for food varies with the wealth of the household, decisions to kill an animal are taken with some trepidation. One of Tharchen's goats was ill and Ama mentioned that she fancied eating some meat, but Angchuk was adamant that the goat should not be killed. "It is a young male goat," he said admonishing her, "and can bring us much pashmina next year. Pashmina brings more money than wool and we need all the money we can get." The local doctor from the Animal Husbandry Department happened to be visiting Rupshu at that time and Angchuk went to fetch him. When the doctor eventually came, he reeked so much of alcohol that Angchuk wondered if he was capable of giving any treatment. Ultimately, the goat was given an injection and the doctor left assuring them that it would recover. The family decided to wait a day and see what happened. The next day the goat was feeling better, Angchuk remarked that it was moving around and eating grass. "No meat then," I said to Ama, and she laughed.

The general consensus in Rupshu is that yak meat, like *'bri-mo* milk, is the tastiest. According to Norgy, sheep and goat meat taste almost the same, and he denied having a preference for one over the other. Yak meat is basically a ceremonial food, eaten at New Year, and families rarely kill the animals at other times.<sup>35</sup> Two or three families get together and kill one yak, the owner being compensated in cash to a half or third of the value of his animal. The meat is then equally shared, though the owner keeps the head, skin, and tail. While families usually kill and consume their own sheep and goats during the year, it is also quite common for them to share in the

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<sup>35</sup> However, Tibetans in Rupshu do kill yak and *'bri-mo* at times other than New Year.

meat of these animals, with the owners keeping the head and skin. The owner may not always be paid for his animal, but is usually promised meat at a later date.

The Rupshupa prefer to eat animals that are killed rather than those that die naturally, because there is more taste in the meat that they kill compared with dead meat. Killing is done by suffocating the animal to death by tying up ('*khyig-cis*) its mouth and nostrils.<sup>36</sup> Before killing the animal a prayer wheel is placed over its head and prayers are recited (Plate 11).<sup>37</sup> These prayers are said to expel any sin acquired by the person who kills the animal, as well as those who eat it. Amongst nomads in Tibet, before the animal is killed, it is given water that has been blessed and a butter lamp is lit and put in front of the altar as an offering (ibid: 25). It is always the men who kill and wash the animals in Rupshu, very rarely will a woman participate. Amongst the Tibetans, however, women will assist in cleaning the animal and making the sausages. However, even amongst the men in Rupshu there are those who will not take part in the slaughter of animals, namely the lamas and those, like Tharchen, who are religious-minded.<sup>38</sup> However, they have no qualms about cooking and eating the meat later. A taboo of not eating meat on the same day that the animal is killed is also

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<sup>36</sup> In some cases the string is removed from the animal's mouth just before it is about to die so that it will appear that the individual was not responsible for the killing of the animal. That way less sin will be accrued by the person.

<sup>37</sup> In all animals that are killed, the small bone where the jaw meets the skull is kept and put in the *mtshal-khang*, a small shrine-like room at which offerings are made once a year. There are two in Rupshu, one at Thugje and the other at Ponka Nugu. Humans have their own *mtshal-khang*, in which bones from the head or face of the individual are placed, and these are at Thugje and Noruchen.

<sup>38</sup> Angchuk used to grumble that Tharchen never helped kill the animals, and he voiced concern over all the sin he was accumulating. On the other hand, he said that if he did not kill, there would be nothing for them to eat.



11. Angchuk places a prayer wheel over a sheep's head and recites prayers before killing it.

observed. The meat on that day is referred to as *nyin-sha* (the first day's meat), and Tharchen explained that since the meat is still "hot", the person who eats it will accrue more sin. Therefore, they only consume it on the second day, when it has cooled down. Chophel cites a similar Tibetan belief:

"To eat the meat of an animal killed that very day is unwholesome and earns more negative karma than usual. It is a great sin, because of which you will be born a *sin-po* (a ferocious sub-human who is not only carnivorous but also a cannibal) in the next life and will go back to hell" (1983: 59).

While everyone gets an equal share of the meat, pregnant women will always be fed the best parts of the animal and most of the fat. Ama explained that this is because they need to put on weight to give them strength when they deliver. Meat is also shared between neighbouring tents, and if Tharchen has killed an animal, he will always send a plate of meat and some sausages to Skarma's tent, and vice versa. Meat may be eaten raw, especially during the winter when it is frozen. Dry meat (*sha skam-po*) is also eaten, in this case the meat is not cooked, but hung out to dry and smoked in the tent.

Part two of this chapter has described animal husbandry practices in Rupshu, which include breeding, rearing, castration, and culling. The last section of this chapter looks at herding practices.

### 3.3 Grazing Patterns - The Shepherd (*Lug-rdzi*)

*Lug-rdzi* do not sit here,  
*Lug-rdzi* get up and go with the sheep,  
*Lug-rdzi* go to the lama first and pay your respects.

In summer, do not be frightened of the heat,  
 On your body wear thin cotton clothes that are red in colour,  
 In summer, do not be frightened of thirst,  
 Carry tasty and strong alcohol with you.

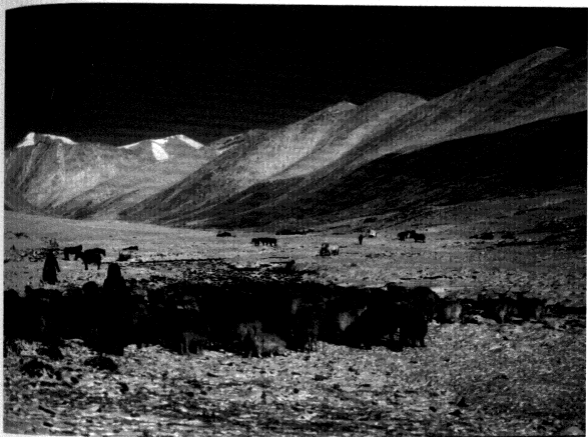
In winter, do not be frightened of thirst and hunger,  
 In the front of your robe carry with you buttermilk and barley mixed with butter,  
 In winter, do not be frightened of the cold,  
 On your body wear the thick leather robe covered with lice.

Every morning, at around eight, shepherds will take the sheep and goats out to graze in the valleys and mountains surrounding the encampment.<sup>39</sup> They return a short while before the sun sets. This varies depending on the time of year, and it is usually at around six in the evening during summer, and as early as four in winter. These timings are not arbitrary but are a rule set by the Rupshupa to maintain pasture lands and prevent over-grazing.<sup>40</sup> Shepherds often walk eight to twelve kilometres a day grazing the livestock, but if grass is nearby then they may not have far to go. Winter is probably the hardest time for the herders, who continue to graze even if it is snowing (Plate 12).

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<sup>39</sup> Herders can also be referred to by different terms depending on the animals they graze: *lug-rdzi* (sheep herder), *ra-rdzi* (goat herder), *g.yag-rdzi* (yak herder), and *ra-rdzi* (horse herder). *Lug-rdzi* is the most commonly used term, even when referring to herds consisting of both sheep and goats.

<sup>40</sup> One of Rupshu's complaints against the Tibetans who live there is that often they do not abide by this rule of theirs and instead take their livestock out to graze as early as four or six in the morning.



