48. Attending a wedding - these men are dressed in their woollen robes (*gos*) and silver jewellery (*rgyan-cha*).

garments. They select colours such as bright blue, parrot green, and yellow. The patterns on the fabric are equally vivacious and may be polka dots, floral prints, or checks. For special occasions brocade is used (see Plate 35).

Structurally, both the *sul-ma* and *gos* are made from rectangular pieces of *snam-bu* that are used in their entirety or cut into smaller lengths and used accordingly. The lower part of the *sul-ma* is made from many more smaller pieces than the *gos*, some being rectangular, others triangular. All these pieces are joined at the waist, and the flare of the skirt is fairly wide and loose. It is said that this design facilitates a woman's movements, especially while she is working, and it would also spread out and cover her while she is sitting.[40] The last chapter stated that cloth produced on a backstrap loom is always narrow in width, and this is essential to the design of garments in Rupshu. It is said that when several narrow strips of cloth are stitched together, the resulting garment is stronger and more durable. Thus, it will last longer than a garment made out of a wide piece of cloth. This was essential in the old days when fabrics other than *snam-bu* were not available. The other reason given is that as a result of the greater number of seams that appear in the garment, where the strips are joined, the cloth is thicker and takes longer to wear out.

The *sul-ma* and *gos* also embody the relationship of a mother with her child (cf. section 5.3.1). Here, the main body of the garment is referred to as the "mother" (*ma*) and the sleeves (*phu-dung*) as her "child". In fact, the large rectangular pieces in

[40] There are no toilets in Rupshu, unlike villages in the rest of Ladakh. Usually a place not far from the tent is allocated as one, and women say that the width of their dress conceals them while going to the toilet.

both garments are also called *ma*. "The mother is the body of all clothes," Aba Palle explained, "Without the mother what will the sleeves do on their own, and without sleeves how will we wear our clothes properly? They are joined together in the same way a child is always stuck to the mother, especially when they drink milk."

A *sul-ma* or *gos* made from *snam-bu* usually lasts a year if it is worn continuously. However, if it is worn only in winter then it can last two years. For the rest of the year machine-made fabrics are used for making the *sul-ma* and *gos*, and these are stitched in Rupshu or bought from Leh or Manali. The fabrics most commonly used are corduroy and velvet, and those made from synthetic wool. Velvet, because of its high price, is kept to wear mainly on special occasions. However men, but not women, also wear robes made from brocade at weddings or religious ceremonies (see Plate 35). Dark colours like black, grey, or navy blue are the most popular ones among the women, while men prefer maroon. The one difference in the design between these and garments made from *snam-bu* is that they do not contain the numerous lengths of fabric that the woollen garments do. For instance, the skirt of a woman's dress is made from only four large pieces of cloth as distinct from twenty pieces if it were made from *snam-bu*.

This variation in design also applies to tents, where those made from goat and/or yak hair are stitched from several lengths of fabric as compared to those now being made from machine-made cloth. The next chapter looks specifically at tents.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE BLACK TENT

> "The black tent is something we inherit from our fathers; it is passed down and not something that will be made in one generation," Meme Nawang Chogyal recounted, "I got this tent from my father, who got it from his father. Some sections of it are very old, probably more than 150 years, but other parts have been woven much more recently by me. Tent building goes on like this."

The black tent, which originated somewhere near Mesopotamia, is the tent of the Bible, the Jews, and the Arabs (Faegre 1979: 9). It moved out of its homeland until it reached the Atlantic coast on one side and the eastern border of Tibet on the other (ibid). Faegre states that the black tent exists in two basic types: the Western or Arab type and the Eastern or Persian type; the latter is found from Iran to Tibet (ibid: 13-14).

Tibetans call their "black tent" *sba-nag* (Ekvall 1968: 65), and in Rupshu it is known as *re-bo gnag-po*.[1] The tent is referred to as both *re-bo* and *grong*, and a *grong-pa* is one who resides in a tent.[2] Further, tents are divided into *reb-chen* ("big

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[1] "The black tent obtains its "blackness" from the natural jet-black colour of the goat's hair - however, many "black tents" are not black at all but are dyed other colors" (Faegre 1979: 10). In Rupshu, tents are not dyed but woven with natural-coloured goat and/or yak hair. The overall result is that the colour of the black tent is seldom actually black, but brown.

[2] The term *re-bo-pa* would not be used here.

tent") and *reb-chung* ("small tent").[3] *Reb-chen* and *reb-chung* are the two parts of a family where some relatives, usually the elderly parents and their unmarried children, have moved into the small tent leaving the big tent to their eldest son, who retains most of the livestock. Though separate, the two tents continue to be a part of each other as the eldest son is said to look after his elderly parents. There are also "new tents" (*grong-gsar*) which form when younger sons leave their father's tent, and these are seldom appendages to the big tent.

When Tharchen married there were six people living in the big tent: his mother, Angchuk, Lanze, Skarma, Ama, and him. One or two years after his marriage his mother made him and Skarma separate.[4]

> "My mother and my younger sister, Lanze, and Skarma, those three all stayed together in the small tent. Then Lanze got married to Pema Wangyal, and I got Padon for Skarma."

Along with inheriting the big tent, Tharchen remembers getting some cooking pots and other utensils, and about twenty-five sheep and goats. His mother kept nine sheep and goats for herself and Skarma. In principle, Skarma got nothing because he went on living with his mother in the small tent.

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[3] This practice is followed throughout Ladakh, where houses are known as *khang-chen*, "big house", and *khang-chung*, "small house" (see Kaplanian 1981: 161-167, Dollfus 1989: 150-158). In some places in Lower Ladakh the terms *khang-ba* and *khang-bu* are used respectively (Aggarwal 1994: 73). These days, with the influence from Leh, the terms *khang-chen* and *khang-chung* are now being used in Rupshu.

[4] Since Abi Yangzom had no husband, the separation of tents took place between the two brothers and not between her and Tharchen.

After Skarma married, his mother continued to live with him and his wife. However, she and Padon did not get along and Abi Yangzom complained that she was always doing most of the work. Tharchen was keen for his mother to separate tents with Skarma and live in her own tent close to his so that he and his family could look after her, but he did not know how to bring the separation about without hurting Skarma's feelings. In the winter of 1993 Paljor's wife died leaving him with a three-week-old son. Abi Yangzom took the opportunity and left Skarma's tent on the pretext of having to look after the child, and now continues to reside with Paljor. After his mother left his tent, Skarma's tent stopped being known as the "small tent" and became the "new tent".

Separation and formation of tents continues to be a feature of life in Rupshu. Tents, like houses, are dynamic entities and constantly undergoing transformations. At the same time, particular features of or within these spaces may serve as a sign for the inhabitants' identity. In most of Ladakh, individuals do not have last names but tag their house names (*grong-ming*) to identify themselves in public (Aggarwal 1994: 72).[5] However, in Rupshu there are no house names, perhaps because tents unlike houses are not permanent and enduring. Instead, the black yak tails, known as *thug*, hanging from the central pole along the sides of the tent serve as a sign of the inhabitants' identity (Plate 49).[6] Some elders insist that in the beginning there were

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[5] Even in the case of marriage or adoption, where one's residence has changed, the natal house name is retained and frequently used to identify a person (Aziz 1974: 27).

[6] Both Drew (1875: 287) and Dainelli (1933: 285) reported that the outer tent poles are often adorned with black yak tails but said nothing about their relevance.

49. A rear view of the black tent (*re-bo*) with the *thug* hanging on either side of it. The white strip down the centre is the *ru-nol*.

only fifteen tents in Rupshu, and these tents can be identified by the black yak tails hanging outside them. It is only their descendants by primogeniture who can hang the yak tails outside their tents.[7] One tail can last for at least three generations, or a hundred years, and when one wears out it is replaced by another. The new yak tail is prepared by first washing it and combing out the tangles, following which it is consecrated by a lama and then only is it referred to as *thug*.[8] The custom continues today and one may say it is auspicious because it shows continuity with the past - "Our ancestors did it and so do we, it makes us feel good."

Elders in Rupshu assert that in structure the tent has not changed over the years. A photograph taken by F. E. Shawe in Rupshu at the turn of the century attests to that (in Francke 1907: 16). This chapter begins with a description of the structure of the tent. The focus here is on the black tent. The structure of the black tent has been subject to change, and the following section looks at transformations in its structure, as well as the emergence of the white tent. The tent is not a mere dwelling, but a central feature of social organisation in Rupshu, and a discussion on spatial arrangements within the tent follows next. The second section describes the formation of a new tent at a ceremony known as *phog-srod*, and the final one examines the position of tents within an encampment.

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[7] However, the practice varies and some younger sons have also started hanging the black yak tail outside their tent.

[8] The tail can belong to a yak or *'bri-mo*; the only condition is that it must be black.

7.1 The Structure of the Tent

The tent is square (*gru-bzhi*) in shape, with a flat roof.[9] It is woven from goat or yak hair, or a combination of the two fibres. Yak hair is the preferred fibre because it is both warmer and stronger.[10] It is also said to be waterproof, and this is brought about by both the natural greasiness of the hair and the oily smoke of yak dung burned inside.[11] However, men who do not own many yaks generally use a combination of the two fibres, and those that do not own any yak weave the entire tent from goat hair. The fibres are kept in their natural shades of brown and black, other colours are not used for the tent. At times a white strip, which is known as *ru-nol*, is used to mark the centre of the tent along the rear wall (see Plate 49).

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[9] The ideal tent would be square in shape, but this is rarely ever the case and most are rectangular. Faegre notes that the shapes of all these black tents may be square, rectangular, or hexagonal, depending on how they are pitched (1979: 59). Tharchen was one of the few who said that in fact the black tent was circular (*kyir-kyir*) in shape and it was the new white tents that were being made these days that were square-shaped.

[10] It is said that the warmth of a black tent depends on the thickness of the fabric, and thickness is determined by both the twisting of the fibres and the weaving of the cloth. In Rupshu, Tibetans make thinner tents than the Rupshupa, and hence it is said that theirs are not as warm.

[11] People in Leh generally informed me that black tents are waterproof and so I would never have to worry about the rain. However, my experiences were to the contrary after spending several rainy days dodging puddles in leaky tents. Faegre maintains that when wet, the yarn swells, thereby closing the holes, and the natural oiliness of the hair sheds the rain for a while, but the tent will leak in prolonged rain (1979: 12). Tharchen said that rain came in through the gaps in the seams and not through the cloth. However snow, if it is removed from the tent before it melts to water will not penetrate.

The tent is made in two sections, as each half makes a full yak load, because in its entirety it is too heavy for one yak to carry.[12] A whole tent may weigh as much as 120 kilos, and on wet days the weight increases. Each time the tent is pitched, the rear wall is re-stitched down the middle, where the right side of the white strip and the black one meet (Plate 50). There is no need to stitch up the front wall of the tent as the door flap (*sgo-yol*), which is attached to the left side of the tent, comes over the gap. The roof (*thog*) is joined across the top with toggles (*char-cung*) and loops (*rgyal-tag*), leaving a smoke-hole (*gong-kar*) a few feet wide across a section of it. Toggles may be made of horn (usually yak horn) or wood. The smoke-hole is usually covered with a thick piece of cloth, such as felt, in case of snow or rain.

The tent roof is held up from inside by two vertical poles (*ka*)[13] that support a ridge pole (*thi-ka*) which runs the length of the tent (Figure 4). The pole nearest the entrance is known as *nang-ka yog-ma* (lower inside pole), and the pole farthest from the door is *nang-ka mgo-ma* (upper inside pole). There are eight poles that support the tent from the outside. The tent cloth is stretched by means of rope stays, attached directly to the edge of the tent cloth (where roof and wall meet) at the four corners and midway between each corner. The rope is generally made of horse hair, as this is stronger than both yak and goat hair. Each rope is looped around one of the eight prop poles and then extended out and tied around a large rock. The external poles and

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[12] *'Bri-mos* are seldom used to transport heavy loads as they can never carry more than fifty to sixty kilos. In contrast, yaks can carry about eighty kilos. Yaks that carry the tent, generally have only one other heavy item placed on their backs along with it, usually the hand-mill or a large trunk.

[13] *Ka* is also the word for pillar in houses in Ladakh.

50. Stitching the two sections of the tent together before pitching it.

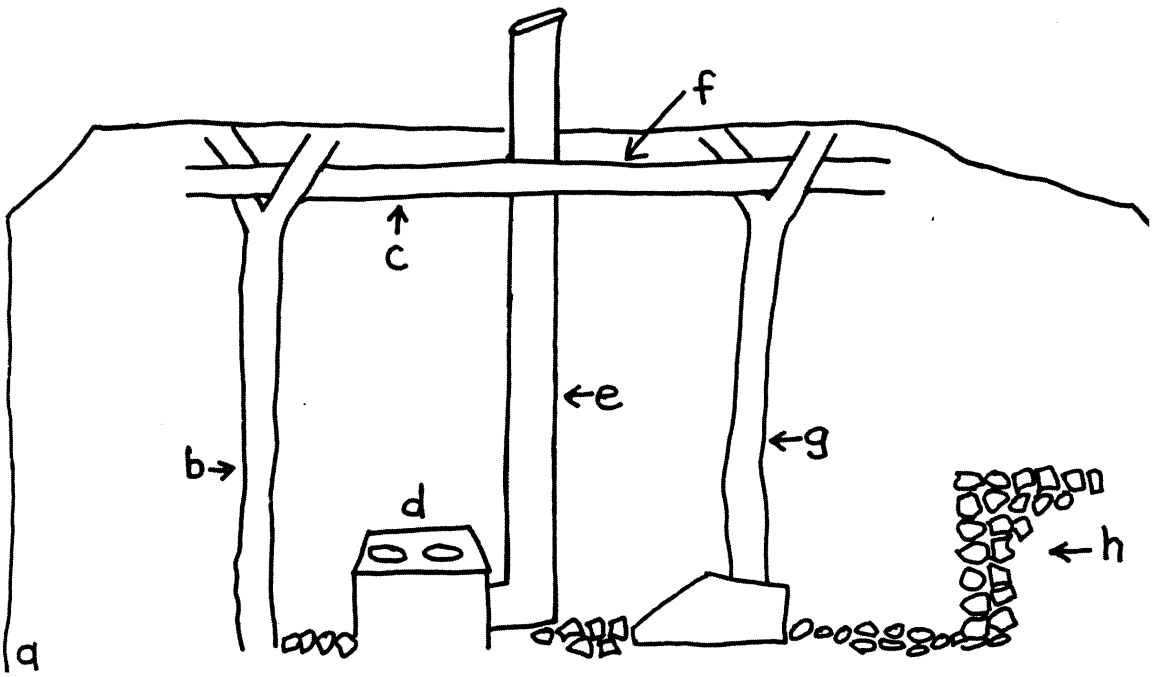

Figure 4 Internal View of Tent , from the Side

a) Door (*sgo*).
b) Lower inside pole (*nang-ka yog-ma*).
c) Ridge pole (*thi-ka*).
d) Hearth (*gog-kyor*) and stove (*thab*).
e) Pipe of stove.
f) Smoke-hole (*gong-kar*), the opening above the hearth.
g) Upper inside pole (*nang-ka mgo-ma*).
h) Platform of stones used for altar (*chos-sdag*).

ropes pull the roof out so that it is practically flat with the walls hanging vertically (see Plate 49). These poles can be shifted in distance and angle to give any desired pull on the tent roof, which is virtually hung between them.

The tent, just like rugs or blankets, consists of several narrow strips (*num-ba*) of cloth, and cloth breadths are stitched side by side to form the finished piece. These strips, just as *snam-bu* lengths, are measured in terms of spans (*mtho*). The breadth of each strip is a standard twelve inches, which is determined by the width of the loom. The height of a large tent would be ten spans, a smaller one eight spans, but lengths generally vary with heights of individual men who are weaving the tent. Tent sizes also vary with the number of strips sewn into them; a large tent may have fourteen strips along one wall while a smaller one may have twelve.

The warp laid for a tent consists of thirty-four to forty warp length threads in double ply. At the time of weaving, the warp is laid to weave one long strip and it may be used in its entirety or cut into smaller strips, depending on their position within the tent, and used accordingly. At other times three strips of equal length may be woven with a break, in the warp, between each of them.

The joints inside the black tent are trimmed with narrow white bands (*rgyel-'dag*), woven from wool or made from cotton cloth. At first the men state that these are there to enhance the appearance of the tent, and are for "show". However, apart from accentuating the look of the tent, the bands are there to make the tent strong from

within. These are tension bands and reinforce the joints along the roof where the strings, attached to the tent poles, pull at the tent in order to prop it up.

The tent is put up around a stone wall enclosure (*rtsig-pa*), and the area circumscribed by this wall is known as *tsher-sa* (Plate 51). It is said that a good *tsher-sa* must fit a tent exactly, and one that is too big or too small does not speak well of its maker. The size of the *tsher-sa* actually depends on the stone wall that has been built around it, which in turn is determined by the size of the tent. However, the dimensions of the stone wall and tent do not necessarily remain constant, as sizes change when walls are knocked down and rebuilt, or new tents stitched. Tharchen mentioned that his present tent fits the *tsher-sa* at Ponka Nugu perfectly, but is too big for the ones at Debring and Zara.

The height of the stone wall can vary from a few inches to as much as thirty or forty inches. The latter is usually the case where a pit has been dug into the ground and the wall built within this. The wall serves two purposes: it protects the inhabitants of the tent from the fierce winds, and also offers makeshift platforms upon which the family's food, clothes, and other belongings are stored. On the left side of the tent, facing in from the door, shelves are built into the stone wall. There is usually one towards the front known as *la-kung*, and three at the rear called *khyir-ku* (Figure 5 and see Plate 51). These shelves are mainly used to store perishable items, such as butter (*mar*), meat (*sha*), and dry cheese (*chur-pe*). Each tent also has a small platform built from stone that protrudes from the centre of the back wall which serves as the family's altar, *chos-sdag*.

51. The stone wall enclosure (*tsher-sa*) before the tent is pitched. The three stone shelves (*khyir-ku*) are visible on the left, at the back.

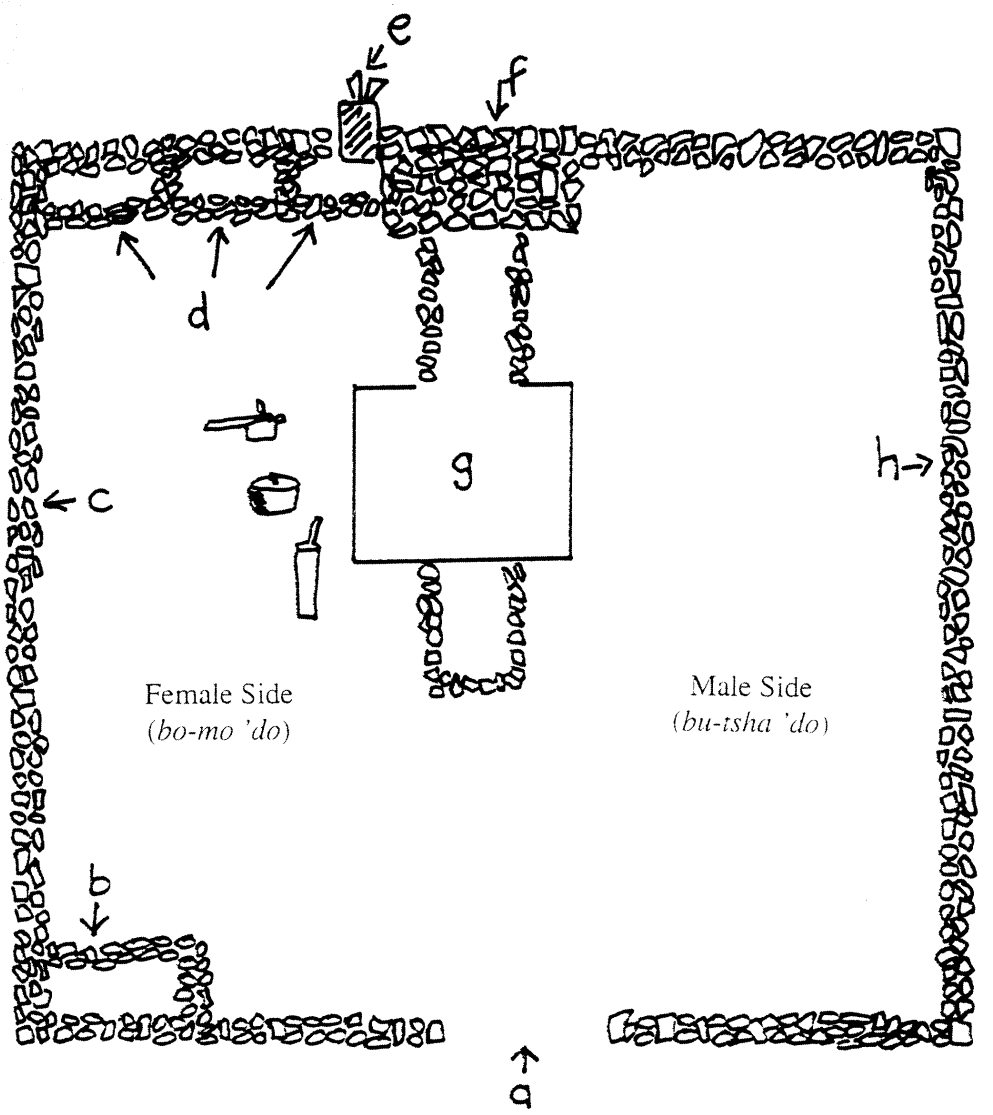

Figure 5 Internal View of Tent, from the Front

a) Door (*sgo*).
b) Shelf (*la-kung*) at the front.
c) Clothes and blankets are stored here.
d) Three shelves (*khyir-ku*) at the back.
e) The home of the tent god (*phug-lha*), the two sticks pointing out of the container are the sacred arrow (*mda'-zar*).
f) The altar (*chos-sdag*).
g) Hearth (*gog-kyor*).
h) Religious items, saddles, and saddle-bags are stored here.

Amongst the Tibetans in Rupshu the floor of the tent is covered with tiny stones.[14] This practice is now being followed by some of the Rupshupa as well, and they call the flooring *shag-ma*. This flooring keeps the tent cleaner as there is less dust, and water is thrown over the stones each morning. However, the process is lengthy and involves hard work, and Tharchen says he only does it at encampments where they are going to be staying for a long time.

Tent weaving is exclusive to men in Rupshu, and they assert that this weaving can never be done by women. In contrast, Jina states that to make a tent one Changpa family consisting of five to six persons takes two months with all family members weaving daily (1995: 50). His statement infers that "all" family members, including women, weave the tent. It is only among the Tibetans in Rupshu that women, and not men, weave the tent but if Jina is referring to them he does not say it. Ekvall noted that Tibetan women weave the tent, but it is men who stitch it because the stitches must be extremely tight (1968: 63). The tent is the only item a woman is not permitted to weave in Rupshu, whereas she can weave saddle-bags if necessary. The reason for this is that strength and tightness are attributes contained in a man's weaving, but not in a woman's, and these are crucial elements for withstanding life in Changthang. Therefore, it is essential for a tent to retain these qualities in order for it to be a suitable shelter.

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[14] The Tibetans practise this in their homes as well, where the floors are packed down with earth mixed with water and a layer of tiny stones scattered over this (Pommaret-Imaeda 1980: 250).

An entire tent is seldom woven at one time, instead the structure is gradually built up over the years. One section of the tent can be many generations old, probably more than a hundred years, while other parts will be brand new. As sections of the tent get old, they tear and fray, so the tent is constantly under repair. New strips are perpetually being woven and stitched into the place of old ones. This is rarely the case with the white tent, which is discarded as soon as it wears out. The next section looks at it.

7.1.1 The White Tent

The white tent (*gur*) is a fairly recent phenomenon in Rupshu and is not mentioned in accounts of earlier travellers to the region. The fabric used to make these tents is a thick white cotton or canvas, which comes from Himachal or Leh.[15] In 1993 one metre cost Rs.147. Material from used or abandoned parachutes, belonging to the Indian Air Force, is also stitched into these tents. Similarly, old tents, purchased from the army, are reassembled so that they are structurally the same as tents made in Rupshu.

In structure these tents are basically the same as the black ones except that they are always made in one piece, as they are lighter, weighing approximately forty kilos. Further, there is no horizontal ridge pole tied between the two vertical poles inside the tent. As a result, the opening over the hearth is larger in the black tents than in the

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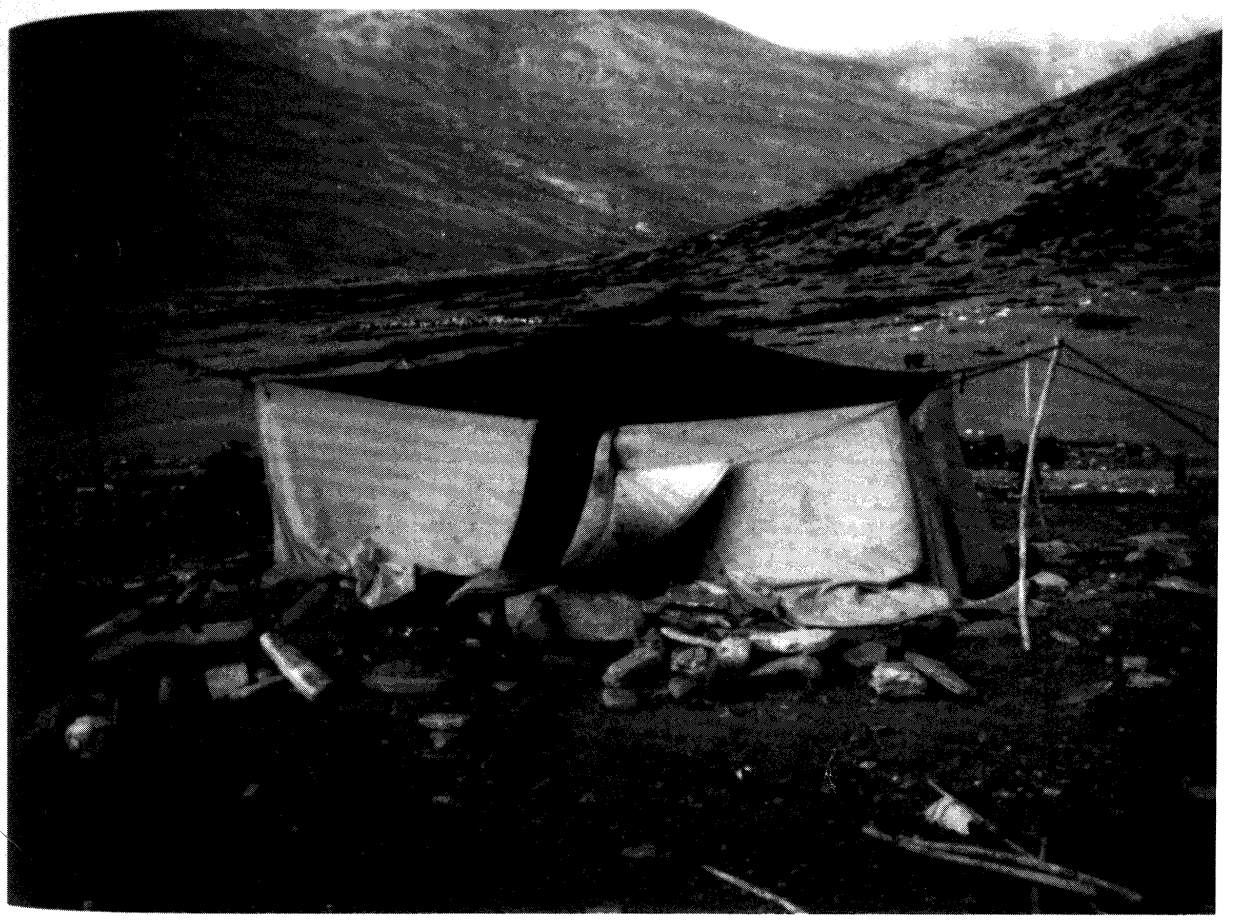
[15] The Rupshupa also use the English phrase "double-jean" to refer to this fabric.

white ones. However, there are variations to their composition, and while some are made entirely in white, others are assembled from a combination of white fabric and the woven strips used in the black tents. It is more common to see tents in the latter combination (Plate 52). These tents often have white walls, a black roof and black door. They are known as *thog-gnag* (black roof), as opposed to an all-white tent which would be *gur*. A black roof is preferred, because yak hair is stronger and can withstand the weight of the snow and fierce winds. It also lasts longer, and some people add that it is cheaper. If the entire tent is made of white cloth, then about twenty-five to thirty metres are required depending on the size of the tent, but when the fabric is used only to make the walls then about twenty metres suffice.

Tharchen discarded his black tent in 1990 and made himself a white one. However, he retained the roof of his previous tent, which he said must be about twelve years old. The door and panel opposite the door (on the rear wall, behind the altar) also remained black. Though he had changed over to a white tent, Tharchen remained adamant about not altering his roof. Nonetheless, in 1994 when he made himself a new tent it did not have a black roof. The new tent was even larger than his old one, and the white fabric was bordered on the edges with a light blue cotton fabric similar to the Tibetans' tents.

Rupshupa who have adopted the white tents often make comparisons between the two, and extol the virtues of the white one. Nawang Skalzang remarked:

> "I prefer the tent made out of this white fabric because it is easier to carry, it weighs less. And if it gets wet then it won't weigh too much either."



52. Tharchen's white tent with its black roof.

Weight is an essential criterion for the tents. Since these tents are made and carried in one piece it is easier for a family that does not have many, or any, yaks to transport it.

Size is another factor taken into consideration, and Tharchen stated that the one advantage of the white tent is that it can be made as big as one wants.[16] Tharchen's was probably one of the largest tents in Rupshu, and he was proud of this.[17] In contrast, black tents are probably made smaller to minimize weight and increase warmth. Their size is also restricted by the amount of yak hair available.

Not all men can stitch a white tent, and they usually request one of the more expert tailors in Rupshu to do this for them. Tharchen received at least two to three orders in a year. Being an avid tailor, he was very conscious of the use of space in tent construction. He spoke about wanting to make bigger and bigger tents so that there would be more room inside the structure. He was one of the few men in Rupshu who visualized making the tent with more than one room:

> "I'll make a partition in the tent so I have another room. In this small room I will keep my altar and all religious things so that they do not get dirty, and in the other room we will all live and cook."

Whether or not Tharchen achieves this still remains to be seen.

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[16] Most black tents are small and cramped, and I could barely stand upright in one of them. This was rarely the case with white tents in which I could stand comfortably.

[17] It was also said to be the cleanest and neatest. In 1994 LNP, without notifying anybody in Rupshu, did a survey of the tents and declared Tharchen's tent the cleanest and awarded him a prize for this.

While the benefits of the white tent are weight and size, strength and longevity remain the strong points of the black tent. A white tent only lasts for about four to five years, because the fabric cannot withstand the rigours of the climate, especially the fierce winds. It is fairly common to see entire white tents, poles and all, get blown down by the strong winds of the Changthang. The fabric of the tent is further weakened by the presence of an open fire in the tent. Though most tents in Rupshu have a stove, open fires are lit in winter when temperatures drop. It is said that the smoke from within and strong sun from on top spoil the tent.

Further, some people maintain that the white tent is warmer than the black one because unlike the latter there are no holes in the weave of its fabric and this prevents the wind from coming in. On the other hand, they say that more rain leaks into a white tent in comparison with the black one. Some Rupshupa suggested that they could cover the roofs of their tents with plastic to make them waterproof.[18]

The more prosperous families take advantage of the benefits of both types and own two tents: a white one for summer and a black one for winter. On a hot day in summer it is just too warm to sit inside a black tent and so the white ones are

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[18] An Englishman, from a non-government organisation in London, who worked with LNP in Ladakh suggested that he was going to show the Changpa how to line their tents with felt as this would make them warmer. He had heard that this was the practice in Mongolia, where nomads line their yurts with seven layers of felt. The first place he tried his idea out in was Rupshu, but quickly abandoned the project because the Rupshupa showed a lack of interest. Later Tharchen told me that, though it was a good idea on the whole, layers of felt would make the tent heavy and then it would be difficult to transport. The Rupshupa make about ten moves during the course of a year, in comparison Mongolian nomads usually move camp only twice during the year, from summer to winter pastures.

preferred because they are cooler. In winter it is the opposite and the black tent keeps one warmer. In addition, when moves of the camp are done in stages, black tents are usually kept rolled up for the short stay at the intermediary campsite and the white one put up instead.

The final advantage of the white tent is that it is easier to come by, and less work is involved in its manufacture. This may be one of the main reasons for the presence of more tents in Rupshu as it is now relatively simpler than it used to be for families to split up and live as separate, nuclear units rather than as joint families. The other basis given for more tents is the growth in population in Rupshu. The division of tents and formation of new tents is the subject of the second part of this chapter.

Architecture involves not the just the provision of shelter from the elements, but the creation of a social and symbolic space which both mirrors and moulds the world view of its inhabitants (Waterson 1991: xv). In Rupshu, spatial organisation within the tent is a crucial element to understanding spaces inhabited by the gods, as well as male and female principles. The section below turns to this.

7.1.2 Spatial Organisation within the Tent

We were sitting round the hearth (*gog-kyor*) one evening talking of the day's events, and Rinchen was drawing on a piece of paper. She drew the inside of a tent with the stone wall running around the edge, the shelves at the front and back, the

stove in the middle, and the utensils scattered around. She drew a line down the middle, from the back of the tent to the door, and turned to me. "This is my mother's side," she said pointing to the left of her drawing, "this is my father's side," and she pointed to the right side of her drawing. Thus, as Carsten and Hugh-Jones state, the house is a prime agent of socialization and that "if people construct houses and make them in their own image, so also do they use their houses and house-images to construct themselves as individuals and as groups" (1995: 2-3).