12. A shepherd (*lug-rdzi*) takes the livestock grazing as the first snowfall of the year begins in early November.

Sheep and goats are generally herded together, in flocks of up to two hundred to one shepherd, assisted by a dog. Yaks and horses are the only livestock not herded. They are left untended in the high mountain valleys where they graze by themselves. These valleys are said to have more grass, and so it is stated that this balances out the pressure of livestock on the pasture. The practice is similar in Tibet, and Goldstein and Beall state that the yaks usually do not wander too far from where they are left, so when they are needed for transportation, it is not difficult to locate and bring them back (1990: 80). However, it is also common for the animals to go missing or be killed by predators. In spring and summer, *'bri-mos* are kept in the camp for two reasons, so that they can easily be milked, and to protect their young from predators. *'Bri-mos* are herded separately, because they walk at a different pace from sheep and goats, and are said to frighten the latter. While sheep and goats walk much faster, the *'bri-mo* is slower and has a tendency to loiter. This makes it difficult for herders to watch over sheep and goats as well as *'bri-mos*. In Mongolia, similarly, herders keep horses and yaks away from sheep and goats. Horse's hooves are said to destroy the pasture of sheep and goats, and yaks have a negative effect as they dig up grass with its roots, and the pasture takes two to three years to recover (Humphrey et. al. 1993: 51-52). Thus, it is generally "recognised that animals' activities affect one another and that they have their 'appropriate places' in nature which it is the herdsman's task to observe" (ibid: 52). Lambs and kids are usually herded separately from the adults, and those born around the time of migration are transported strapped in small bags on top of the Rupshupas' belongings on horses or yaks.

Shepherds are usually young boys and girls who generally start herding from the age of eight or nine. At first they accompany a parent or older sibling, until they are confident of handling the livestock on their own. When Rinchen first started weaving in October 1992, Tharchen's second son, Norbu, began to take the livestock out grazing. He was then around seven or eight years old, and brimmed with excitement on the first day he accompanied his elder brother, Norghey. In some families, where there are many more children, they may start herding at a later age. Thus, most of the responsibility of herding falls on the older children, and siblings often go together or take turns. Both Norghey and Rinchen, who continued to herd even after she learnt weaving, would say that they liked being shepherds except when it was very cold and windy. While herding, they spent their time reciting prayers, spinning, making rope, or often they met up with other shepherds and lit a fire and made tea. The only deterrent to their herding was when there was some function going on in the camp. Every time there was a prayer ceremony, a horse-race, or a wedding in the camp Rinchen and Norghey would argue amongst themselves as to whose turn it was to go herding. Tharchen would have to mediate and decide who should go. Then he would compensate the one who went by allowing that child to return from herding two or three hours earlier, so that they could also join in the festivities. At other times he would tell Angchuk to go herding so that both children could stay back.

Herding is hard work, especially during winter, and as they get older, and especially after they marry, most adults hope to stop shepherding. After fifteen or twenty years of herding, sometimes on a daily basis, at other times on alternate days,

they say they get tired and look forward to quitting. This is especially the case with married women who speak with some derision of their counterparts who continue to herd.<sup>41</sup> Ama remembers that she first began herding at the age of six and went on till she got married at twenty-five. In her new home, Tharchen and his brothers did all the herding, and so she was glad to stop. Men continue to herd for many more years and some, like Tashi Tondup, who is nearly sixty years old, still herd livestock occasionally despite their age. In contrast, women have more work to do in and around their tents, and they have their weaving. Some adults who have only one child may share the herding with them. Thus, though it is generally older children who are responsible for herding the livestock, if their parents feel that the animals are underfed they may decide to take them out grazing instead. Tharchen rarely if ever went out herding, but would send Angchuk when he felt the sheep needed good pasture. At times the children may be lazy and not walk far enough with the animals. Angchuk grumbled that though he always told Rinchen where the best grass was, and that she should take the animals there, she never listened to him.

In families where there are no children old enough to go herding, or there is only one child, then two or three tents pool their herds and participate in a rotational system of shepherding. The daily herding is then equally divided between all the tents. This sharing can be between siblings or neighbouring tents that are not

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<sup>41</sup> It is the same in Tibet, where herding is a low-prestige job for adults, and is typically done by teenagers and low-status adults such as unmarried siblings and daughters-in-laws without children (Goldstein and Beall 1990: 110).

related.<sup>42</sup> Nawang Skalzang's son is only two years old, a daughter has just been born, and his wife is not yet strong enough to go herding. He and his father-in-law share their herding, and each goes on alternate days. Since his father-in-law has three younger children old enough to go herding, Nawang does not always have to go, and so he sends his livestock with one of the children, in exchange for which he does small chores for his in-laws, such as making rope and stitching. Tharchen and his younger brother Skarma herd their livestock together. Since Tharchen has a much larger herd than Skarma, he has to contribute twice the amount of work towards the herding. They have organised it in such a way that every two days of herding are Tharchen's responsibility, and the third day is Skarma's. However, more often than not Skarma does not go herding and requests Rinchen or Norgey to take his turn. Their kindness would then be reciprocated by Skarma, and the children would be invited to his tent for dinner on that day. Later he would often bring them small gifts from Leh. Tharchen has also shared the herding of his *'bri-mos* with an elderly Tibetan man, when they each went on alternate days. At another campsite, nine tents got together and shared in the herding of the *'bri-mos*, and so Tharchen's turn came up every nine days.

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<sup>42</sup> Pooling herds for grazing is not uncommon. In Tibet the practice is similar but generally, while being a neighbour may itself be sufficient grounds for co-operation, the households that combine to look after their animals jointly are generally extended families (Clarke 1988: 87). Among the Kalasha, although descent groups may claim to "own" areas of pastureland as their corporate estate, non-agnates can easily obtain access to grazing in such regions through their membership within a co-operative herding company of *palawi* partners. This consists of a group of four to ten households who pool their pastoral resources for the summer period, sharing the tasks of herd management and dairy production (Parkes 1987: 643-644).

Many families tend only their own animals throughout the year, but some integrate the livestock of other families from neighbouring villages for a given period of time into their own flocks in return for payment in cash or kind. Still others work exclusively, at least for part of the year, as hired shepherds, and this is especially true of families that are not very well off. There are times when Rinchen will herd for other families when Tharchen needs the extra money, for example, she worked for a month as a herder in Debring for a Tibetan family. She was given food every day and at the end of the month was paid Rs.550. Later, the Tibetan man gifted her a pair of shoes when he returned from Manali. There are also times during the winter when entire tents migrate to Leh and pay someone in Rupshu to do their herding for them in their absence. At other times of the year, mainly summer, shepherds also collect medicinal plants for local doctors (*am-chi*), who pay them for the service - Norgey often does this work.

The general herding pattern, as mentioned earlier, is to take the livestock out around eight in the morning and return before sunset.<sup>43</sup> Milking (*'o-ma 'jo-cis*) is women's work.<sup>44</sup> The ewe and female goats are usually milked twice in the day, once

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<sup>43</sup> However, this pattern changes in spring when there are two herding shifts in one day. The first is early in the morning, usually before dawn, and the ewes and female goats are not milked at this time. Around midday they are brought back to the tents, milked, and then taken out to graze again. In the evening when the livestock return, they are milked once more. This herding pattern is followed in order to strengthen the sheep and goats after the long, cold winter. According to Brower's Sherpa informants, this pre-milking period of early morning grazing boosts milk production (1991: 128).

<sup>44</sup> In contrast, Jina writes that only old men and women milk the animals (1995: 56). It is emphatically stated in Rupshu that milking is woman's work, and that men never milk. Besides, women of all age groups participate in milking; it is not strictly the prerogative of the elderly.

in the morning before they leave for grazing and again when they return in the evening. The yield of milk per animal is highest in summer, while it is at its lowest in winter.<sup>45</sup> Young lambs and kids are separated from their mothers during summer, grazed near the camp or placed in different herds, to prevent them from drinking their milk. The *'bri-mo*, though she is milked only once a day, in the mornings, supplies the Rupshupa with the most milk, and this supply is usually constant throughout the year. Ewes yield the smallest amount of milk and for the shortest period, about three to four months in the year. By August their milk supply will have dried up altogether.<sup>46</sup> Female goats give milk for a much longer stretch of time. The reason for this, Ama explained, is that lambs are allowed to drink more of their mother's milk than the kids, because they are not as strong. In contrast the kids are separated from their mother a few weeks after they are born, to prevent them drinking her milk. This exchange of goats is done by keeping the kids with another person's flock until they are weaned off mother's milk, as a kid will never drink milk from any other female goat. By the end of October the milk supply is so scarce that the ewe and female goats are only milked in the morning. The Rupshupa say that they like *'bri-mo*'s milk best of all, then sheep milk, and lastly goat milk. This is because milk from the *'bri-mo* and ewe are richer than that from the female goat. However, after milking, all the milk is usually just mixed up together and boiled.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> As a result of the low production of milk in winter, many Rupshupa have now taken to stocking up on powdered milk to see them through the shortage.

<sup>46</sup> In some cases ewes yield very little milk, and then they are milked only once a day, usually in the mornings.

<sup>47</sup> However, sometimes only sheep and goat milk is mixed and used for making cheese, while *'bri-mo* milk, because of its high fat content, is boiled separately and specifically kept for making butter. These balls of butter are then

When the sheep and goats arrive after the day's grazing, the young and female livestock are first separated from the rest of the flock. Though milking is specifically women's work, everybody helps with rounding up the livestock and different cries are used to call the various animals. "Chor-chor," Padon hollers as she and Lanze run after the lambs and kids. Even the children help out at this time, and they will go scampering after the young with their small lassos and attempt to ride on their backs. The lambs and kids are kept tied up during the night, usually in the centre of the pen, in an area known as the *ses-sdang*. This is to prevent them from straying and to protect them from predators like wild dogs (*spyang-ku*) and the snow leopard (*jed-po*, Leh: *gcan*). The women then separate the ewes and female goats from their male counterparts. "Tho-lo, tho-lo," Ama exclaims as she chases the ewes, and Rinchen goes after the female goats calling, "tor-lo, tor-lo." As each ewe or goat is caught they are tied, each facing the opposite direction, by looping (*mgug*) a section of the rope (*tar-thag*) over the neck in a slip knot (*tar-non*). Goldstein and Beall refer to this as a crochet-fashion slip knot (1990: 90). Once they are securely tied the women begin milking their animals (Plate 13). While households may herd together, they almost always keep their milking separate. The women work their way twice up and down the line of animals, and once finished they pull the loose end of the rope and the slip knot unravels the row of crocheting to free the animals at once (*ibid*). For weaning, a paste made from dung and water is sometimes applied to the udders of the lactating females before untying the animals. This is to prevent their young from drinking their milk.

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wrapped in goatskin and stored for the winter.



13. While Rinchen is busy tying the ewes and female goats, her mother begins milking them.

Milking the *'bri-mo* is a little bit more difficult because of both its size and temperament. However, the *'bri-mo* is only milked in the morning, because her calf would have drunk all her milk during the course of the day. The calf is first called, "*kho-kho*", separated from the mother and tethered to a line pegged into the ground. Then the *'bri-mo* is rounded up with the same cry, and entreated to stand still with the call "*ri-ri*". Her hind legs are tied together to prevent her from kicking the woman milking her. The calf is then untied and allowed to drink its mother's milk for a moment to start the flow; it is then dragged away and retied. After milking, the calf is untied and allowed to forage with the mother all day.

The final section in this chapter turns to a description of the system of pasture organisation followed in Rupshu.

### 3.3.0 Pasture Organisation

Herding is not done indiscriminately by the shepherds. There is a carefully worked out system of pasture allocation that both prevents overgrazing of particular pastures and ensures that livestock will always have enough grass to eat. Clarke explains that because most nomadism tends to take place in repetitive annual cycles, traditional rights of these communities to access these definite areas of grazing is formed, which eventually leads to a general rule of regulation of the pasture (1992: 394). Pastoral organisation involves the same pattern of dispersal and seasonal transhumance over extensive grasslands as was covered in the previous chapter regarding the annual route of migration (cf. section 2.3.1).

Land is not privately owned in Rupshu, and before 1947 all grazing land was jointly held by the people under the jurisdiction of the local chief and the monastery. After independence this changed, and now all land in Rupshu is owned by the State government, to which the local people have to pay taxes for grazing their livestock.

Further, the rights over grazing lands are not exclusive to any group of families, but to all the inhabitants of Rupshu as a whole. At each campsite specific - areas circumscribing pastures are demarcated for grazing, and herders are forbidden to take their livestock beyond these boundaries (*sa-mtshams*).<sup>48</sup> Tharchen explained:

"If we are camped at Debring, then we cannot go and graze our animals at Zara, and we cannot go below Shang Dong where you see the broken houses along the road."

The end of each boundary is marked by several piles of stones (*sa-rdo*), stacked one on top of the other. Each *sa-rdo* is about two to three feet high, and they are scattered along the edge of the boundary in groups of two, three, or four. The chief makes periodic visits to the stone piles and checks or restacks them when required.

Boundaries also often follow natural landmarks, such as streams, rivers, and ridges, and these separations are more likely to be practically useful perimeters for both the shepherd and livestock.

The custom is that when shepherds take their livestock grazing, they can go wherever they like as long as they remain within the demarcated boundaries. This rule is absolutely mandatory. If they are apprehended transgressing this regulation, their

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<sup>48</sup> *Sa-mtshams* also means border or frontier.

families are fined (*chad-pa*) by the chief. For every ten sheep and goats that have strayed beyond the boundary, the family is fined one ewe. This ewe is given to the chief, who sells it, and keeps the money for community use. According to the chief, the reason the ewe is the penalty is because the loss of milk is felt more acutely by the family, and so it is hoped that they will be more disciplined next time. On the other hand, cash payments are also acceptable these days, and the value of the ewe may be paid to the chief.