Spatial organisation within the tent is a crucial element to inhabiting spaces between genders and between individuals. The tent is divided into two realms, the female and the male. Standing at the door, facing inwards, the left side of the tent is referred to as *bo-mo 'do* (female side) and the right side as *bu-tsha 'do* (male side). This gender division extends outside the tent as well. Thus, the two sides of the tent reflect specific gender associations in terms of who inhabits which side of the tent. This is further accentuated by the articles kept, and work performed on each side of the tent (see Figure 5). However, the Rupshupa assert that the altar, hearth, and door should remain in a straight line down the centre of the tent. Among Mongolian nomads the practice is the reverse and the male side of the tent, considered to be ritually pure, is on the left and the female, impure, on the right of the door (Humphrey 1974: 273). Houses are not always divided between left and right, and in the Kabyle case the inside of the house is intrinsically female and the outside male (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 40).

The women of the house, including those who visit, inhabit the left side of the tent. It is here that women give birth, and babies are nursed, attended to, and put to sleep. After the mother stops nursing the child, he or she then sleeps on the right side of the tent along with the older children.[19] The husband and wife also sleep on the left side. All cooking is done on this side of the tent, and food, cooking utensils, and the tea churner are stored here, as are all the family's clothes, jewellery, and blankets made by women (Plate 53). It is said that shelves are only constructed on the left, and not on the right, side of the tent because women have so many more things to store than men.

The right side of the tent is the male sphere. All male family members and male visitors sit on this side of the tent. The male domain is also where religious items, such as prayer books, and incense are stored (Plate 54). It is here that saddles, saddle-cloths, stirrups, and bridles are kept, along with saddle-bags and blankets woven by men.

Bourdieu states that through rules about how space is to be used, people are obliged to act out their relations to each other in a particularly personal and immediate way (1973: 99-102). Through his analysis of the Berber house he contends that the child growing up there automatically absorbs Berber notions and values about human relationships, and in particular the relation between genders, as Rinchen did through

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[19] During summer older children often sleep outside, leaving the tent to their parents and children who are still being nursed. In most polyandrous marriages the younger brother also often sleeps outside, except when his older sibling is away.

53. Ama grinding grain on the left side of the tent which is the *bo-mo 'do* (female side). The altar and hearth are visible on the right, and they are always in a straight line down the centre of the tent.

54. Prayers are always held on the right side of the tent, the *bu-tsha 'do* (male side).

her drawing. Further, Bourdieu suggests that this unverbalized form of socialization ultimately extends beyond the division of space in the house itself, outward to encompass the rest of the world where the house as a whole is "female" as opposed to the public world of men (ibid: 106-110). These principles are symbolised in the public arena of politics that is the focus of the next chapter.

Arrangement of space within a tent is often a reflection of social organisation. Faegre maintains that the line between the male and female sides of the tent can be quite strict, as in Arab cultures where there is a dividing curtain, or it may be loose and the people of both sexes may move about freely as with the Inuit (1979: 7). However, the internal features of a house embody more than just the division of space, they also serve as vehicles for the symbolic elaboration of systems of hierarchy (Waterson 1991: 12). Thus, the tent is a representation not just of unity but also of various kinds of hierarchy and division. In Rupshu there is a well ordered and ritually defined seating arrangement observed around the hearth. This ranked seating arrangement is known as *gral*, and is common throughout Ladakh (see Dollfus 1989: 133-134, Aggarwal 1994: 84-91). The seating is arranged in order of importance and status, and it is customary for those highest in rank to sit closer to the top of the tent, near the altar. Those lowest in rank sit toward the bottom of the tent. The uppermost seat (*gral-mgo*) is usually inhabited by the head of the household, the best carpets will always be laid here, and all other adult male members of agnatic descent seat themselves in order of seniority after him, ending at the lowest seat (*gral-zug*). The head of the household would forsake his seat for a man higher in rank than him, or a

lama. Children sit in a semicircle around the bottom of the hearth, close to the entrance.[20]

The same order is practised by the women on the left side of the tent. The wife of the household sits closest to the altar, facing her husband across the hearth. Their son's new wife would occupy a seat below her mother-in-law, and would only acquire the former's seat when she left the tent. My own seating within the tent remained somewhat ambiguous, as I was always made to sit on the right side of the tent near the hearth. Tharchen always sat at the top, and I usually sat between him and Angchuk. However, when my husband visited he was offered the seat above Tharchen. It was only when guests called on them or they were entertaining, that Ama would beckon me over to sit beside her. This was probably so that it would not look strange to outsiders, and at the same time Ama said that it was better I sat next to Tharchen because I was always busy working.

Apart from the hierarchical division of humans, the tent also exemplifies the three-tier division of the world, inhabited at the highest level by the gods, in the middle by the *btsan*, and at the lowest by the *klu* (cf. Chapter Three).[21] Tucci suggests that the tent and the home are not places like all other places, but are capable of being

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[20] Vohra mentions that among the Dards the aged, who may be agnatic or affinal relatives, sit with the children in the neutral part of the residential unit (1989a: 52). However, I did not observe this practice in Rupshu.

[21] In tents this representation takes place on a horizontal plane, while in houses throughout Ladakh this is depicted vertically (see Murdoch 1981: 264, Dollfus 1989: 131).

interpreted cosmologically as a projection of the universe into earthly existence (1970: 187). In the tent the uppermost realm is called *lha phu-la*, and the lowest is *klu yog-la*. The centre is *btsan bar-la*. In homes throughout Ladakh and Tibet the three levels of the world are believed to be connected through the central pillar (*sbas-ka*). This is said to be of great ritual and symbolic significance, and it represents the world-tree, the centre of the universe, and the communication channel between the three worlds (Corlin 1980: 87). In some cases this main pillar is also known as the "soul wood" (Day 1989: 78). In Rupshu the uppermost tent pole represents the link between the three worlds. At the same time, Tucci writes that this connecting "pole" or "pillar" can also be seen as a "cord" (1970: 225).[22] The opening above the hearth in the tent, which lets out the smoke, is seen as the apex and corresponds to the highest gate at the summit of the world, which opens into the unbounded space where sun and moon describe their eternal courses (ibid: 188).

The *phug-lha* or the "tent god" (tutelary deity of each *pha-spun*, cf. section 6.1) is housed in the uppermost portion of the tent, but though it belongs to the male lineage it is kept on the left side of the tent - the female side (see Figure 5). In most homes in Ladakh the house god is near the father's side or between husband and wife (Vohra 1989a: 53). The god may also be housed in the central pillar, in altars in homes, or on the roof of the house. Most people in Rupshu had no explanation as to why the *phug-lha* was kept in the female side of the tent, and asserted that it had been

[22] Buddhists also believe that the house can be depicted as a huge tree that grows though all three realms; it has its roots in the underworld and its highest branches in heaven (Ahmed 1990: 26).

like that from the beginning. Nawang Chogyal stated: "It has always been kept in the women's side, near the mother, never on the man's side."[23] Some elders added that this was the tradition even before "religion" (i.e. Buddhism) came to Rupshu. The *phug-lha* is propitiated every morning and evening by the head of the tent, through offerings of incense and a lit butter lamp (*mchod-me*).[24] Whenever Ama churned a fresh lot of butter she first offered a bit to the *phug-lha*, followed by the upper tent pole and the lower one, and to the hearth between them. She often skipped the lower tent pole, and said it was because the upper pole was more important as it was the main pole of the tent and she could never forget it.

Apart from spatial division and hierarchial representations, the tent also embodies kinship systems and links between tents. This is demonstrated through the partition and formation of new tents on the occasion of the *phog-srod.*

7.2 The Formation of a New Tent

It was the day of the *phog-srod* (literally "to take charge"), and there was much activity going on outside Dawa Urgyal's tent. The lama from Korzok Gompa had arrived at daybreak and the recitation of prayers had begun inside Dawa's tent. Five

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[23] However, Tucci also mentions that amongst nomads in Tibet the *phug-lha* is associated with women and has his place in precisely that part of the tent where the women's life mostly takes place (1970: 188).

[24] Tharchen maintained that the *thug*, black yak tail hung outside the tent, was also there to appease the *phug-lha*.

sheep had been killed and were being cooked for the evening's feast. The *chang* was tasted and declared potent enough for the guests.

Dawa Urgyal, now almost forty-four years old, was bequeathing his tent to his eldest son, Skarma Tagdol. Skarma was about twenty-three, married and had one son. After relinquishing the "big tent" to his son, Dawa would move into the "small tent" along with his wife and their six unmarried daughters. Thus, the celebrations were to mark the formation of a new tent for Dawa, and the inheritance of the old one by Skarma.

In the evening guests came to Dawa's tent bearing gifts of *mchod-pa* (pyramid-shaped cakes made from barley flour and water), rice, bread, and *kha-btags*. The men were seated in the main tent, the women and children in a smaller one nearby. Skarma Tagdol, his wife, and their son sat in the centre of the main tent. The ceremony began with Dawa announcing that he was leaving his tent to his son, along with a hundred head of sheep and goats. Further, he was giving him the silver butter lamp, statues, and prayer boxes on the altar; old silver coins, two carpets, two blankets, an assortment of cooking utensils, and Rs.50,000. Along with that Dawa also gave his son two horses; one with all its riding gear (saddle, stirrups, and pair of saddle-cloths), and the other without. Those sitting around showed their approval by shouting "*jus-legs, jus-legs*", the Ladakhi word for greeting.[25] Once Dawa had finished, other guests then came forward to give Skarma their gifts. Most consisted of

[25] In this case the word *jus-legs* is used to show approval.

a *kha-btags*, and cash amounts which ranged from Rs.5 to Rs.50, depending on the guest's relationship to the family and their degree of wealth. All gifts, along with the bearer's name, are recorded in a ledger in the same manner in which lists are made and kept of a bride's gifts at her marriage (cf. section 6.1). That night, Skarma slept in the big tent and his father in the small one.

The main part of the *phog-srod* is characterised by the father leaving his tent to his eldest son and moving into a smaller tent nearby. The *phog-srod* is only performed when the eldest child is married and has offspring of his own. Amongst Tibetan nomads the practice is similar and when the eldest son marries, the extended family usually has its first break-off, although there is a tradition that the family should not break up while the parents are still alive (Ekvall 1968: 25). However, Clarke states that in North-East Tibet the rule is for the main tent to be inherited as one unit by the youngest son, who stays with the parents, and for there to be an equipartition of livestock between male offspring if they move away from their tent of birth (1992: 402). He says that this practice of inheritance by the youngest rather than the eldest son also increases the period of authority of a head over the main tent. In contrast, women receive only clothes and jewellery when they leave their natal tent, and some are given livestock.

The *phog-srod* is also known as *khag-gnyis* (to separate or divide in two). Though separate structures, the big and small tents continue to be an extension of each other and are always interacting and helping one another. Tharchen explained that what is important is that their hearths are separate. As a man's younger sons marry

and leave their father's tent similar *phog-srods* are not usually held unless the family is extremely wealthy. The tents younger sons set up are known as new tents.[26]

Separation and formation of new tents are not always effected through large ceremonies held for the occasion. In Tharchen's family there has not been a feast for many years now, but new tents have been formed. Tent division generally occurs when married sons put pressure on their fathers, and this is said to be the case when there is friction between the daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law. Reis writes that residential break-up is generally seen as a change for the better for the position of a woman, for the simple reason that now her own nuclear family instead of the whole household will be the centre of her activities (1983: 220). It is said that if a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law get on well then there are less chances of the tent dividing. The other reason cited for division is when the tent may be getting too crowded. Ama commented that too many people living in a tent at one time was not good because it always led to fights between members. However, she added that the positive side to this was that there was always a lot of people to share with the workload. Often parents can be reluctant to relinquish their tents to their eldest son, and so try to delay the *phog-srod*. In some cases parents may only give the tent to their eldest child, but hold back on some of their other wealth. The ceremony held at the time can also incorporate other events, such as Tsewang Lhamo's marriage feast described here.

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[26] They may also be called *ya-'u*. However, this term more specifically refers to the tent of the youngest son, who is the last to leave his father's tent.

When a man has no sons, a husband is brought into the tent for his eldest daughter and the tent is left to him. The son-in-law usually stands in as a surrogate son, but unlike a real son he does not have the right to set up his own tenthold apart from that of his wife's parents (Ekvall 1968: 27). Matrilocal uxorilocal marriages are widespread in Ladakh and Tibet when there is no son to inherit the home (see Aziz 1978: 127, Levine 1988: 147, Aggarwal 1994: 217). Clarke states that matrilocal residence is also likely if there is a lack of labour in the tent (1992: 402). The one requirement of the change of residence of a man to his wife's tent is that he has to change his *phug-lha*, in the same manner that women do when they marry and enter their husband's tent.

Tsewang Lhamo is the eldest of three sisters, they have no brother, and a husband had to be brought into the tent for her since she was the heir to her father's tent. However, this was not easy, as her family is considered to be of slightly low-caste.[27] According to Ama, Nawang Namgyal who is from Koyul, was tricked into coming here by an uncle of Tsewang Lhamo's. She seduced him, got pregnant, and then her parents forced him to stay on under obligation to his child. "If you observe," she went on, "he is watched very carefully and never allowed to leave the camp alone in case he runs away." That was in 1992, but by the time the *phog-srod* was held in

[27] Low-caste people in Rupshu are called *rkyang-zan phyi-zan* ("eat wild ass, eat marmots"), and it is said that they are considered "low" because they eat wild ass (*rkyang*), marmots (*phyi-ba*), mice, and horse meat, with the result that their bodies emit a bad smell. Though the practice of eating the meat of these animals has stopped today it is said that their bodies still have a bad smell and thus, the stigma remains. As a result, it is difficult for girls from these families to find husbands and often they have to marry in far-off villages where their lineage is not known, or husbands have to be "captured" and brought for them.

1994 their second child had already been born. Since they never had a proper wedding ceremony (*bag-len*, Leh: *bag-ston*), the *phog-srod* was both a combination of the wedding feast and the inheritance of the tent. At this time her father also gave them a horse with its saddle, stirrups, and saddle-cloths; four silver prayer boxes, a large silver butter lamp, a set of seven brass and copper offering bowls, a yak, eight sheep and goats, several saddle-bags, and Rs.1,000. Lastly, he announced that of everything else he owned, one-third he would retain for himself and two-thirds would belong to the couple.[28]

The distribution of wealth is public knowledge, as all gifts are announced. People observe and comment on the father's degree of generosity, and if he has been magnanimous they will praise him for his largeness of heart; if he has been miserly they scorn him. Dawa Urgyal came from a prosperous family, and so the large amounts he left to his son were expected. In contrast Tsewang Lhamo's father, who was not as well off as Dawa, gave away practically everything he owned, so people commended him for his selflessness. Children may also petition their father through older family members or the chief if they feel he has not left them their requisite share. For instance it was recalled that when Dawa's father had given Dawa the big tent and later when his two younger children had got married, their father had not given them appropriate gifts and family members had criticized him for this. He now took the occasion of his grandson's *phog-srod* to absolve himself of this criticism and

[28] This is a common practice; it is said that when a father's property is divided three ways then the eldest is entitled to two-thirds of it, and the remaining one-third is split between the parents and other children.

to divide his remaining wealth between all three children. He gave both his sons a silver butter lamp, one Tibetan carpet, thirty silver coins, and Rs.30,000. He gave his daughter a silver butter lamp, ten silver coins, and Rs.1,500. He also presented his grandson with a silver butter lamp, one Tibetan carpet, one leather saddle with its woven cover, forty silver coins, and Rs.40,000.

In the case of fraternal polyandrous marriages, the property and wealth are not jointly owned by both brothers but belong solely to the eldest. In the event that the younger brother decides to leave and form his own family, the decision to give him something from the tent is the older sibling's prerogative. Pema Wangyal is Gurmit's younger brother, and both were initially married to Dolma. Later, Pema Wangyal fell in love with Lanze, Tharchen's younger sister, and decided to marry her instead. Dolma was furious at having to lose her husband to another woman, and is said to have put up a big fight. She also ensured that Pema Wangyal left the tent with nothing. In spite of the odds, Pema Wangyal did marry Lanze and set up his own tent, which became a new tent. However, life has not been easy for them as they have only thirty sheep and goats, and three children to feed. Tharchen had once tried to intervene on his brother-in-law's behalf and get something for him from Gurmit, but Dolma was unrelenting. Today, the two sides do not talk to each other.