Cases of animals straying beyond the assigned grazing areas are not uncommon, and it seems these rules are readily flaunted by the Tibetans who have more cash to pay for their fines. Once in October, when the men were returning to camp after the annual collection of salt from Tso Kar, Skarma spotted twenty horses grazing near Ponka Nugu. He immediately recognised them as belonging to the Tibetans and was furious. "Damn the Tibetans," he said angrily, "their horses are eating the grass we keep for the winter." Then quickly he and some other men rounded them up and rode the horses back to camp where they left them in front of the Tibetans' tents.<sup>49</sup>

It appears that there is no fixed rule within their system of pasture organisation that allows for grazing lands to lie fallow because, as Tharchen explained, there is always grass everywhere. However, if it is felt during the year that there is not much

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<sup>49</sup> Situations such as this occur fairly frequently, but often go unnoticed because of the vastness of the land. Once when Angchuk and I walked from Mangzul to the main road, he pointed to some yaks grazing nearby and said that they belonged to the Tibetans. Again they were eating grass meant for later in the year.

grass at a particular camping area, they decide not to halt there, or to shorten the customary length of time spent there. In 1994 it was decided that the grass around Norchen was decreasing, so a decision was taken that in 1995 no one would be allowed to camp there unless the prayer ceremony was being held.<sup>50</sup> They would have to stay at Norchung or Rina instead.

Apart from the grass that is fed to the livestock, twice in the year they are marched to Tso Kar and fed the salt there.<sup>51</sup> This is known as the *sel-dud* and is usually held in June and September. The livestock are not fed salt (*tshwa*) meant for human consumption, but instead fed two other qualities of salt known as *ba-tshwa* and *dgo-rong*.<sup>52</sup> The former is said to be like fine barley flour in texture and is generally fed to the sheep and goats. The *dgo-rong* is very coarse, and of an inferior quality compared to *ba-tshwa*. It is only fed to livestock when *ba-tshwa* is in short supply. These two kinds of salt are said to be good for the livestock's nourishment, and to increase their strength. The entire camp rarely attends the *sel-dud*, and it is usually only the adult men along with the shepherds and a few young girls to milk the animals. A *sel-dud* is held for about a week, though two days are spent in travelling

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<sup>50</sup> In 1994 Tharchen, his brothers, and a few other families had camped at Norchen a month before the prayer ceremony. In 1995, this was no longer to be allowed.

<sup>51</sup> Horses, yaks, and *'bri-mos* are also fed the same salt as the sheep and goats, but they are not taken to Tso Kar. The salt is usually brought back to the camp and fed to them there.

<sup>52</sup> Drew identified *ba-tshwa* as carbonate of soda, and *dgo-rong* as a mixture of sulphate of magnesia with a compound of soda (1875: 300). Francke also mentions the same compositions (1910: 62). Unlike the salt for human consumption, which is obtainable only once a year, these other two varieties are always available.

there and back; for the remaining five days the livestock is busy eating salt. However, despite the benefits of the salt, livestock are not taken there more than twice in the year. The reason for this is that they would finish all the grass around Tso Kar, and this is specifically kept for winter grazing. Often the salt is also brought back to the camp and fed to individual livestock when their owners think they are weak and require extra nourishment. This is often the case in spring, which is the lean season for the animals.

The Rupshupas' chief source of livelihood continues to be animal husbandry, where all good fortune ultimately depends on a healthy and prolific herd. This in turn depends on their proper supplication and veneration of the gods, *btsan*, and *klu*. Once this is ensured, provided a lot of hard work is also put in, they believe that they are assured a flourishing herd and an abundant supply of meat, pashmina, and wool. It is the increasing price of pashmina which makes livestock rearing worthwhile and profitable for almost all Rupshupa. The next chapter looks at the process of removing pashmina and wool from the sheep and goats, and fibre preparation.

CHAPTER FOUR"THE LIVESTOCK ARE NAKED NOW":GATHERING AND PREPARING FIBRES

The men were busy shearing the sheep. Lanze and Padon stood on one side laughing among themselves. "Now look at the sheep," Lanze remarked teasingly, "they have no *gos* (male robe), no *sul-ma* (female dress), all their clothes are gone. They're naked (*gcer-sgog*)!" However Skarma, who was standing nearby, quickly amended her statement and quipped, "you can't see the ram's nakedness because his backside is still covered with wool, but see the ewe is totally exposed. You can see everything of hers!" Shearing conjures up all kinds of euphemisms connected to the sheep being unclothed and bare, and constant fun is made of them during the course of the day.

The main source of fibres for the Rupshupa is from the livestock that they herd, and this consists of their sheep, goats, and yaks. While sheep wool (*bal*) is the primary material used for weaving in Rupshu, goat hair (*ral*),<sup>1</sup> yak hair (*rtsid-pa*) and yak wool (*ku-lu*) are also widely utilized. Horse hair (*rta-rngog*) is used only as and when required; otherwise it remains uncut. However, pashmina (*le-na*), though

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<sup>1</sup> The local term for human hair is *skra*. However, the word *ral* is used to refer to a boy's hair when he is new-born. Most boys first cut their hair at the age of six or seven, after which it is called *skra*. On the other hand, a woman's hair is never cut during her life.

widely available in Rupshu, is not used there.<sup>2</sup> Sheep and yak wool are softer than goat and yak hair, and are largely used by women in the weaving of their blankets, carpets, and fabric for clothes. Goat and yak hair is stronger than wool, and it is used by men for weaving the tent, for saddle-bags, and for making rope. In Tibet too, sheep wool is widely used for weaving (Kuloy 1982: 25). In contrast, though wool is prevalent in Bhutan, cotton and silk are also extensively used for weaving there (Pommaret 1993: 1).

In Rupshu, removal of fibres from the livestock takes place only once a year and begins around the end of May.<sup>3</sup> The season commences with the combing of pashmina from the goats, followed by the removal of hair and wool from the yaks, and ends with the shearing of the sheep. This order is followed basically because pashmina is the first fibre to come out, followed by yak wool and then sheep wool. However, sheep and yak wool are at times removed together. By the end of July or the first week of August the removal of fibres must all be over before the big prayer ceremony, mentioned in section 2.3.1, at Norchen begins. The other stipulation is that no pashmina and wool can be sold until after the prayer ceremony is over. In practice deals are made with traders, but stocks remain in Rupshu until the prayers are over.

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<sup>2</sup> The nomads of Western Tibet refer to pashmina as *ku-lu*, as they make no terminological distinction between goat's down and the soft undercoat of yaks, dogs, and antelopes (Goldstein and Beall 1990: 105).

<sup>3</sup> In contrast, shearing is done twice a year in Lower Ladakh, in late April or early May, and again in September (Myers 1983: 43).

This chapter begins with an account of the removal of pashmina and wool in Rupshu. It first describes the order and process by which these fibres are removed from the livestock. The second part examines the quality and yield of these fibres. The last part looks at the stages involved in the preparation of fibres: cleaning, carding, spinning, and twisting.