Thus, the manner in which tents separate and new ones are formed is not fixed but is compliant with the needs of each situation. Elders in Rupshu state that in the past the *phog-srod* did not occur with the same frequency as it does today. Several reasons are given for this, ranging from the fact that there are far fewer polyandrous

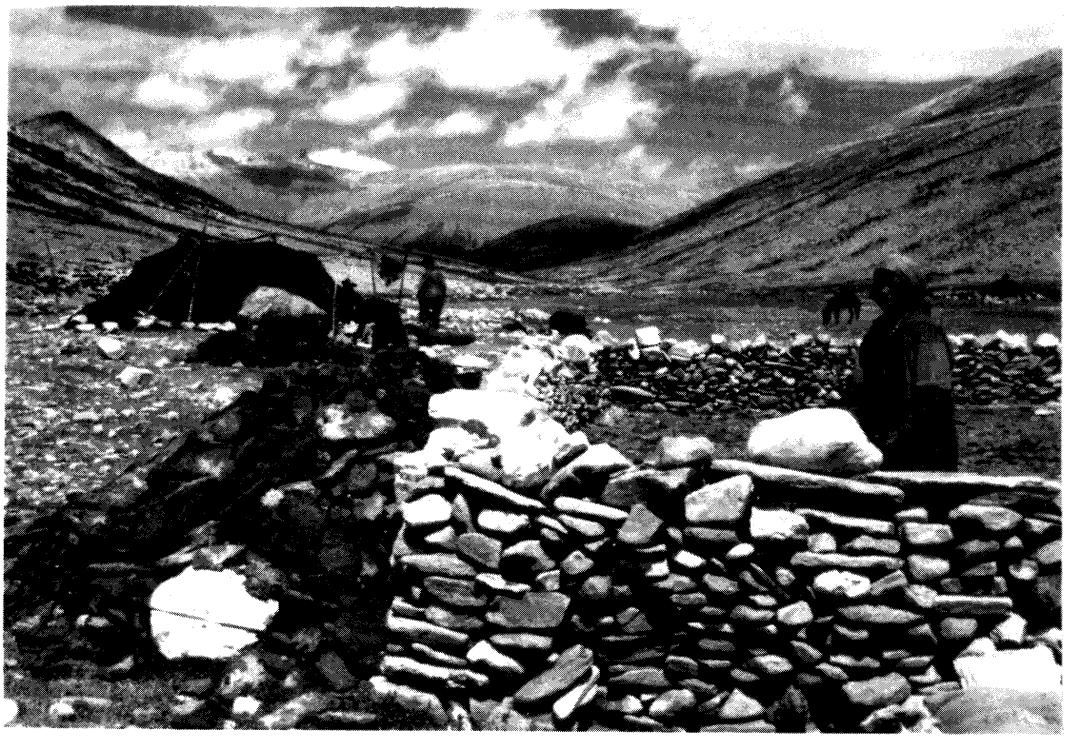
marriages taking place to the statement that fewer sons are becoming lamas. This leads to more marriages, and an increase in the population. In addition, it is far easier to make a tent these days because fabric can be purchased from the market, or old tents can be procured from the army. Weaving a tent took far more time in the old days, and was also dependent on the stock of yak and goat hair. With the number of tents increasing in Rupshu, their position within the campsite cannot be arbitrarily decided as this would lead to altercations if two families wanted to pitch their tents on the same site. Settlement patterns within the campsite is the subject of the last part of this chapter.

7.3 The Campsite - Locating Tents

The upper part of the valley is full of willow trees,[29]
That is not a good place.
In the lower part of the valley there is a blue lake,
That is not a good place.
In the middle of the valley there is a clear space,
That is a good place.
That is where the square pens must be built,
It has been like that from the beginning.

The underlying order in the location and orientation of campsites is depicted in this song, which Tharchen sang for me, since tents are typically pitched beside the pens meant for livestock (Plate 55). Tents are always positioned with their doors facing east, as is described in the phrase "*gyes sgo shar la, rlung-po nub la*" ("the

[29] Trees do not grow in Rupshu because it lies above the tree line, but Tharchen said this song was about the past and believed that perhaps there were trees then.



55. The tent, in the rear, is pitched beside the pen (*gle̱-'e*) in the fore-ground. The pile of dried dung (*ril-ma*) lying on the side of the pen has been removed from it, and will serve as fuel.

door is to the east, the wind comes from the west)."[30] It is considered inauspicious for tent doors to open towards the west, as this is where the wind usually comes from.[31] Further, Ama explained the reason for this position was that tent doors must always open towards the rising sun; it would be bad if they turned the tent's back to it.[32] Thus, in a campsite tents are usually strung out in a line along a mountain valley and rarely does a camp consist of a circle of tents (Plate 56).

The journey to a new campsite is typically done in two stages, and the second stage of the move is designated as the day when the entire camp migrates (cf. section 2.3.1). On this appointed day all tents must come down and be folded away at around the same time. It is considered unpropitious if a family brings their tent down a day earlier, or a day later, than the day allocated for this. Thus, it is necessary for those who depart on the first stage of the move to leave their tents standing. Skarma, who always leaves on the first stage of the journey with Tharchen's and his luggage, would have to leave his tent standing. Later Tharchen would take his tent down on the appointed day and bring it along with him. The reason given for this is that the area

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[30] This orientation extends to the one-room structures the Rupshupa have built at Thugje and Noruchen. Humphrey observes that even after the Buryat nomads built houses, instead of tents, their alignment facing south or south-east continued (1983: 272).

[31] In houses in Ladakh the orientation is similar, and Murdoch writes that entrances occur on the side of the buildings facing south or east, while north and west orientations are considered poor (1981: 274).

[32] During the course of the same conversation, Ama explained that "the sun comes up from behind the mountains in the morning, and goes down behind the mountains on the other side in the evening." She then asked me if there were mountains in Bombay, and when I replied in the negative she clicked her tongue and stated: "If you have no mountains in Bombay, then where does your sun come from?"

56. Black and white tents, some with pens beside them, are pitched across the length of the valley at Debring.

within one's tent, the *tsher-sa*, must not be seen by others before the time of moving and therefore everyone must bring their tents down together.[33] This rule is mandatory and is reinforced by the chief who fines families that do not comply with this. This fine can be from Rs.10 to Rs.15, or the men may have to do some additional work set by him. The only exception to this rule is made for tents where a birth or death has recently taken place, and only after consultation with the chief are they allowed to move at a later date.[34] It is also customary for people who own two tents to take down their black one and pitch the white tent in its place, thereby circumventing the chief's fine. The black tent is usually moved a day earlier because it is heavy to carry, and there is always more luggage on the second day of the move.

Once a new campsite is reached, each family moves towards their tent site. These tent sites are largely established through hereditary rights, but there are also some campsites in Rupshu where there are no hereditary placements for tents. These generally include the encampments occupied between the months of May to July, and at Norchen where camps are only pitched when the annual prayer ceremony is held.

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[33] Since tents are usually taken down while it is still dark, this could be one of the reasons why the Rupshupa break camp so early in the morning.

[34] However, chiefs are known to be quite unrelenting as they maintain that it brings bad luck and misfortune to the camp if all the tents do not move together. Greater leniency is shown to tents where a death, rather than a birth, has taken place and new-born babies have been known to die because they were moved too soon. At times the move of the entire camp may be delayed to accommodate a lone tent, but this usually depends on the rank and status of the tent. This is also usually the case with deaths, because the rituals involve the participation of a lot more people (all the *pha-spun* members) than those connected with the birth of a child.

Fixed places of residence usually prevail at campsites such as Debring, Zara, and Ponka Nugu, when all the tents camp together.

It appears that this was not always the case, as Meme Tsering Paljor explained that in the past they had their hereditary tent sites at almost all camping grounds:

> "But, with the number of tents growing in Rupshu and the presence of the Tibetans, there were families who didn't have fixed places for their tents. They said this was not fair and so we had to give up our places and now we play *cho-lo* (dice)."

In campsites where tent spaces are not fixed, sites are allocated through a game of dice known as *cho-lo*, which is the focus of the next chapter. *Cho-lo* would be played before the move to an encampment, because as soon as the Rupshupa reach the new place they head straight for their allocated sites. Three tents, generally of a patrilineal extended family, get together and one dice is rolled for every group of three tents. Sometimes two or three unrelated men join together, but usually the pattern is of a grouping of brothers or of a father and sons. The group that gets the highest number has first say in where they will pitch their tent. Coveted areas are those higher up in the campsite and close to the stream. Tibetans do not participate in this game, and they are generally allocated the lower areas of the camping ground for their tents.

There are also stray cases when hereditary tent sites are shifted. In Zara Barba Tharchen mentioned that his tent site was a new one:

> "Our tent used to be down there first, among everybody, but this year we decided to move up here. There is more space here to keep the sheep and goats, and the place is better too."

The new place belonged to Ama's brother-in-law, but he and his family had moved to Leh and settled down there some years ago. Since they had no intention of ever returning to Rupshu, they had given Tharchen permission to occupy their tent site.[35]

The tent is mainly pitched by men, though women and children may also help. First, the ground is levelled and cleared of stones and shrubs. The stone wall and shelves are built if need be, or the existing ones are attended to. The tent is then unrolled and spread over the stone wall, and the ropes are stretched over the tent poles and tied to the rocks. Once the tent is in place the women then move in and arrange their belongings. The stove is the first to be set up and tea is soon boiling away.

Beside each tent there is a pen (*gle-'e*), where the livestock are kept. The pens are built from stone and usually consist of one large enclosure, not far from the tent (see Plate 55). However, at spring campsites it is common to find additional enclosures adjoining the larger pen and these are constructed for the lambs and kids (Figure 6). The walls of these enclosures will generally be higher than those of the larger pen, and this is to provide additional protection from predators. New-born kids are kept in a small box-like space, known as *re-pul*, for the first thirty days after they are born. The kids are lowered into this and the opening is covered with a thick piece of cloth at night. Lambs are not kept in a separate enclosure but tied in the centre of

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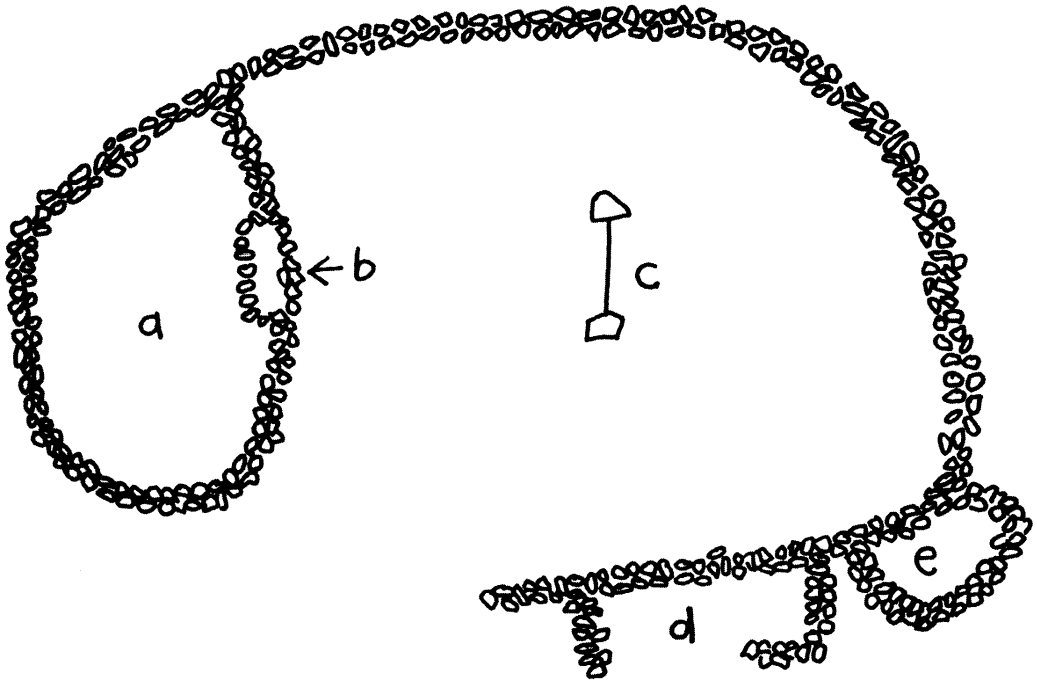
[35] Permission has to be taken from the owner of an inherited tent site before raising one's own tent in that area. In Debring there was an empty tent site with a stone wall around it near Tharchen's tent as that family was presently away tending the monastery's livestock. I wanted to pitch my tent there as the stone wall would shield me from the wind, but was only allowed to once Tharchen received permission from the owner. This was granted a few days later.



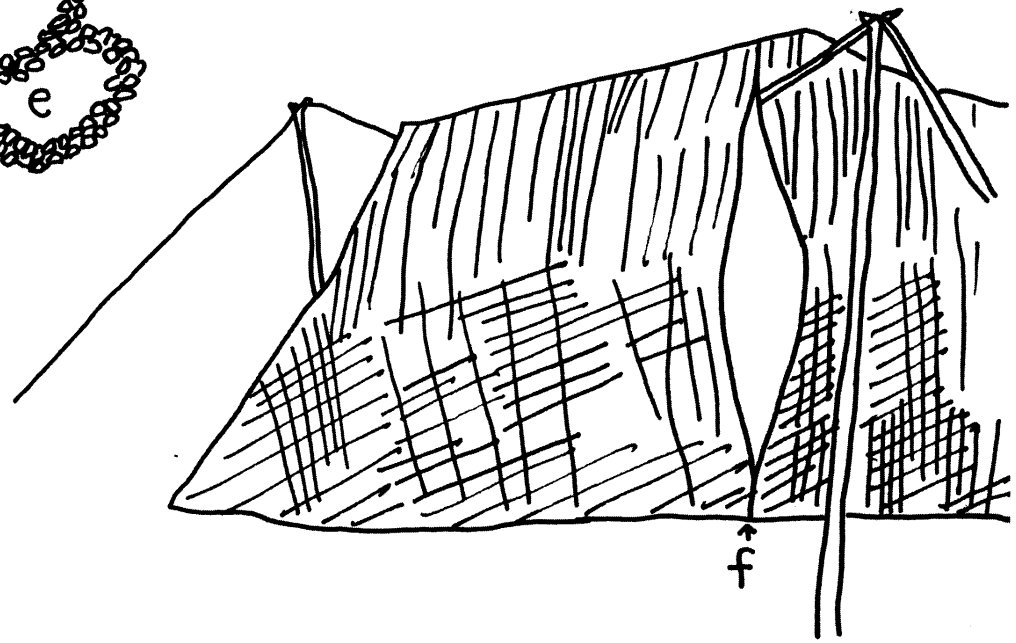


Figure 6 Layout of the Pen (*gle-'e*) and Tent (*re-bo*)

a) Enclosure (*chor-khang*) for lambs and kids.
b) The entrance to the *chor-khang*.
c) Area (*ses-sdang*) in centre of pen where new-born lambs are tied at night.
d) Enclosure (*yar-sdang*) for the *'bri-mo* and her calf.
e) Enclosure (*re-pul*) for new-born kids.
f) Door (*sgo*) of the tent.

the large pen, in the *ses-sdang*, so that they can be near their mothers. Once the lambs and kids are strong enough to go grazing with the rest of the herd, they are kept in a pen known as the *chor-khang*.[36] The entrance to the *chor-khang* is accessible only through the larger pen. Another enclosure built beside the main pen is the *yar-sdang*, and this is where the *'bri-mo* and her new-born calf are kept during the night.

Pens for livestock are not constructed at all encampments, and the Rupshupa distinguish between sites where they have their "own pens" ("*rang gle-'e*") and those that do not. At encampments where pens are not built, the areas demarcated for livestock are referred to as "*yul-pa'i gle-'e*" (the "village pen").[37] The latter is generally an open space not far from the tent.

Overall patterns of the layout of tents within the campsite can also be determined by the presence or absence of pens for the livestock. In Debring, where there are fixed pens, the tents are placed much closer to each other. While in Norchen, where there are no pens, the tents are put up much further apart. This distance serves to prevent the mix up of livestock belonging to different tents.

The absence of pens can be detrimental to the survival of livestock. There were several nights when wild dogs would attack the sheep and goats, scatter them

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[36] Lambs take comparatively less time than kids to build up their strength, and after fifteen days they are out grazing while kids take a month.

[37] Tharchen mentioned that observing whether a tent site is hereditary or not is by the presence of stone pens, as having a pen meant the site was fixed. However, I found that this was not always the case at all campsites.

and then strike a stray animal. In the morning the family would grieve over their loss. Skarma had once pointed out, "without our livestock we are nothing, the death of one is like the passing away of a family member." Apart from predators, dogs within the camp, though generally not carnivorous, are sometimes known to kill livestock but it is often difficult to determine the owner of the culprit. One night at Norchen it rained very heavily and snowed a bit too, when Gurmit's dog attacked one of the sheep and a few of the other dogs followed him. Tharchen and his brothers lost quite a few livestock that night, and others were injured from dog bites. They demanded compensation from Gurmit, but he refused to admit that it was his dog. Since predators were a nightly occurrence I asked Tharchen why they did not build proper pens at all campsites. He replied that since they did not have fixed places for their tents at all the campsites people generally did not bother to make pens - "Why should I take the trouble to build a pen that somebody else will use."

Apart from protecting livestock, the pen is also a source of fuel for the Rupshupa. Whenever they arrive at a new campsite the Rupshupa first dig up and remove the top layer of dried dung (*ril-ma*) from the pen. This is then stored beside the tent and provides the family with fuel for the period that they are camped there (see Plate 55).[38]

[38] This does not meet all their fuel requirements and they also collect dry shrubs and bushes. Often this dry dung is also sold to traders from Leh, who sell it to households during winter.