#### 4.1 Removal of Fibres

Shearing the sheep, cutting goat hair, and removing hair and wool from the yak are basically male occupations. Men are also responsible for combing the pashmina out of the goats, but if a family is short on male labour the women will help, and so might the older children. Men assert that the generally observed practice in Rupshu is that a woman will never shear, only men shear. They perceive this as the conventional division of labour, and stress that women are too busy with other occupations. However, opinions vary among the women. According to Ama, a woman can cut wool, but since her hands are smaller it is difficult for her to grip the shears properly. Therefore, she cuts slowly. In contrast a man cuts much faster than her, and so women are not usually involved in the shearing. Furthermore, in a family that is short of male labour it is not uncommon to see women helping with the shearing.<sup>4</sup> A woman who shears because she has no man to help her, or is helping out,

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<sup>4</sup> On one occasion Lanze, Tharchen's sister, helped her husband with the shearing. Though a few comments were passed by those sitting around, she continued to shear regardless.

is not condemned or ridiculed. In Tibet, shearing is done by both men and women, using the small, highly sharpened sickle blades employed in cutting hay (Ekvall 1968: 48).

While most fibres are removed from the livestock once a year, goat hair like horse hair is cut only as and when required. Though horse hair is stronger than goat hair and is usually used to make the ropes that support the tent, the latter is more in demand and used more frequently than the former.<sup>5</sup> While goat hair may be cut from any part of the animal's body, horse hair is taken only from the mane. In Tibet the manes and tails of mares are also sheared, but for appearance's sake the horses used for riding are left untouched (ibid: 48).

At times, the sheep may be sheared twice in the year, and this wool is specifically kept for making felt (*phying-pa*).<sup>6</sup> Wool for making felt requires very short hairs, and so it is cut a few months after the sheep are sheared.<sup>7</sup> This is usually in October or November, just before winter sets in. This was extensively practised in Rupshu at one time, but is no longer very common as felt can now be easily purchased from the shops in Leh. The other reason is that cutting the wool just before winter sets in is said to weaken the lambs, making them less resilient to cope with the cold.

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<sup>5</sup> Occasionally villagers from other parts of Changthang or Lower Ladakh come to Rupshu to buy goat hair. The Rupshupa will then cut only as much as the person requires and sell it to them. In Tibet too the mane, tail, and hair of mares may be cut off for sale as horse hair (Downs and Ekvall 1965: 175).

<sup>6</sup> This contrasts with machine-made felt which is known as *sag-led*.

<sup>7</sup> Good quality felt is that made from lamb's-wool (*yun-pu*), and not wool from an adult sheep.

Sheep shearing is a major event in Rupshu, in which men from neighbouring tents help each other out through a reciprocal arrangement known as *sdeb-she*.<sup>8</sup> In contrast the removal of fibres from the goats and yaks is carried out by family members without any outside assistance. The section below turns to the combing of pashmina, which is the first fibre to be harvested in the season.

#### 4.1.1 Combing Pashmina

For the grass that you have just eaten, oh goat  
 Give us some good pashmina  
 For the water that you have just drunk, oh goat  
 Give us some good pashmina  
 Sit down on the grass and be still, oh goat  
 So that we can take out your pashmina

Tharchen sang this song while he was busy taking pashmina out of one of his goats. Pashmina is removed (*shad-cis*) from the goats with the help of a comb (*kred*). During winter, pashmina lies flat against the goat's body providing it insulation against the bitter cold. At this time the pashmina cannot be combed out, and it is referred to as *ma-khog*. The Rupshupa state that it is only when winter is over and the goat eats the first new grass (*sngo-rtswa*), that the pashmina rises slightly above the surface of the goat's body and can then easily be combed out. The local combs are made from yak horn, and resemble a shrivelled hand with six fingers. The handle of the comb consists of a semi-circular stuffed pouch made from yak skin. Into the flat

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<sup>8</sup> The word *sdeb-she* can also refer to barter. Thus, the term refers to both an equal exchange of goods or physical assistance.

part of the yak pouch six curved and pointed pieces of horn of varying lengths (two to six inches) are inserted. The yak pouch is then stitched on all sides. However, these yak horn combs are seldom used or made nowadays. Instead, metal combs are used, and they are usually made from steel (Plate 14). The comb is made of heavy wire bound together with finer wires, and each tine of the comb is curled around at the tip to produce a hook (Commonwealth Secretariat Report 1993: 31). These combs are not manufactured locally, but come from Manali, and some men even say from China. The goat hair is cut with the same pair of metal shears (*chan-pa*) used to shear the sheep and yaks (see Plate 14).

The practice is to comb a few goats at a time, and this is usually done in the morning before the goats leave for the day's grazing (Plate 15). The goats may also be combed again in the evening, if they return when there is still sufficient light. While a sheep is sheared in one sitting, pashmina is removed from a goat in stages. Tharchen explained that pashmina keeps a goat warm, and if it were removed all at one time, the goat would feel cold and might fall ill. For goats that are old or frail, the removal of their pashmina is delayed, and may be done as late as August. It is said that in goats that are stronger, their pashmina comes out faster, while it takes longer in those that are weak.

It is claimed that while shearing wool does not hurt a sheep, the combing out of pashmina does cause the goat pain. This pain is expressed by the goat, because it bleats and yelps a lot, and the cries sound like the animal is in distress. In contrast, the sheep are relatively silent when they are being sheared. Further, the comb can hurt the



14. From right to left: pashmina comb (*kred*) and metal shears (*chan-pa*) used for cutting wool, and goat and yak hair.



15. Pema Wangyal combing pashmina out of a goat.

goat if it is not pulled correctly, especially when it is yanked harshly. It is not uncommon for the Rupshupa to draw blood while pulling out the pashmina or even to pull on the goat's flesh, especially around the legs. Rinchen once pulled on the comb so hard that she severed one of her father's goat's legs, and eventually the animal died.

As soon as the pashmina has been combed out of a goat, it is divided into a few bundles, wound around a stick and stored away in piles known as *tho-gor*, awaiting the traders. There are varying opinions as to whether or not pashmina gets bad if it is kept for too long. While government officials in the Sheep Husbandry Department claim that it does spoil, the Rupshupa say that they would really never know because within two to three weeks of combing they have sold all their pashmina.<sup>9</sup> Midway through pashmina combing, the removal of hair and wool from the yaks begins.

#### 4.1.2 Removing Hair and Wool from the Yaks

Hair is grown on the yak's back and legs, and wool on its underbelly. While hair is cut off the yaks using the same metal shears used for shearing sheep wool and goat hair, no tools are used to remove the wool and it is simply removed by pulling out with the hands. The wool is pulled rather than cut, because ideally this technique

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<sup>9</sup> The question of pashmina getting bad is probably related to the problems of storing and transporting encountered by the Rupshupa. As it rains a lot in Rupshu in August, the pashmina gets wet and thus heavy.

ensures that the hairs remain as long as possible. The process is the same in Tibet. Ekvall explains that this wool then makes the best tent cloth because cut ends reduce the watertight quality of tent cloth (1968: 47).

During removal of the hair and wool from the yak, its fore or rear legs are usually tied together as it has a tendency to run away or kick. This hobbling prevents it from doing either. In addition to this, two or three yaks may also be tied to each other as this make it easier to keep all the animals together (Plate 16).<sup>10</sup> Removal of fibres from the yaks is not a daily process since the animals are not always in the Rupshupa's camp, as they are left to graze in the higher pastures. The yaks are only brought down from the mountains and valleys when it is time to move camp. It is during this period, which lasts for approximately three to four days, that the hair and wool are removed. In comparison, however, the 'bri-mo is present in the camp at this time because she usually has young that require protection from predators, and she has to be milked. Thus, her hair and wool are removed in the morning before she is left for grazing. Once removed, the yak hair and wool are usually stored in the rooms at Thugje and used for weaving as and when required.