While tents are representative of social organisation in Rupshu, *cho-lo* or the "game of dice" relates to political formations, as will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE GAME OF DICE:

MAKING DECISIONS AND ELECTING LEADERS

The camp had reached Rogchen, where we would stay a few days before moving on to Debring. Angchuk, Skarma, and a few other men pulled out a leather board (*sho-gdan*), counters (*lags-skyi*), and a pair of dice (*cho-lo*). They began playing *cho-lo* (Plate 57).[1] The loud cries of those who were winning soon drew a crowd around them, and the betting grew stronger. I asked Tharchen to explain the rules of the game to me, but he stated that he could not. Later Ama informed me why Tharchen was unable to show me how the game was played and said it was because "women never play *cho-lo*, it looks bad."[2]

A few days later when we were sitting in the tent and talking about designs (*ri-mo*), Ama pulled out the small saddle-bag (*lag-kyig*), woven by her mother at the time of her marriage, and which all women use to store their jewellery, precious items, and money (Plate 58). She pointed to the design in the weave and said, "see women

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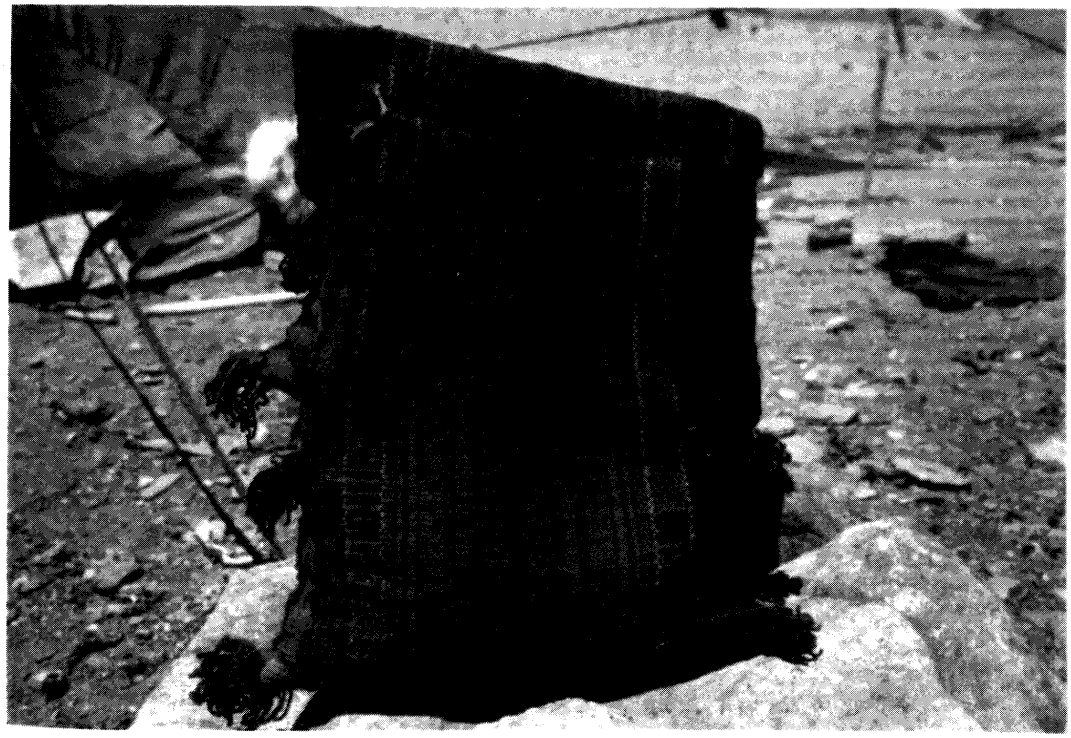
[1] *Cho-lo* refers to both the dice and the game in which the dice are used. The Tibetans refer to both the dice and the game as *sho*. In the context of this chapter I use the word *cho-lo* to refer specifically to the pair of dice and not to the game.

[2] After several weeks of coaxing Tharchen finally agreed to teach me because I said it was important for my work. We were only one of two tents at the time, the other belonging to his brother-in-law. "Now no one can see me teach you," he commented. I learnt fast and was soon winning. Suddenly, Tharchen stopped abruptly and said, "that's enough, you've learnt the game!"

57. A group of men playing *cho-lo*. The two white dice are visible in the centre of the round leather board (*sho-gdan*).



58. This is Ama's *lag-kyig*. The red and green square blocks in the side panels are a variation of the *cho-lo* design.

weave the *cho-lo*." The design consisted of small squares, each representing a die. At the same time, each square is part of a group of twelve squares that are evenly staggered in rows of four.[3] A few lines of the ground colour separate each block of twelve squares from the next one. Thus, women who are excluded from playing *cho-lo* are permitted to weave representations of the dice in their cloth. This is forbidden to men, because as a rule men do not include designs in their weaving.

In Rupshu, *cho-lo* is more than just a game, as the roll of the dice is the ruling factor in practically all decisions made there. These range from who should be chief, when the community should move camp, how tent sites should be allocated, and who should be sent to tie the prayer flags and make offerings at the village shrine. Women, by virtue of their exclusion from the game, do not participate in these decision-making processes. Throughout Ladakh it is the same, and a woman is considered unsuited to represent a household in public decision-making areas and attend meetings, where local authorities (invariably men) are selected, disputes are settled, and matters of common interest are discussed (Reis 1983: 221). In Bhutan it is the same, and though men do not weave there, they cut already woven cloth and stitch it into finished forms that are used in settings where religious activities and government business take place and where men rather than women preside (Myers and Pommaret 1994b: 143-144).

Nelson argues that most male ethnographers define nomadic societies as being structured in terms of two dichotomous social worlds: the tent and the camp (1973:

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[3] The number is always twelve, because this is the total number a pair of dice gives, and it is always a pair of dice that is used when *cho-lo* is played.

43). The former is the private or domestic domain of the woman, where family matters are handled, and the latter is the public domain or political arena of the man where decisions affecting the entire group are made (ibid). The assumption is that since the camp is where political activity takes place, women play no formal role in it (ibid: 46). However, Nelson suggests that if politics is understood as power-structured relationships then we must see the relationship between the sexes in a political context, where women exert influence on (and hence coerce) men and therefore participate in the power structure of society (ibid: 56). Barth, who also makes a similar distinction between the tent and camp, states that within the camp a bilateral system of duties and relations is obvious - while its outer boundaries are conceived in patrilineal terms, affinal relations serve to establish political bonds between tents (1961: 38-39). The movement of women between tents and the strategic alliances built up as a result of this is relevant to the role they play in this sphere. The weaving of textiles, especially at the time of a woman's marriage, can be said to be one way through which women are empowered (cf. section 6.1).[4]

Ardener states that in cultures where women are not formally represented in the political arena, they operate through what may be called "muted structures" (1981: 17). At one level, it could be said in Rupshu that the degree to which women influence public policy and exercise political influence is represented through their weaving of the dice. Where women's roles are perhaps more significant is in the

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[4] The manner in which women are empowered can take many forms. For instance, Abu-Lughod describes how Bedouin women resist traditional structures of power through the sexually segregated women's world, resistance to marriages, sexually irreverent discourse, and oral lyric poetry (1990: 43-47).

informal roles they play. Women frequently meet during the day when spinning and weaving are done outdoors, and they will chat about matters pertaining to their tents and families, about Rupshu and coming events, and about people from other villages. Community decision-making, which is formally in the hands of men, is organised in such a way that women's opinions are heard and taken into account. Men often return from meetings, where political affairs concerning Rupshu are discussed, and matters are talked about around the fire in the tent at night. Women comment to their husbands, and in turn they tell them what they have heard during the course of the day from their conversations with other wives. When Gurmit became chief in 1993, many people said he was too weak to rule and that it was actually his wife, Dolma, and not he who governed Rupshu. Although many activities carried out in the community are quite definitely gender specific, occasionally women in Rupshu are involved in shearing, salt collecting, trading, and even weaving the articles normally woven by men. Thus, it seems that when conditions necessitate, women are called upon to do men's work, but rarely the other way around (Nelson 1973: 44).[5]

This chapter examines the political organisation and decision-making process within Rupshu, and examines how all decisions are governed by the roll of the dice. While women are categorically not permitted to play, among men there also are criteria that determines who can actually throw the dice. The first section looks at this selection, on the basis of their status, within Rupshu. This is followed by a discussion

[5] Among the Basseri spinning and weaving are never done by men, and male villagers are often ridiculed by the nomads for pursuing these activities (Barth 1961: 15).

on the field or arena of play, which is the "meeting". The next section describes the annual appointment of the chief, and other officers, in Rupshu. Along with these appointments, selections are also made for the position of the *rta-rdzi* (horse herder) and *dkor-pa* (those who attend to the monastery's livestock). The final section looks at the role of the *rta-rdzi dkor-pa* in some detail.

8.1 Those who Play with Dice - The *Khral-pa*

All men in Rupshu do not throw the dice and play *cho-lo*. Participation in the game is confined to a certain section of men, and they are known as *khral-pa* (taxpayer). Each tent will have one *khral-pa*, and this is always the male head.[6] However, the amount of *khral* (tax) a man contributes varies with the status of his tent as a "big" or "small" one (cf. Chapter Seven). The practice is for big tents to contribute two-thirds towards *khral*, and small tents one-third. However, *khral* is no longer expected of men who have passed the age of sixty. Further, if a man were to die before his son were old enough to become a *khral-pa*, then that tent is exempted from *khral* until the son is considered the right age. Tharchen assumed the duty of a *khral-pa* soon after his father died, and he was about twenty-one years old at the time. However, there is no fixed age for this and often mothers advise their young sons on

[6] Goldstein writes that while all laymen and lay women (with the exception of the nobility) in Tibet were serfs (*mi-ser*), only those belonging to the most prestigious serf sub-status were known as *khral-pa* (1971b: 4). In contrast, Clarke writes that in the Nepalese region of Helambu (or Yolmo) ideally all the people are *khral-pa* (literally "taxpayer"), a term which has the sense of a full village member or village-citizen (1980: 81).

decisions they make. The amount of work a *khral-pa* contributes is also determined by his wealth, and this largely depends on the size of his herd.

In Ladakh, the tax system under the Dogras was similar in form to that under the kings of Ladakh, although harsher in practice, and the big house was the main taxpaying unit (Grist 1990: 130).[7] The big houses had to make annual payments to the state, and these were paid in grain and money (Grist 1990: 129, Dollfus 1989: 62).[8] Taxes were also levied in kind, and each village had to provide free carriage for government and monastery missions, and fixed rate porterage for traders and travellers who had been issued with passes for that purpose (Grist 1994: 264). These porterage and carriage obligations, also known as corvée, extended up to the next village or stage on the route and were mainly levied on the big house.[9] While these taxes in money and kind were levied according to the size of the landholding of a house, richer households could pay someone else to perform the corvée in their place. In addition, when the need arose, households had to provide donations or workers for public works such as the construction of irrigation canals, roads, and bridges, as well as make special payments to build a new temple or sponsor a religious ceremony, transport

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[7] Apart from the *khral-pa* there were other tax statuses who were not included as government taxpayers. These were the *dud-chung* or workers attached to a particular monastic or noble estate; *mi-bogs* or leasers of land; and *bla-brang-pa*, houses of hereditary lamas (Grist 1990: 129).

[8] Areas, such as Rupshu, which could not provide grain had to give instead supplies such as meat and butter.

[9] This obligatory porterage and carriage was known as *khral* in Ladakh, and *begar* in Hindi (Cunningham 1854: 269). Grist mentions that it was also known at various times by the names *res* and *'u-lag* (1990: 138). The practice was the same in Tibet where human transportation services were known as *'u-lag*, riding animal services as *rta-'u*, and carrying animal ones as *khal-ma* (Goldstein 1971b: 10).

wood and supplies to Leh, and act as postal runners (Grist 1990: 131). Villages or houses which were in the estates of monasteries were not subject to government taxation, although the Dogras did charge a small tax on monastery lands, but their houses had an obligation to work for the monastery they were attached to in return for the land and animals they held from it (ibid). This relationship remains right up to the present; an example of this is the tending of the monastery's livestock, and the processing of their products. After independence, much of this tax and landholding system was abolished, including corvée.[10] The closing of the trade routes also precipitated the end of corvée.

At present the system of *khral* in Rupshu remains partly as it was before, but changes are also evident. Government land taxes, or rather taxes on livestock, still have to be paid but these are now minimal (cf. section 3.2). Corvée is only required for work pertaining to Korzok Gompa and its lamas, and not for traders or government representatives. In addition, *khral-pa* have to provide labour for the monastery or any other work or building activity in Rupshu and Korzok. Men who are *khral-pa* are also expected to hold office in Rupshu's political organisation, help out at religious ceremonies and other events held there, and look after the livestock belonging to Thugje Gompa.

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[10] However, the monasteries exerted their political influence to resist all attempts at land reform and today many of them continue to hold land in Ladakh. "In fact monasteries own about one-third of all the land in Ladakh, the main landholder being Hemis Gompa" (Grist 1990: 133).

Khral is demanded not only of men, but also of their yaks and horses. There is no *khral* on the sheep and goats. Horses that are fast and strong acquire the status of *khral-rta*, and sturdy yaks become *khral-g.yag*. Horses that are not *khral-rta* are referred to as *chor-rta*.[11] In 1992 there were forty-five *khral-rta* and fifty *khral-g.yag* in Rupshu. These animals are also required to work towards Rupshu's welfare and they are used to transport men, typically *khral-pa*, and goods when the need arises. For instance, when a *khral-pa* is sent to Korzok to consult the chief there or to fetch a lama for a prayer ceremony in Rupshu he will not ride his own horse, but one of the *khral-rta*. Both the man who is sent and the horse he rides are chosen through the throw of the dice, and the manner in which this is effected is the subject of the next section. Less *khral* is demanded of yaks as compared to horses, and this is usually once in three years when the lama in charge of Thugje Gompa has to return to Korzok. At this time about thirty to thirty-five yaks are required to transport the lama and his belongings from Thugje to Korzok.[12] The same yaks will then be used to bring the newly appointed lama and his luggage to Thugje.

A record is kept of each *khral-pa's* contribution to *khral* in Rupshu, to ensure that each one has worked or given according to their means, and the next section outlines how this is accomplished.

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[11] There is no specific term used to refer to yak that are not included in this count of *khral-g.yag*.

[12] However, in 1992 when Lama Sonam returned to Korzok no yaks were required as the Rupshupa got the use of a truck to transport his belongings.

8.1.1 The Field of Play - The Meeting

Meetings (*mdun-ma*) are a common feature of life in Rupshu, and they are regularly called by the chief when decisions regarding *khral* have to be made. Only *khral-pa* attend these meetings, and if all were to be present that would be about forty to fifty men. However, usually only half that number attend, and at times as few as five men may gather. As the men sit around in a circle, a mark is made on the ground to indicate the seat of those who are absent. Coming events are discussed and the number of men who will participate decided.

At a meeting in October, the decision to move camp had been taken, as well as the man chosen to go fetch the horses and yaks. The dice had given their consent. It only remained for them to decide who would carry the schoolmaster's belongings to Zara. The dice were thrown again and this time the lowest number fell on Tharchen. As he brought the luggage over to his tent, Ama complained:

> "How can our yaks carry so much luggage? We have our own, and we have to help Skarma and Lanze. Then we have hers and now this! Why didn't you say anything?"

Though decisions of the dice are binding, a man can plead to opt out by stating his inability to perform the task and offering the chief a *kha-btags*. It was too late now for Tharchen to change his mind, but Ama made sure he knew that she resented his complacency. All the way from Debring to Zara, Ama grumbled about the extra load.

As in most games here too the highest number wins (*thob-song*), and the lowest loses (*shor-song*). In effect, low numbers mean a negative response and it is

those with the lowest number that have to do the work. However, since a record is kept of all the *khral* done, work is equally rotated among all the *khral-pa*, including the yaks and horses designated for *khral*. For instance at a meeting, in 1994, to decide who would go to Korzok Gompa to pay Rupshu's respects to their new Rinpoche the dice were rolled twice. The first round determined which man would make the journey, and the second roll decided which horse he would ride.

The Rupshupa state that *cho-lo* has always been a part of their lives and that in the past all decisions, including those such as corvée, were made by the roll of the dice.[13] The only exception to this was the selection of their leaders, as previously this was decided by choosing men from among a circle of well-respected and learned male elders. Offices were held for a period of three years and not one, as is the practice these days. This method of selecting a leader is still prevalent in most parts of Ladakh.

This method of employing dice to make decisions or recruit officials is not unique in itself, and games of dice have also been instrumental at a number of events including the losing of kingdoms. In the Mahabharat, one of India's great epics, the war between the Pandavas and Kauravas was fought over a kingdom that had been lost in a game of dice. In a hymn recorded by Vohra it is recounted that the decision to migrate from Gilgit, eastwards to Ladakh was taken by the Dards after a game of

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[13] In other parts of Ladakh, villagers organised a rota co-ordinated by their chief and other officials (Grist 1990: 131). In some villages government officials (*rgad-pos*) formed a council of seven members (all from big houses), and they sorted out corvée services among other things (ibid: 138).

dice in which they lost their land (1989b: 79-80). The presence and widespread use of dice is recounted in several occasions in the Himalayan world. The legend of Gesar relates that he beat his enemies in a game of dice by performing the impossible, casting the number thirteen with only two dice (Calkowski 1993: 33-34). An even more telling example of the use of dice in historic Tibet may be found in a traditional Tibetan New Year rite held in Lhasa, referred to as "beating the ox-demon king". On the thirteenth day of the first month of the New Year, the man masquerading as the ox-demon king engaged in a debate (which took the form of a game of dice) on the validity of Buddhist tenets with a mock Dalai Lama (Stein 1972: 217).[14] Since the dice were always loaded, the mock Dalai Lama always won, a result which despatched the Ransom King to a year's exile, and purified the community in the process (ibid). Tibetans have also been known to employ the dice to legitimate the resolution of legal disputes. In an analysis of the legal systems of Sakya, a major Tibetan principality, Henderson cites the case of a homicide trial where the inconsistent testimonies of accuser and defendant led to the judge subjecting both to a trial by ordeal involving torture (1964: 1102-1103). When the accused withstood flogging as well as, if not better than his accuser, suspicion began to fall on the latter and the judge was left with no other choice but to invoke the ultimate trial by ordeal, a roll of the dice on the bloodied side of the skin of a freshly killed yak (ibid: 1103). Dice are also used in healing rituals, where illness is interpreted as the loss of one's soul (*bla*), and the consequent danger can be the work of a god or demon (Tucci 1970: 190). White die

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[14] "The ox-demon, also known as the Ransom King (*glud-'brong rgyal-po*), was thought to be an enemy of Buddhism and, therefore, a demon" (Calkowski 1993: 34).

and high scores are assigned to the gods, black die and low scores to the demons. Thus, if high figures are thrown it is certain that a god is the cause of the illness or the threatening death of the man for whose benefit the ritual is performed (ibid).

Apart from the use of dice for making decisions, the casting of lots is also not unusual. In Ladakh, a system of lots is used every five years to select the two monastery oracles at Matho Gompa (Ahmed 1990: 51). The names of the candidates are written on pieces of paper, rolled around in a bowl, and then two names are picked out by the head of the congregation (Brauen 1980: 136). The procedure for choosing the Abbot of Manri (a Bonpo monastery in Himachal Pradesh) and the Junior Tutor of the Dalai Lama are similar in that names, written on paper and concealed inside balls of barley flour, are also drawn out of a bowl (Ramble 1993: 295). A similar procedure was used in 1950 and again in 1956 when it had to be decided whether the Dalai Lama should take refugee in India or stay in Tibet: "Scrolls of paper with the alternatives written on them were rolled up in little balls of *tsam-pa* and shaken in a bowl; the decision was made in accordance with the one which came out first" (Snellgrove and Richardson 1968: 263).

Although among other nomadic pastoral groups in the Himalayas dice are rarely used in local politics, there are examples of them being utilized for decisions concerning pasture and grazing. In Western Bhutan, dice are cast to randomise the allocation of communal yak pastures between herders (Ura 1993: 91-93). The rules of dividing communal pasture differ in Central Bhutan and instead of using dice, a lottery is held among the herders (ibid: 96). It is the same in the village of Pemuthang

in Tibet. Here as at Namtsho herds graze on community lands and the exact area a household uses can rotate within the village from year to year, depending on the committee; if people cannot agree they hold an intra-village lottery (Clarke 1988: 90). Lots are also drawn in the village of Te, in Nepal's Mustang District, to decide on the local office of chief. The procedure for the recruitment of the headman is an elaborate game played out by the villagers where a system of notched sticks is used for drawing lots among the men (Ramble 1993: 292-294).

Throughout Ladakh and Tibet, gambling is fairly popular, and is contained within Buddhist principles. Calkowski explains that gambling is legitimated by one's luck (*rlung-rta*), power (*dbang-thang*) and merit, *bsod-nams* (1993: 32). She maintains that it is luck, the quality that determines the outcome of such games, which is perceived by Tibetans as being of divine origin (ibid: 33). However, it also stands to reason that at the start of the game everyone's chance to demonstrate luck, that is to win, is theoretically equal (ibid). This concept of a greater equality of roles is what the Rupshupa emphasize as their reason for the use of the dice to decide those who will hold office there. In addition they stress the fact that these decisions are made through divine mediation, and hence the chosen men can be said to be celestially elected.

This system of using dice to recruit men is said to be more democratic than that practised in the past. The old system changed about eight years ago when some men who were disgruntled with the lack of egalitarianism began to voice their opinions. They said why should only some men be chief, why can all men not be

given a chance at being chief. As their voices grew stronger, more men joined them, and eventually the system changed to the present one.[15]

However, the picture is different today and most men are unhappy with the way this has worked out. Tharchen is one of the most vociferous, and regularly speaks out against this playing of dice:

> "All the men here think they are one better than the other, they are all big-headed. Everyone thinks they are good enough to be chief, and so we get chiefs who can't even read and write, who don't know how to go to Leh and present our problems to the authorities there. What if my brother Skarma were to become chief? He's so poor how can he entertain a government official in his tent. This is a bad system, but what can we do?"

Many men now want to stop this playing of dice to elect their leaders, and say it has not had a positive effect on Rupshu. There is the Tibetan superstition that believes that playing dice too much reduces one to poverty, and to most people this is an unknown quality of the dice game (Chophel 1983: 61). Chiefs in other villages also criticise Rupshu for having such a system, and advise them to choose a person who is learned. Angchuk remembered that when he went to sell his wool in Thiksey, the chief there said: "All of you in Rupshu, you think so much of yourselves. You think you can all be chief!" LNP has advised Rupshu to stop choosing their chief in this manner. The LBA has also stepped in and informed the Rupshupa that this election of their leaders through dice must stop immediately and that a man must be chief for a three-year term. The Rupshupa themselves are a little more hesitant and say they will continue for another two years before reaching a decision. By 1996 the Rupshupa had

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[15] However, the Tibetans living in Rupshu choose their chief by election and not through dice.

still not reached a verdict, and the dice continued to be thrown. The second part of this chapter portrays the present system.

8.2 The Roll of the Dice - Selecting Leaders

The camp at Mangsul was quiet, appearing almost deserted. It was the day marking the anniversary of Buddha's birth, and a propitious time for Rupshu.[16] At Thugje Gompa, a valley away, the *khral-pa* convened and made preparations for the game of *cho-lo*. The outcome of the game determines successors to the present leaders for the coming year in Rupshu. While the men gathered on the plains below to commence the game, up in the monastery the lamas began to recite prayers remembering Rupshu's ancestors and invoking the blessings of the divine protectors of Rupshu.

Each year Rupshu chooses four local leaders. These are the chief (*go-ba*), two "members" (assistants to the chief), and a *kotwal*.[17] The *kotwal* is probably the most demanding of the four positions, and many in Rupshu confess that is he who actually does most of the work:

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[16] Buddha's birth anniversary is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month, which is usually in May.

[17] When the Dogras came to power in Ladakh, they initially tried to implement a system of non-local administrators, but after that failed they quickly returned to a system very similar to the old, albeit with new names for the officials (Grist 1994: 267). Under the Dogras the village representative was called a *lambadar*, but in most villages in Ladakh the term *go-ba* continues to be used. *Kotwal* is a lone word from Urdu, and I was told that formerly the term used was *gyan-yog*.

> "He's always running here and there, and has to do whatever the chief tells him to do. He's always calling the other men for meetings, fetching this or that, putting up a tent for a visiting government officer, or helping the chief entertain guests at his tent."

In addition, it is the *kotwal* to whose care the dice are entrusted, and it is he who always throws the dice at the meetings. The *kotwal* also keeps a record of the *khral* that is performed by each man in Rupshu.

At this time the horse herder is also selected, along with the five men who tend the monastery's livestock.[18] Thus, each year at Thugje ten *khral-pa* have to be chosen to hold these positions. These ten men are exempt from other forms of *khral* during the year they hold these appointments.

The selections are based around a well-defined system that rotates every five years, and therefore is referred to as "*lo lnga*" ("five years").[19] In the first year of the five-year period all *khral-pa* sit to play *cho-lo*. In the second year the ten who had been appointed the previous year sit out, and the remaining *khral-pa* sit to play. This process is repeated each year, till five years are completed and then all *khral-pa* play again to begin a new five-year period. What often happens is that by the time the fifth

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[18] Jina writes that only one family is annually selected by the chief to look after the monastery's livestock (1995: 53-54). This may have been the system in the past, but as the number of livestock belonging to the monastery grew their care was divided between more men. Further, all selections are made on the basis of the dice (though it does change annually), and are no longer taken by the chief.

[19] The first year of the five-year cycle is called *thung gcig-pa* (first time), the second year *thung gnyis-pa* (second time), and so on till the fifth year is reached. After five years are over, the cycle ends and the first year begins again.

year is reached very few *khral-pa* remain to play, and so all newly designated *khral-pa* are included at this time.

The third year of a five-year period occurred in 1993, and twenty-five *khral-pa* sat around to play *cho-lo*. As each man's name was announced, the *kotwal* rolled the dice in his name and called out the number. Fifteen men, having got the highest numbers, left the circle.[20] Ten men remained in the circle and for each man the *kotwal* rolled the dice again. Tharchen got twelve, the highest number, and chose to be the horse herder. Pema Wangyal, his brother-in-law, had the next highest number and he chose to look after the monastery's livestock. The next three men also chose to do the same, and the two that followed decided on being member. Finally it was just down to Urgyen and Gurmit. Urgyen had the number three and so he chose to be *kotwal*. Gurmit, with number two, was left with no choice but to be chief.[21]

Those who had held office the previous year met with their newly appointed successors and offered each of them a bowl of *chang* and a *kha-btags*. This offering signifies the handing over of office. In addition, the new chief is entrusted with the *go-ba sgam-ba* (chief's box). This is a box containing all documents, papers, and maps relating to Rupshu. The former horse herder, having brought all the horses to

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[20] If two men should get the same number, then the dice is rolled again between them.

[21] It may seem paradoxical that few men want to be chief since it is the highest post in Rupshu. However, though the office may carry status with it the work is demanding and cannot be done by everyone. Further, Tharchen felt that one had to be rich to be a chief because one is forever entertaining government officials and other visitors to Rupshu.

Thugje, accounts for them and then hands them over to the charge of the new horse herder. In the same way, the new *dkor-pa* receive the monastery's sheep and goats from their predecessors after they have taken a count of the livestock. After all the offices have been exchanged the *khral-pa*, now under the leadership of the new chief, hold a meeting to decide on matters and events for the coming year. These range from whether there should be any alterations in the route of migration for that year, when the big prayer festival should be held and which Rinpoche should be called to preside over it, and what the price of pashmina should be.

Apart from the ten offices mentioned above, *khral-pa* are also chosen to fulfil other obligations in Rupshu. A day after the events described above take place, the dice are rolled again to choose a further twenty men who will be appointed as *gnyer-pa* (literally "one who serves") for the coming year. The ten men chosen for office on the previous day are not included in this roll. The duties of the *gnyer-pa* are to help out at all community events, and this largely includes the three horse races and the prayer ceremony held at Thugje Gompa on the Buddha's birth anniversary. The work mainly involves setting up the big tent, making beer and tea, cooking food, and providing butter for the oil lamps in the monastery. All twenty *gnyer-pa* do not work at one time and they are distributed between events. Four work at each of the three horse-races, and eight at the prayer ceremony. So, in effect, a *gnyer-pa* only works once in the year. In addition, *gnyer-pa* are compensated for their work and each man receives four sheep (usually ewes) during their term from which they are allowed to

keep the wool.[22] When their year as *gnyer-pa* is over these sheep are passed on to their successors. The horse herder and those who look after the monastery's livestock are also compensated for their work; the next section looks at their role in Rupshu.

8.3 The *Rta-rdzi Dkor-pa*

The horse herder is responsible for the welfare of all the horses in Rupshu, and the five *dkor-pa* tend the monastery's livestock. These six men, along with their families, usually pitch their tents some distance away from the main encampment. At other times of the year they follow a route of migration that differs with the rest of the camp (Table 2). However, they do move camp on the same day as the main encampment. The reason given for this alternate route is pasture distribution. The *rta-rdzi dkor-pa* move with much larger herds of sheep and goats, including all the horses, that if they were all to move together it would put too much pressure on the pasture lands. Grazing such large herds in one locality would definitely lead to shortages of pasture and so an alternate route is followed by the *rta-rdzi dkor-pa* in order to avoid this.

While all six families generally have to move and live together, it does not always happen that way. Since Tharchen was horse herder in 1993, soon after his appointment the family moved to Yauchen. However, they were accompanied by only

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[22] This compensation of sheep is probably because they have to provide butter at the time of the prayer ceremony at Thugje Gompa, as well as food and drink for everybody at all events. The milk and sale of the wool help them to cover some of the cost.

Table 2 Route of Migration Followed by *Rta-rdzi Dkor-pa*

Rupshu	*Rta-rdzi Dkor-pa*
Ponka Nugu	Thugje
Nalbu Khar	Nalbu Khar
When the main camp is at Tasa Phug, Nang Jura, and Chumgo	Tasa Phug
When the Rupshupa are dispersed in small groups in several places	Yauchen
Norchen	Tauseru
Rogchen, Rogchung	Chupzang
Debring	Chi
Zara	Zara Phu
Rogchen, Rogchung	Chupzang

one *dkor-pa* and not five. The others had been delayed for a variety of reasons, someone's yak was missing and one man had gone to Leh. Nawang was the only one with a genuine reason, his wife having died a few days previously and the family still had to complete the rituals. However, it had been rumoured that Nawang was trying to get out of being in the *dkor-pa* and was looking for someone to take his place. He came from an influential and wealthy family and so Tharchen had said that it would not be difficult for him to convince the chief to give someone else his place in the *dkor-pa*.

The remaining sections of this chapter describe the work prescribed to the horse herder and those who look after the monastery's livestock respectively.

8.3.1 The Horse Herder

> "When a man requires his horse, say he has to go somewhere or he is required to perform some *khral*, then first he will come to me, the horse herder, and ask, 'where is my horse?' As horse herder I am required to know where each man's horse is, and the two of us will go together to fetch his horse," so said Angchuk, who by virtue of being Ama's second husband also became horse herder along with Tharchen.

The horse herder is responsible for the well-being of all the horses in Rupshu, and in 1993 there were a total of 105 horses under his charge.[23] In much the same way

[23] In the old days, when Ladakh was ruled by a king the actual conduct of state affairs was entrusted by him to a prime minister (*bka'-blon*), who had a number of other positions under him one of which was the master of horses, *ga-ga rta-rdzi* (Marks 1977: 49).

in which there are demarcated grazing areas for the sheep and goats, horses also have fixed grazing areas. It is the horse herder's responsibility to leave the horses to graze in these areas, and to regularly check that they are all there. Most horse herders visit these areas and review the horses on alternate days. If the horses have strayed out of the demarcated grazing area, which invariably happens, the horse herder is required to round them all up and then leave them in the specified grazing area. Previous chiefs have tried to impose a fine of Rs.10 on the horse herder for each horse that goes beyond the specified grazing areas. However, the horse herders dispute this and say it is physically impossible for them to be constantly after the horses. The other reason is that in the same way that men come to the horse herder when they are in need of their horse, they must also leave the horse with him when they have finished. This rarely happens, and quite often men just leave their horses anywhere and then later blame the horse herder for not looking after them properly.

A horse herder's work is hard and strenuous. There were many evenings when both Tharchen and Angchuk would return, after a day spent running after horses, complaining of how tired they were and how much their bones ached. However, a horse herder is compensated for the work he does and this is one of the main attractions of the post in spite of the exhausting work involved. The payment is such that for every three horses in his charge that are *khral-rta*, the horse herder receives one female goat. He can keep the milk and pashmina from the goat for that year, and if she gives birth the kid belongs to him. For the remaining horses in his charge, the *chor-rta*, the horse herder receives four kilograms of grain for each horse. In addition,

when the horse herder moves to a new campsite he is permitted the use of two horses from amongst the *khral-rta* to carry his belongings.

Thus, the post is especially coveted by those families who are not so well off and are in need of the extra food and money. In the past, it was common to allot the post of horse herder to a poor family in Rupshu so that they could benefit from the extra milk and grain. If the family were especially impoverished, the man may remain a horse herder for many years, sometimes as many as ten or fifteen. This system also changed with the introduction of playing dice for selection of the chief in Rupshu.

Tharchen has chosen to be horse herder several times. He can count at least ten occasions, and in spite of being better off today he still prefers the position:

> "I can benefit by being a horse herder, because we get things like flour and extra goats from which we can keep the milk and pashmina. That is why I chose to be horse herder."