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<sup>10</sup> Brower cites another technique, followed by the Sherpas, for immobilizing yaks while shearing them. This "involves tying two together, head to head, by their horns, placating them with salt (poured on the ground between the animals, who lick salt from each other's muzzles) and quickly snipping the long hair from flanks and tail" (1991: 140).



16. Three yaks are tied together, and their fore-legs hobbled, for the purpose of removing their hair and wool.

### 4.1.3 Shearing Sheep Wool

Ama's beer was not yet ready for the *bal chang* (literally "the beer of wool"), and she and Tharchen were anxious. Their turn was nearing, and it would look bad if they had no beer to serve to the men who came to help cut their wool. Finally, Tharchen had to borrow beer from his neighbour, Angdu, whose beer happened to be ready ahead of time. Two days later, when Ama's beer was ready, the amount they had borrowed was returned and Angdu served it at his *bal chang*.

Good hospitality is commented upon, and men who come to help someone cut his wool must be well fed. There must also always be generous quantities of beer, otherwise it would be embarrassing to the hosts of the *bal chang* and difficult for them to get help the following year. While the women are busy preparing the food and drink for the day of shearing, the men are preoccupied with other matters.

Before the shearing (*dra-cis*) of the sheep begins, the men will ask the astrologer (*dbon-po*) to tell them a good day to start.<sup>11</sup> In Tibet as well, "each encampment selects an auspicious day for shearing by consulting the traditional Tibetan lunar calendar" (Goldstein and Beall 1990: 100). In contrast, the astrologer is not consulted before removing pashmina or yak wool. Special prayers are not held before either event. At this time the decision is made as to the men who will be *sdeb-she*, i.e. help each other out with their shearing, and as to the order in which they cut

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<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that the astrologer in Rupshu also works for the Sheep Husbandry Department in Leh.

each other's wool. Men who are *sdeb-she* are usually related or from neighbouring tents. Depending on the size of their flock, each man will require the assistance of about five to seven men to help him shear his sheep. Naturally, the more men who come and help, the easier it is to finish, and all the shearing can be over in a day or two. These men are amply provided with food, tea, and beer on the day of shearing.

Among Tibetan nomads, "households cooperate and/or hire shearers to complete the work in a single day since this simplifies the logistics" (ibid). In Rupshu hiring help is rare, but the few men who have very large flocks of sheep may require the assistance of additional men, apart from those with whom they have a reciprocal arrangement. These men would then be paid for their work. This payment is usually made in kind, by giving them the wool from one sheep. This kind of work would be done by men from families who have less livestock and need the extra wool, because more wool translates into more grain.

This reciprocal arrangement for shearing wool is followed only among the Rupshupa, and they do not extend it to the Tibetans. The Rupshupa say that they do not like to ask the Tibetans to cut their wool; they prefer to do it among themselves. They say the Tibetans' sheep are sick and infected with sheep lice (*lug shig*), so if they cut their wool this disease will spread to their sheep. However, men from poorer families do not hesitate to go and help the Tibetans cut their wool, but only after they have finished cutting all their own. They explained it not in terms of their need, but on the grounds that the Tibetans come to them pleading for help, and they go because otherwise it would look bad. The Tibetans usually make payment for this help in

cash, and amounts vary from Rs.30 to Rs.50 for a day's work. Another difference commented on is that the Tibetans do not make home-made beer like the Rupshupa, but serve rum or whisky.<sup>12</sup>

The shearing of wool begins immediately after the livestock have left for the day's grazing. Tharchen usually divides his herd into two groups, one consisting of ewes and the other of rams. He sends all the ewes and goats out to graze in the morning with Rinchen, and keeps the rams back. Later in the afternoon Rinchen will return with the ewes and take the shorn rams out to graze.<sup>13</sup> Tharchen and Angchuk had their two brothers, Skarma and Paljor, along with their brother-in-law, Pema Wangyal, helping them. In addition there were two men from neighbouring tents. Along with Tharchen's sheep, thirty belonging to his brothers were also being sheared. He explained that since they did not have such large herds, it saved them the expense of providing food and drink for everybody.

The sheep are first rounded up and tied in a long line. It is from here that each man takes a sheep, shears it, and then leaves the animal to graze (Plate 17).

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<sup>12</sup> When Angchuk, Skarma, and Paljor returned from cutting Migma, a Tibetan's, wool they mentioned that he served rum. This was approved and much talked about, and was an added incentive to go and help cut Migma's wool on the second day.

<sup>13</sup> Tharchen explained that it is not necessary to shear the sheep in this order, and while some people do it, there are those who do not.



17. Shearing Tharchen's livestock - Paljor takes a sheep from the line of tied animals while the men behind him are busy shearing.

Byangmo! Let the shears cut well between the two wools,<sup>14</sup>  
 Let the man's hand be strong and swift while cutting,  
 The God of the Sheep has not come,  
 God of the Sheep, come,  
 Let the White Sheep of the Gods come to us.

This chant is repeatedly sung during the course of the day, and they say it is one way in which they propitiate the gods while shearing.

Once a sheep is taken from the line of animals waiting to be sheared, the shearer sits on the ground and holds the sheep down with his hands and feet. The conventional order followed while shearing is to first remove the wool from the sheep's stomach, and this is cut or pulled out by hand. Then the sheep's feet are tied together over its stomach and the wool is cut along one side till the shears reach its spine. The sheep is then turned over and the same procedure repeated on the other side. The wool is then snipped off along the spine of the sheep. The rope around the sheep's legs is untied and the animal released.

The shears are cleaned each time a new sheep is shorn by rubbing them with a piece of wool that has been dipped in water. Once the fleece is cut, and it usually comes out as one big piece, it is folded in half and twisted tightly. The two ends are knotted together and the bundles are stored outside the tent. On average, one man can shear about twenty to twenty-five sheep during the course of a day. The children also contribute to the day's activities: they go around collecting stray bits of wool while the

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<sup>14</sup> I was told that Byangmo (*dbyang-mo*) is a term used to call all the sheep. To cut between the two wools refers to cutting between the wool that has grown during winter and that which has just grown in summer.

sheep are being sheared. Later they will trade their small bundles with Nawang Dorje, the trader from Manali, in exchange for sweets. Parents also tell their children to scrummage around the pens, after the livestock leave in the morning, and gather the bits of wool and hair the animals may have shed during the night. These stray bits are found clinging to the stones, rocks, and dirt inside the pen. This is known as *gle-'e bal*, "wool from the pens".