That year many people, especially the Tibetans since he got on well with them, had asked Tharchen why he had not chosen to be chief since he had the highest number and would have made a good one. Though Tharchen acknowledges the praise, he remains adamant that only when he gets the lowest number and has no say in the matter will he be chief.[24]

[24] In 1996 the inevitable happened, Tharchen got the lowest number and became chief.

8.3.2 The Monastery's Livestock

A *dkor-pa* consists primarily of goats, and the practice is for there to be more females than males. Sheep are in the minority, because a ewe yields less milk than a female goat. Milk is important to the *dkor-pa* as it is required for the making of butter, to ensure the butter lamps in the monastery are kept burning, and cheese which is for the lamas' consumption. The sale of pashmina and wool from the livestock goes towards supporting the lamas and the upkeep of the monastery.

The *dkor-pa* were initially established when individuals who wanted to gain religious merit donated livestock to the monastery.[25] The livestock thus became the property of the monastery, and people were appointed to look after them.[26] In the past there was only one *dkor-pa* in Rupshu, but as the number of livestock and individual donations increased there was a corresponding need to increase the number of *dkor-pa*. This was because one man could not look after so many livestock at one time, including his own. Ama recalled that her father was always giving a sheep or a goat to the *dkor-pa*, because he used to consider it auspicious. While some individuals give to the *dkor-pa* selflessly, others require motivation. At least once a year a lama will go around enticing people to donate livestock to the *dkor-pa*, saying that their sins

[25] No one in Rupshu could tell me when this practice began, but many did recall that it has been there for many, many years.

[26] In Tibet the property of the monasteries was essentially of four kinds: landed property, herds of large and small livestock, trading goods, and interest on loans (Tucci 1970: 158). The practice is essentially the same in Ladakh.

will be reduced through this action. If many livestock have died as a result of a bad winter, the lama's request will be more assertive.

At present there are five *dkor-pa* in Rupshu, and they are known by a different name each, depending on their contribution towards specific needs within the monastery. The first two are known as Thugje Gompa's *dkor-pa*, the next two as Kanjur *dkor-pa*, and the fifth as Mani *dkor-pa*. Thugje's *dkor-pa* are the oldest in Rupshu, and were most probably founded when the monastery was first built. It consists of only goats, out of which more than half will be female. The produce from these livestock go towards the upkeep of the lamas residing there, and the burning of lamps within the monastery. The Kanjur *dkor-pa*, consisting of ewes and female goats, are said to have been established a little after Thugje's. They are specifically kept for the annual recitation of the religious text known as Kanjur.[27] This is held at Korzok Gompa, for the benefit of the Rupshupa and therefore they have to contribute towards it. The Mani *dkor-pa*, in which there are predominantly female goats, is the most recent and originated in the name of the big prayer wheel at Thugje. This was built some eight to ten years ago, and stands below the monastery.[28] The produce from this livestock also goes towards the daily recital of prayers by the lamas at Thugje Gompa.

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[27] The Kanjur (*bka'-'gyur*), "The translation of the Word" is the first part of the Tibetan canonical collection of Buddhist scriptures, the other being the Tanjur, *bstan-'gyur* (Tucci 1970: 35). The Kanjur contains 108 volumes.

[28] Tharchen donated part of the land, on which the prayer wheel stands, and half the construction materials.

Each *dkor-pa* possesses anywhere from thirty to a hundred head of livestock, but the average is said to be around fifty. Since milk is important to the *dkor-pa*, if there happens to be more male livestock than female then the chief sells the excess male livestock and purchases their female counterparts. Each family in charge of a *dkor-pa* is required to give the monastery the yield from this livestock during the course of the year. It is forbidden to keep or eat anything from the *dkor-pa*, and to do so is regarded as a grave sin. A lama at Thugje emphasized the severity of this claim and said that, "If you do so, then your mouth will be set on fire - the *dkor-pa* belongs to the monastery." To discourage people from using or selling what essentially belongs to the monastery, the lamas specify the amounts required of each *dkor-pa*. For each female goat in the *dkor-pa* roughly two kilograms of butter, and two small saddle-bags of dry cheese must be given. While the butter is periodically sent to the monastery over the course of the year, the cheese is given once a year. If any *dkor-pa* should fall short of this stipulated quota they then go to the monastery with a variety of offerings, such as *chang* and *kha-btags*, and plead their case with the lamas. They also request that instead they be allowed to purchase oil from the market for the monastery's lamps. All the pashmina and wool from the sheep and goats must also go to the monastery, with the exception of goat hair which they are permitted to keep. The practice is for the chief to collect all the pashmina and wool, weigh it, and then sell it to the traders. The proceeds are then given to the monastery.[29] If a sheep or goat in the *dkor-pa* should die, the lamas at Thugje Gompa must be informed

[29] In the years 1992 and 1993, money from the sale of the *dkor-pa's* pashmina and wool also went towards the construction of the central courtyard in Korzok Gompa.

immediately and sent the meat. The meat must be accompanied by the animal's horn bearing the brand of the monastery. The horn is proof that the animal is indeed dead, otherwise the man in charge of that *dkor-pa* may be charged for the loss. Further, all young born to the *dkor-pa* during the year become the property of the monastery. Once a year, usually in June, a lama accompanied by the chief count all the livestock in the *dkor-pa*, brand the new-born lambs and kids, and check the marks on the old livestock.

Unlike the horse herder, who is compensated for his work, those who tend to the monastery's livestock are not reimbursed. The reason for this is that their work is comparatively less strenuous than the horse herder's, who is forever chasing horses. It is said that the *dkor-pa* does not interfere with the daily work routine of the family, it simply increases the number of livestock they have to herd, milk, and look after. The family continues with their grazing, milking, making of butter and cheese. Nothing has changed, except that the size of the flock has increased. Besides, the work is said to be a positive gesture towards the accumulation of merit for a better birth in their next life. However, it is the actions and yields of this life that preoccupy most men in Rupshu, and my last chapter turns to a description of trade there.

CHAPTER NINE

THE SHEEP'S EYE: PATTERNS OF TRADE

It was growing dark in Tharchen's stone-walled store-house at Thugje, but preparations were still under way for the salt march the next day. While Angchuk was busy collecting saddle-bags and repairing holes in them, Tharchen searched for rope. Some bags were beyond repair and these were discarded, yet others were full with the previous year's salt or other rations. These were quickly emptied, and added to the heap of bags. By nightfall, the brothers had amassed a pile of thirty saddle-bags each one bearing Tharchen's mark of identification - the sheep's eye (*lug-mig*).

All trade and articles woven for trade are controlled, made, and utilized specifically by men.[1] These include a variety of saddle-bags and blankets made from goat and yak hair. The yarn that men weave with is never dyed, nor is dye applied to their finished fabric. Thus, all weaving is done in natural colours. In addition, men seldom incorporate designs in their weaving; the nearest they come to doing this is in the weaving of the *yud*. These are specific patterns men weave into their saddle-bags and blankets so that each man can easily discern his belongings. Various representations of the sheep's eye are a common pattern woven into these articles connected with trade.

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[1] Women also occasionally weave articles associated with trade or take decisions regarding what to sell, and negotiate prices. However, their role in trade is overshadowed by that played by men, and thus this chapter looks specifically at men's contribution to trade.

Chapter One set the background against which contemporary trading patterns in Rupshu are discussed here. While there has been a reorientation of trade routes over the last forty years, the items of trade have essentially remained the same: salt, pashmina, wool, and livestock. Woven articles do not, and rarely ever did, form a major part of Rupshu's trading goods. Occasionally, the Rupshupa may trade some of their blankets and bags with villagers from Lower Ladakh in exchange for dry apricots and walnuts. At times they even sell old tents to these villagers, who cut and stitch them up to make coarse blankets or storage bags. Tashi Targyas explained why there was this partiality for their woven goods:

> "Their weave is thinner than ours, but our weave is thicker and so it is stronger and warmer. This is because we make it with our hands and not with our feet. What they weave looks nice for wearing, but it is not much use against the cold."

The altered trading patterns have unsettled the economic value of the goods traded by Rupshu. Salt and wool were once Rupshu's major trading items, and barley the main medium of their exchange. However, with the entrance of government sea salt in the market the salt from Changthang is no longer coveted, and barley is gradually being replaced by rice, lentils, and other food products. Though wool continues to dominate the field of trade, pashmina has emerged as the new product of commercial importance. Once sidelined in favour of pashmina from Western Tibet, its demand increased when the border with Tibet closed, and today Rupshu's pashmina is considered to be among the best in Ladakh. Pashmina prices have escalated so rapidly that the increase has astounded many elders in Rupshu who remember the time when wool was more expensive than pashmina. However, they

remain sceptical as well, wondering how long this windfall will last. Barter and money exchange coexist in Rupshu and transactions are often based on a combination of both systems.[2] Humphrey and Hugh-Jones argue that barter cannot be understood in isolation, but is best seen in relation to other forms of exchange and in the light of its social context (1992: 2).

This chapter begins with a look at the articles woven specifically to be used in trade in Rupshu, and includes a discussion of the *yud*. In the context of weaving articles for use in trade, the remaining sections examine the contemporary trading patterns in Rupshu. This includes the trade in salt, as the annual collection of salt from Tso Kar remains an important event in Rupshu and one which all the men enthusiastically attend. This is followed by that in pashmina and wool, and the sale of livestock which often occurs alongside the trade in pashmina. The pashmina and wool market has been affected by the uncertainty and speculation surrounding the demand in recent years, causing extreme price fluctuations. The reasons for this are discussed here.

9.1 Weaving for Trade

A variety of articles are woven by men in Rupshu, specifically to hold trade items. Goat and yak hair, or a blend of the two, are more commonly used for this weaving. However, sheep and yak wool can also be used if desired. The most

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[2] This situation in Rupshu is not unique, and similar instances are reported from other areas, such as Nepal (Fisher 1986) and Indonesia (Barnes & Barnes 1989).

important of these items are saddle-bags and blankets (*chal-li*). All saddle-bags and blankets are woven in a combination of strips, in the same way that tents are, which are later stitched together to make the final product.

Three types of saddle-bags are woven in Rupshu, and while their basic shape remains the same they differ in size. The saddle-bag consists of two bags that have a common back (Plate 59); a single bag is referred to as *sne-do*. The smallest of these saddle-bags is the *lug-sgal*, followed by the *rta-bra*, and the largest is the *da-sgal*.[3] This difference in size depends mainly on the number of strips that have been stitched together to construct each bag. While the length of each bag varies with individual preferences, the number of strips used in the width is stipulated. *Lug-sgal* are always made from two strips, the *rta-bra* from three, and the *da-sgal* from four. These strips generally measure twelve inches in breadth, the measurement determined by the width of the loom.

The purpose of making three sizes is to fit them for the various animals that carry them. The *lug-sgal* is made for sheep and goats,[4] the *rta-bra* is for horses, and the *da-sgal* for yaks. These bags are made for the transportation of trading goods, food, and other personal effects when the Rupshupa move camp or make the journey

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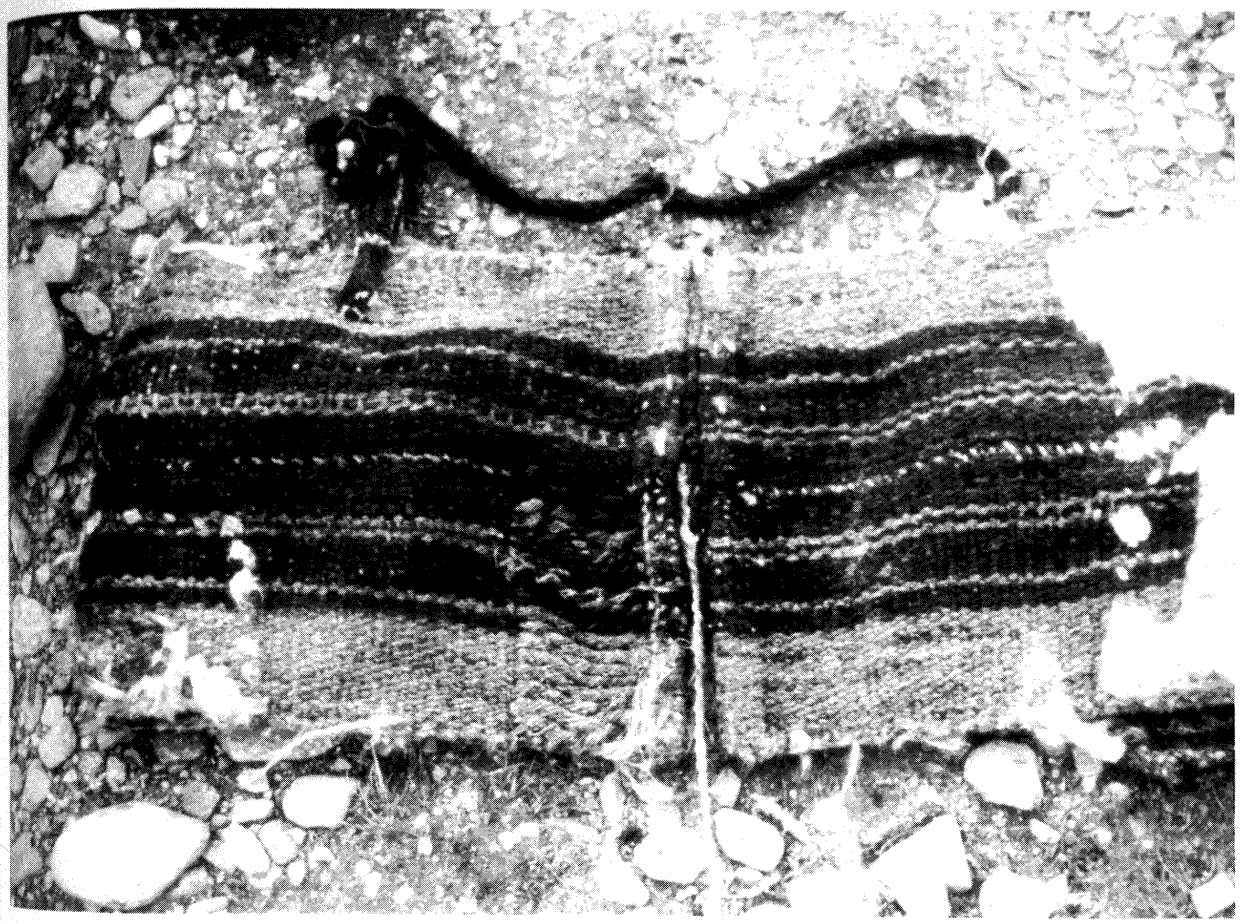
[3] The word *sgal* literally means "load", and the term *lug-sgal* refers to a sheep's load.

[4] The *lug-sgal* is made in three sizes: the largest is the *rab*, followed by the *'bring*, and the smallest is the *yol*. This is because the men first see the size and strength of the sheep or goat before deciding what size *lug-sgal* to load it with.



59. This is the *lug-sgal*, the smallest of the three saddle-bags.

to collect salt. *Lug-sgal* mainly hold salt and grain. The *rta-bra* and the *da-sgal* hold pashmina and wool, apart from pots and pans, clothes, shoes, books, and so forth.

The *lug-sgal* is the most widely used saddle-bag, and men are typically seen weaving them, just as women are seen weaving the *snam-bu*. They are constantly in demand since each man must have a sufficient supply of them at all times. Sonam Rinchen says he tries to weave forty to fifty *lug-sgal* in one year, but it all depends on how much goat or yak hair he has twisted. The *lug-sgal*, unlike the other two saddle-bags, is always woven in pairs, so the warp for two *lug-sgal* is laid at one time.[5] If a man is a fast weaver, such as Sonam Rinchen, he could weave one in a day. Sonam starts to weave first thing in the morning:

> "In the very early morning I lay the warp. My wool has already been made ready the night before, and so then I can start weaving immediately."

The strips for all three types of saddle-bags are woven as one continuous length, and there will be no breaks in the fabric. Later, the strip is cut and stitched, and the ends hemmed under. Patches of locally made felt (*phying-ba*) are stitched on to the lower corners of the bag, to strengthen and reinforce the edges.

The blankets are also made from strips, similar to those found in the saddle-bags (Plate 60).[6] Blankets also come in different sizes, and this generally depends on

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[5] This is because the other two saddle-bags are larger than the *lug-sgal*, and the length of the warp required to make two at a time would be unmanageable as well as difficult to weave.

[6] It is said in Rupshu that blankets made from goat and yak hair are only to be used by men, while those made from sheep and yak wool are used by women.

60. Sonam Rinchen's blanket (*chal-li*) is woven from goat and yak hair. The striped pattern is his *yud*, and this consists of "*jar-kang gcig, lug-mig gcig*" ("one straight line, one sheep's eye").

the weaver's personal specifications. A large blanket consists of eight strips, a small one of four. At one time, warp is generally laid for four strips of a blanket, and these can be woven in a day. These blankets are not woven with the same frequency as the saddle-bags. Sonam Rinchen explained that new ones were not woven every year, but only as and when required. It all depended on how long the old one lasted, and only when it began tearing would it be replaced. A blanket is known to last a man seven or eight years.