Sheep shearing involves a much more intricate and symbolic pattern than that followed for the goats and yaks. The previous chapter indicated that at the time of shearing special reverence is shown to the sheep dedicated to the gods, *btsan*, and *klu*. This includes the two rams left for the Genpo and *mis-ga*. On all these five rams a tuft of wool will be left uncut on their backs between their forelegs, and this is known as *don-bal* (Plate 18).<sup>15</sup> This is so that they can be distinguished from the rest of the flock. Further, the *don-bal* is said to resemble the offering of a *kha-btags* to that particular sheep through which the gods, *btsan*, and *klu* are being propitiated. While Tharchen leaves only a small portion of wool, there are other men who leave much more so that the strip extends right across the sheep's back and down its forelegs. Tharchen felt that too much wool was not good for the sheep: it would weigh down their forelegs and become too heavy for them to walk, and in the long run it could even make them ill. Slightly smaller *don-bal* are also left on the sheep that are *tshes-thar*.

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<sup>15</sup> The practice is similar among the ewes. However, among the goats left for the gods, *btsan*, and *klu* no such thing is done because goat hair does not stand up.

Further, on all rams the wool hanging between their hind legs is not cut, and this is referred to as *sla-zar* (Plate 19).<sup>16</sup> The *sla-zar* is said to be their "show", and similar to the wearing of jewellery (*rgyan-cha*).<sup>17</sup> It is also said to be a sign of the ram's "masculinity": without it the ram will feel strange and exposed. No similar custom is practised when the ewes are shorn.

The last sheep from the flock to have its wool shorn must be a ram that is used for mating, the *ru-po*. While a flock may have more than one *ru-po*, this must be the best looking of them all. It should be white in colour, with long and well curved horns. This sheep is always sheared by the head of the family, and as soon as he finishes shearing it a loud cry of "*ki-ki so-so lha-rgyal-lo*" ("may the gods be victorious") rents the air as he shouts for the prosperity of his livestock and family. A thin strip of wool remains uncut along the length of its back, and this is also said to resemble the offering of a *kha-btags* to the animal. Further, a small woven woollen bag, known as *khab*, is tied around the ram's back and hangs between his fore and rear legs. This is so that the ram can easily be distinguished at all times.

Soon after the shearing is over the sheep, but not the goats and yaks, are taken to a river and washed. This is only done once a year. Washing of the sheep is referred

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<sup>16</sup> A small portion of wool is also left unshorn on the chest of all sheep, goats, and yaks, and this is known as *brang-bal* (chest wool). However, though everyone said that this custom has existed from earliest times, no one was able to explain the reason for it.

<sup>17</sup> Brower mentions that the Sherpas leave hair long and uncut on the haunches of the yak "for looks" (1991: 140).



18. This sheep is dedicated to the *klu* and hence the *don-bal* is left on its back.



19. A rear view of the rams shows the *sla-zar* hanging between their hind legs.

to as *tshi rgyab-cis*, where *tshi* refers to both grease and dirt. The sheep are mainly washed at rivers near Pang or Zara, as these are the only two rivers in Rupshu with an abundant supply of water. They are washed by making them walk through the water twice. This washing is done for several reasons, apart from cleaning and removing dirt after cutting the wool. Washing is said to increase the growth of wool, and make the new wool come out and grow better. Further, it supposedly fattens up the sheep, and increases fat content in the meat.

Once all the fibres have been harvested, they are appraised in terms of quality, and while a small portion is put aside for use in Rupshu, a larger part is kept for trade. The second section of this chapter turns to look at the yield of pashmina and wool in Rupshu.

#### 4.2 Fibres used Locally and in Trade

Chapter One commented on the fact that some of the finest quality pashmina and wool in Ladakh come from Rupshu. This fact is not only proudly affirmed to by the Rupshupa, but is also recognised by government officials and traders in Leh. According to Dr O. N. Muku, Director of the Sheep Husbandry Department in Leh, the features that define fine-quality wool are: stable and large diameter, low grease content, low medullation,<sup>18</sup> greater number of crimps,<sup>19</sup> and preferably white colour.

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<sup>18</sup> Medullation refers to "protein spots", i.e. visible black spots on the fibre. If there is too much medullation, then it is difficult for the dye to catch uniformly on the wool. Local sheep in Ladakh usually have a higher proportion of medullation than the Merino sheep that have been imported into the region from Australia and New

Wool from Rupshu is said to be prime quality because it contains and combines these attributes. It has no grease (which is a by-product of humidity), has a long staple length of more than four inches, and a large diameter of twenty-five to thirty microns.<sup>20</sup> These government recommendations regarding the quality of wool do not contrast much with the standards of the Rupshupa, where a distinction is made between wool that is good (*'jam-po*) and bad (*btsog-po*). Good wool is defined as that which is long (*ring-po*) and contains many curls (*tsa-ru*), and there is a preference for white-coloured wool. Bad wool is generally said to contain a lot of grease (*tshi*), and though this is later washed out, wool that contains grease is not good to begin with.<sup>21</sup> Lamb's-wool is said to be the best, followed by wool from the rams, and then the ewes.

Traders who purchase wool from Rupshu also praise it for its fine qualities, and show a preference for buying white wool. Nawang Dorje says it has a long fibre length and describes it as being *pakka* (Hindi: ripe or strong) compared to wool from Himachal. He explains that the difference in quality is because in Rupshu the sheep

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Zealand.

<sup>19</sup> Crimps refer to the curls in the sheep's wool. A low number of crimps would mean that the staple length is uneven, with the result that this wool is difficult to dye. Sheep from Changthang have a much higher number of crimps than those from Lower Ladakh.

<sup>20</sup> 1 micron = 0.001 mm.

<sup>21</sup> Wool is actually said to contain two kinds of grease. The first kind, *tshi-gnag* (black grease), is said to be thick and black. The second variety is *tshi-dkar* (white grease) which is thin. While the former is disliked, the latter is preferred because it acts as a kind of lathering agent when wool is washed. However, all grease is eventually removed once the wool is washed.

are sheared only once a year, whereas in Himachal they shear them thrice. Further, because of this difference in shearing practices the wool from Rupshu is warmer because it has been left on the sheep the whole year round, including winter.

Preference for particular types of wool is demonstrated at the time of weaving. Women prefer the warp to be of wool that is long and straight, and the weft to be made from wool that is short in length, and has a lot of curls. They maintain that wool from a ram is generally longer and rougher and, therefore, more suitable for the warp, while that from an ewe is shorter and softer and appropriate for the weft. Lamb's-wool, which is even softer than wool from the ewe, is also preferred for the weft. Themes of the separation of male and female and the opposition of their qualities, and the confrontation of male and female are enunciated early on - before weaving even begins. These gender themes in weaving are explored and discussed in the next two chapters.

The pashmina of Rupshu is said to be of the finest quality because it has a staple length of two to three inches and a diameter of twelve to fourteen microns.<sup>22</sup> In comparison, the average staple length of pashmina in the rest of Ladakh is one to two inches and has an average diameter of fourteen to fifteen microns.

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<sup>22</sup> Fibre diameter is the single most important feature of cashmere (pashmina), and the smaller the diameter the finer the fibre (Ryder 1987: 5-7).

#### 4.2.1 The Yield from Sheep, Goats, and Yaks

The yield of pashmina and wool depends on the area and the health of the animals. Males of the species always yield more than the females, as the latter are weakened by giving birth, feeding, and milking. In Rupshu, an average size ram produces about two to two-and-a-half kilograms of wool, and a ewe slightly less than two or sometimes even as little as one kilo. A male goat can yield up to three hundred grams of pashmina, though the men claim that a really large goat could give as much as five hundred grams.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the female goat produces about two hundred to two hundred and fifty grams of pashmina.

Further, the manner in which livestock are looked after also determines the quality of their fibre. Traders often comment that Tibetans have the best fibre and say it is because they graze their animals for many more hours than the Rupshupa and Kharnakpa. They also say that the pashmina from Rupshu and Kharnak is better than that from Korzok. Here a comparison is made between the manner in which livestock are cared for in Rupshu and Kharnak versus Korzok. It is said that in Rupshu and Kharnak livestock are not kept in pens during winter, while in Korzok they are kept in closed rooms and therefore the fibre does not grow to its full potential. The other thing is that by keeping the animals in a closed room for two to three months the

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<sup>23</sup> When pashmina is combed out of the goat the hair also gets pulled out along with it. The Commonwealth Secretariat Report states that the quantity of guard hair combed out is always much greater than the pashmina in a ratio of 3:2; because the fibres are distributed evenly, in adjacent follicles, over the whole body of the goat, it is not possible to separate them at the time of combing (1993: 31). Therefore, these figures refer to the weight of the pashmina before the hair is separated from it.

colour of the fibre gets tainted, it becomes a little yellowish because of the urine that touches it.

The amount of wool a family has at the end of the shearing season depends on the number of sheep in their flock. Those with large flocks have more than a hundred kilograms of wool, while those with few sheep may have as little as ten to twelve kilos. Each family reserves a certain amount of this wool for their own personal use, and the rest is sold or exchanged for grain and other goods. This division is readily visible on either side of the tent. Standing, facing the tent door from the outside, the wool for sale is stored to its right, and that to be used by the family on the left. Ama, like most women in Rupshu, was always particular about keeping the best wool for her family, and she would carefully examine all the bundles before she made her choice. The amount of wool set aside on the left of the tent varies with the number of members in a family and their requirements. These amounts are not measured in terms of weight but in volume, i.e. the wool from one sheep or the wool from two sheep. Sonam Rinchen explained that while a large family, of approximately ten members, would keep the wool from ten or twelve sheep, a small one such as his (of four members) would keep the wool from six or seven sheep. However, there are exceptions to this. Chemit Tsering, who belongs to a very wealthy but not large family of only five members, says they retain the wool from thirteen to fourteen sheep.

Though the Rupshupa herd the renowned pashmina goats, they do not use pashmina for their weaving, and only one person's name was mentioned as having

used it locally.<sup>24</sup> They acknowledge the fact that pashmina is a warmer fibre than wool, but say it is too difficult to weave with because the threads keep breaking. Thus, unlike the wool, which is utilized in Rupshu, all the pashmina is sold.<sup>25</sup> The yield of pashmina per family also depends on the number of goats they possess. Tashi Palgyas, Rupshu's chief in 1992, is one of the wealthiest men, and his goats give him thirty-five to forty kilos of pashmina. In contrast, a man with few goats may have as little as two kilos of pashmina to sell. On average, it is said that each man has between twenty and thirty kilos. In 1992 Tharchen had about sixteen kilos of pashmina, while Skarma had only six. Pashmina is primarily sold to traders from Leh and Manali, as is discussed in Chapter Nine.

Since yak hair and wool are kept for personal consumption and seldom sold, they are rarely if ever appraised in terms of weight or volume.<sup>26</sup> Daxue working in Damxung county, China, states that on average yaks annually produce half a kilo of yak hair and half a kilo of yak wool (1990: 4). Yak hair is stronger than goat hair and is mainly used for weaving tents and saddle-bags. Yak wool is warmer than sheep

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<sup>24</sup> This was Chemit Tsering, and she was the only woman I came across in Rupshu who had woven with pashmina. Chemit had experimented with weaving the fibre, but said that though it was soft and fine it was difficult to weave.

<sup>25</sup> Pashmina is always sold in its raw form (i.e. it is not cleaned or dehaired).

<sup>26</sup> However, yak tails are appraised in monetary terms and the present value, depending on the size and condition of the tail, ranges from Rs.1,500 to Rs.3,000. Black yak tails are revered in Rupshu and are rarely sold, unlike the white ones which are readily exported. In the past these white tails were sold to traders and used as ceremonial fly-whisks in temples in Northern India or at the courts of Indian kings. They were also sold to Europeans who used them for Father Christmas beards. These days, they are usually sold in the antique shops in Leh and the buyers are Indian or foreign tourists.

wool, but since it has a shorter staple length women say that it is harder to spin. Still, they covet it because of its warmth. Since it is not abundantly available, it is often used only in the weft of the fabric being woven and not in the warp. In this case the entire weft may consist of yak wool, or one ply may be of yak wool and the other of sheep wool. There is also a tendency for yak wool to break when stretched, which is another reason for not using it.

Over the years the Rupshupa have also been using a certain amount of imported fibres in their weaving. However, their access to these fibres has remained marginal and is negligible compared to their use in Bhutan, where the weavers have access to fibres from around the world and buy the best they can afford (Myers 1994c: 192).

#### 4.2.2 Imported Fibres

Machine-spun acrylic yarn or wool, known in Rupshu as *pham*, has been popular there since the opening of the road about ten to fifteen years ago. However, it is used with discretion and a great deal of restraint. While men continue to weave with the local wool, it is only women who use this acrylic wool in the weaving of their textiles. Yet, they do not use it in the main fabric woven for their clothes, but only as embellishments or to weave specific designs in their belts, blankets, rugs, saddle-

cloths, and small bags for storing food (Plate 20). It is almost always used in textiles in combination with local wool.<sup>27</sup>

This acrylic yarn is manufactured in North India, mainly in Punjab, and the women purchase it from the markets in Leh or Manali. If they are not able to go personally, then orders for the brightly coloured acrylic wool are given to their husbands or brothers when they visit Leh.<sup>28</sup> The colours most in demand are: yellow, pink, orange, shades of green and blue. Red is usually not asked for, as the women still dye that colour themselves. Before this yarn is used for weaving it is first twisted to make it thinner and finer. In Bhutan, women also tighten the twist of woollen, acrylic, and silk yarns from India before using them for weaving (*ibid*).

Women have taken to incorporating this acrylic yarn in their textiles because they say that it allows them to introduce a variety of colours. It is the same in Bhutan, where Myers writes that the introduction of Indian yarns, between 1988 and 1992, revolutionized the colour palette of patterned cloth woven there (*ibid*). The women maintain that they do not use much of this yarn, just a little bit, "a few rows here and there to add some colour to what we are weaving." While the attraction of using this acrylic yarn is that it allows the women more choice in terms of colours, Chemit

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<sup>27</sup> There are variations to the incorporation of acrylic yarn in their textiles, and while just a little may be used for a design, in other cases the warp may be of local wool and the entire weft acrylic. Some women have also started using thick cotton rope for their warp.

<sup>28</sup> When I occasionally went to Leh, I would also receive numerous requests from women in Rupshu to bring them back some acrylic yarn.