These saddle-bags and blankets are usually known by the dominant colour in them, such as "white saddle-bag" (*lug-sgal dkar-po*) or "black saddle-bag" (*lug-sgal gnag-po*). However, each saddle-bag and blanket also contain a striped pattern, that indicates who their owners are. This is known as the *yud*, the section below addresses this.

9.1.1 How to Read a Saddle-Bag

> "Each man has his own *yud* and each *yud* has its own name," Sonam Rinchen stated.

All articles woven for use in trade are patterned with the male weaver's mark of identification, the *yud*. These patterns always consist of stripes, woven in various combinations, from natural-coloured wool.[7] A *yud* is not determined by colour. *Yud*

[7] Tharchen said that in essence all designs consisting of striped patterns are *yud*, but added that they are not "real" *yud*; they just look like *yud*.

are always referred to by name and patterns are read horizontally, from the right to the left. Basic patterns are limited, and generally the *yud* is a combination of one or more of these. The most typical is the sheep's eye, and this is represented by two black or brown stripes with a white stripe in the middle (see Plate 60).[8] Then there is the single straight line, *jar-kang*, and this is usually in a colour that contrasts with the base colour of the bag. The other pattern frequently used is a group of three stripes, each a warp length apart, and this is called *yud-leb*. Modifications to these three basic patterns result in the variety of *yud* encountered in Rupshu. This diversity arises from the manner in which these patterns are used, separately or in combination with each other, and the thickness or thinness of the width of the stripes. Some *yud* may consist of two or three sheep eyes, or there may be two sheep eyes with a *jar-kang* or a *yud-leb* in the middle (Plate 61). Other *yud* may consist of two or three *jar-kang*, and these would be called *jar-kang gnyis* or *jar-kang gsum* respectively (Plate 62).

It is generally claimed that the *yud* belongs to, or is a part of, the tent and is inherited by the eldest son from his father along with the big tent. However, the *yud* is referred to as "*ma-yud*" (as in coming from the mother) and not as "*pha-yud*" (from the father). No informant could offer an explanation for this, since *yud* are always associated with men and never with women.

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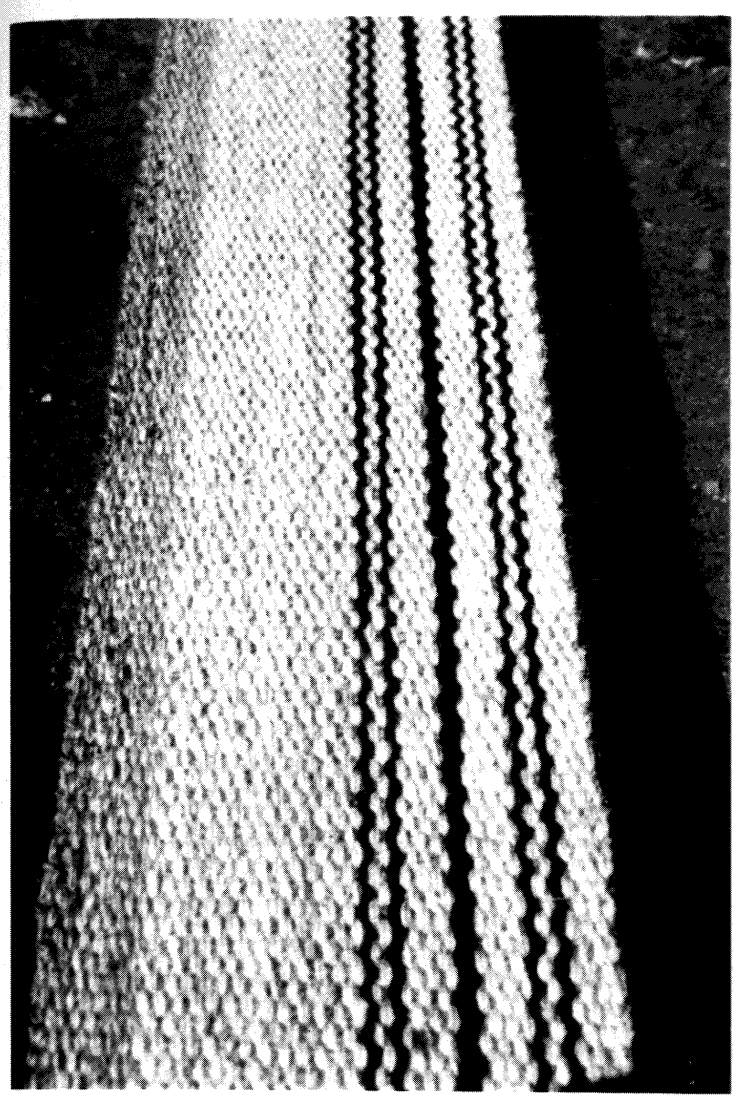
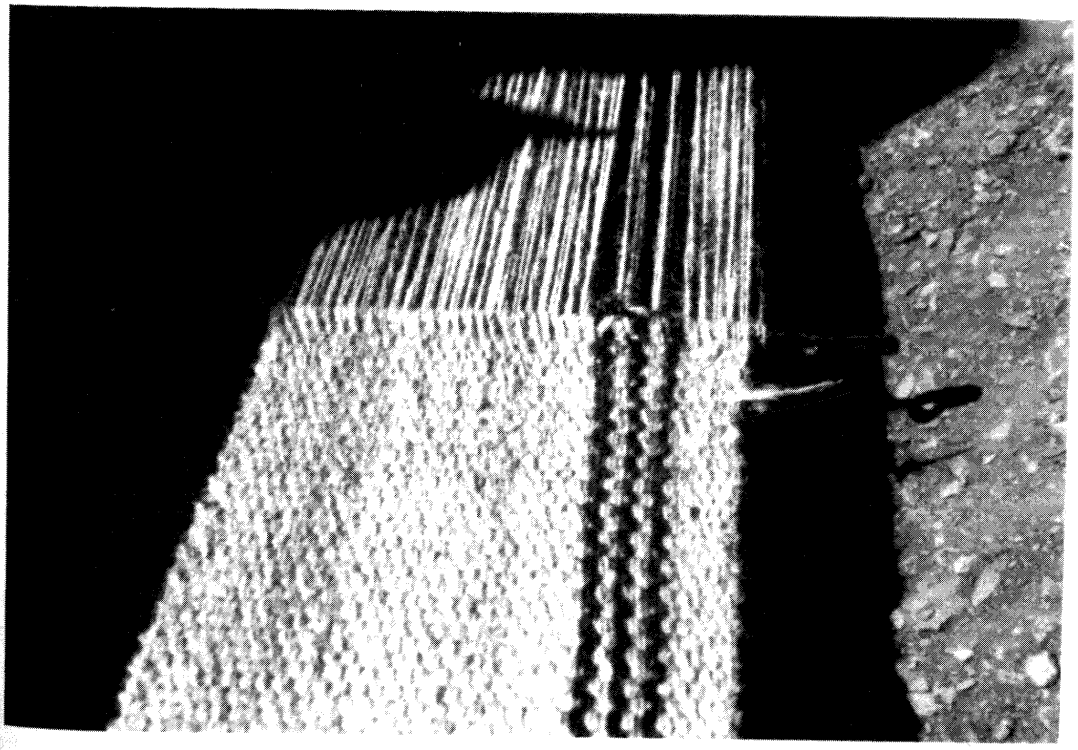
[8] The sheep's eye is also represented by a round circle in white wool outlined by black or brown wool, but this will not be on the *yud* as they are always conceived in stripes.



61. The *yud* are always read from right to left. This one reads as "*lug-mig gcig, jar-kang gcig, lug-mig gcig*" ("one sheep's eye, one straight line, one sheep's eye").



62. This *yud* consists of three single lines and is called *jar-kang gsum*.

Since no two men can have the same *yud*, when a father hands over the big tent to his son he also relinquishes the use of his *yud*. Having moved to the small tent, the father has now to make himself a new *yud*. The practice usually followed by men who are related is to make a few alterations to their previous *yud*. The same is true of brothers, who when they live together all use the same *yud*, but as they marry and move out to new tents are no longer permitted to do so. Tharchen now has his father's *yud*, and when Skarma and he lived together they both used the same pattern.[9] It was only after Skarma made his own tent that he had to alter his *yud*, but even now he says that:

> "There is very little difference between my *yud*, Tharchen's and Paljor's, but that is enough for us. As long as we are able to distinguish our things. You see, we have to be able to tell our things apart, especially when we all travel together, otherwise we would all end up fighting over which bag or which blanket belongs to whom."

The disparity in *yuds* may be very slight and consist of a single line's spacing between two brown stripes, or three black stripes instead of two. Men seldom give away woven articles that contain their *yud*. Further, if a man were to request another to weave a saddle-bag or blanket for him, the weaver would weave that man's *yud* into it and not his own.

The necessity for weaving the *yud*, reiterated by several men in Rupshu, is that it enabled them to recognise their belongings. As Meme Nawang Chogyal explained:

> "This *yud* is there because our saddle-bags move around a lot. They travel to many places and sometimes it is difficult to locate them. With

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[9] In a polyandrous marriage, where two brothers are married to the same woman, one *yud* is shared between them. Should the two brothers separate, the elder sibling retains the *yud* and the younger brother has to alter its pattern.

> the *yud* then the men know this is mine, and this is yours. Our bags don't get mixed up."

In the past, the men often combined their trading journeys to Zanskar and Himachal, because for a certain stretch the route to the two places was the same. However, they went to Zanskar first and at Serchu they would branch out in that direction. It was here that they would leave their saddle-bags full of salt and wool meant for Himachal. These would be collected on their return from Zanskar a few weeks or a month later. The *yud* ensured that no one else picked up their bags.

Similarities to the *yud* are not widely found in other areas of the Himalayas. Amongst the Sherpa of Eastern Nepal, Dunsmore identifies a feature on their sacks and bags used on trading expeditions which she refers to as a "luggage label" and describes it as the line of white yak hair twining on one of the panels near the bag opening which helps the owner to identify his bag (1993: 151-152).

It is not essential for all saddle-bags and blankets to always contain a man's *yud*, and these choices are left to an individual's discretion. The *yud* is most conspicuous in the *lug-sgal*, as compared to the other saddle-bags and blanket. The reason for this is that so many more sheep and goats are used to carry goods, especially at events such as salt collecting, that often there is a profusion of *lug-sgal* strewn around and they are certain to get mixed up. The *yud* prevents this from occurring. In contrast fewer *rta-bra*, *da-sgal*, and blankets are woven and so there is a lesser chance of this happening. The *lug-sgal* is the most widely used saddle-bag as far as the collection and trade in salt is concerned, and it is this that I turn to next.

9.2 The Salt March

Each fall the Rupshupa drive their herds of sheep and goats to Tso Kar, and set up camp around the bank of the lake.[10] The sheep and goats will bring back saddle-bags filled with salt, each animal carrying a load of fifteen to twenty kilograms. Horses and yaks are also used by those who have many, but most men have relatively few and so prefer to use their more numerous sheep and goats. However, it is customary to take only the male livestock because the females are usually not strong enough to carry the weight of the salt. Further, women rarely accompany the men and so there is nobody to milk them.[11]

Only men attend the salt march, and it is mandatory for each tent to send at least one man to collect his share of the salt. Paljor was absent and so the duty fell on Tharchen and his brothers to collect his share of the salt. General disapproval was voiced by all his brothers, and Skarma complained that Paljor always found some excuse or the other to be away and leave them with his work to do. Men who do not

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[10] There is no fixed date for the removal of salt, but this generally takes place during September or October. It all depends on the amount of rainfall that has occurred during summer and on how quickly the water in the lake dries up. In a year of poor rain the Rupshupa have even been known to collect salt as early as July. In 1992, salt was collected in the first week of October and some men said that it was late that year. The system appears to be the same as that observed by Goldstein and Beall where the salt, about a foot deep, appears to be replenished in summer when, according to the nomads, the dry salt bed is covered by a foot of brackish water (1990: 117).

[11] As a rule men do not milk, but those who do not have a large herd are forced to bring their female livestock. At times such as these, they may bring a daughter along to do the milking or have to succumb to doing it themselves.

appear at the salt march are still responsible for ensuring that their share of the salt is collected, and in their absence this duty generally falls on a relative.

Once the salt lake is reached the men first pitch their tents, fortify themselves with tea, and prepare themselves for the work ahead. Some put on rubber boots, others remove their leather ones and roll up their trousers. A few wear sun-glasses to cut the glare of the sun reflecting from the white surface of the salt flat. They gather their tools, which consist of pickaxes, shovels, and large tins.[12]

For the purposes of salt collection the men are divided into four groups, and this system is known as *chu-lag*. Each *chu-lag* is led by a *chu-dpon*.[13] While the *chu-dpon* is changed every year, the members of a *chu-lag* remain the same. These selections are also based on the throw of the dice, in the same manner as all appointments in Rupshu (cf. Chapter Eight). Each *chu-lag* includes seventeen to eighteen men, and they may be from big or small tents. There are two basic reasons behind this system, which began only when Rupshu started removing salt from Tso Kar. The first is to safeguard the lake and its precincts; while the second is to ensure the peaceful removal of salt from the lake, as described here.

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[12] All men use the same size and shape of tins, and these are prepared by removing the top lid and puncturing the bottom with holes so that any excess water in the salt can drain off. Two more holes are made towards the top of the tin, on two opposite sides, and a stick is passed through these to function as a handle.

[13] In areas of Ladakh where agriculture is practised the *chu-dpon* is in charge of the system of irrigation, and he controls the amount of water that is given to each farmer for watering his field (Murdoch 1981: 262).

In the centre of the lake the *kotwal* presides over a meeting of the heads of the four *chu-lag*. With the pointed edge of a pickaxe he draws a line across the surface of the lake, dividing it into roughly four equal parts. Then he takes out his dice and rolls them between the four *chu-dpon*. The *chu-dpon* with the highest number decides which quarter of the lake his men will remove salt from. Then the man with the next highest number chooses, and so on until all four *chu-lag* are allotted a section of the lake. The *kotwal* explained that the division of the lake into four parts is to deter the men from randomly removing salt from anywhere they choose, and to pre-empt clashes between men who decide they want to take salt from the same place. The other condition of this salt march is that each man must fill twenty-five *lug-sgals* with salt.[14] This is to ensure two things. The first is that everyone participates in the removal of salt and does their share of the work, and the second is the equal distribution of salt. The owners of small herds had once grumbled that it was not fair that men with large herds could take out more salt than them, and so this rule was enforced.[15]

As soon as the *kotwal* has finished rolling his dice and the lake is portioned off, the removal of salt can commence. Each group of men move out on to their section of the lake. The men tend to work in teams, rather than individually, and

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[14] The volume of salt held by one *lug-sgal* is roughly equivalent to that held by one tin, and so each man has to take out twenty-five tins of salt in order to fill twenty-five *lug-sgals*.

[15] In the days when the Rupshupa went to Tibet to collect salt it was mainly the owners of large herds of three hundred or more livestock, who could afford to make the journey, and the practice was for a man with a small herd to join up with one of them and work in exchange for this favour.

while some pound the crust of the salt lake and break the salt into small bits, others load it into the tins. The remaining men carry the tins and unload them on to the bank, and bring them back again to the lake (Plate 63). While the men may work together, they will each pile their salt in separate heaps. Towards evening, when the work is over, each man marks his pile of salt with a sheep or yak horn, an old boot, a twig, or a saddle-bag, so that they can tell them apart. The salt is then left overnight on the sides of the lake.

The next day, the salt is allowed to dry in the sun before it is packed into the *lug-sgals*.[16] Each man sits and fills his own saddle-bags and then sews them closed (Plate 64). They try not to overload the bags, otherwise they will be too heavy for the sheep and goats to carry back. Further, they have to be careful that there are no pointed bits of salt that will jab into the livestock's backs, so the salt is vigorously tamped into the bags. It is evening by the time all the *lug-sgals* are filled and piled, ready to be loaded on to the livestock the next morning.

Early the next day, the sheep and goats are driven to Tso Kar and the *lug-sgals* are tied across their backs, with some difficulty, and the march back to camp begins (Plates 65 and 66). This practice of removing salt from Tso Kar is relatively new in Rupshu: men say they have been doing it for the last thirty years or so. Before then many of them claim that there was no salt in Tso Kar, and the next section explores the issue of how salt was "found" there.

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[16] If the salt has not dried sufficiently, then the men may dry it again back at camp. The salt is not washed before it is eaten.

63. Men generally work together while removing salt from Tso Kar. Here four men help each other carry their tins filled with salt to the bank of the lake.

64. Once men have removed their quota of salt from the lake, they then sit near their piles and fill their saddle-bags with salt.

65. The sheep and goats are tied together before the saddle-bags are loaded on to their backs.

66. Sheep and goats leave Tso Kar with the salt.

9.2.1 The "Discovery" of Salt

> "When we could no longer go to Tibet and the Tibetans came to live here, there was an old man among them called Azem," Tharchen narrated, "It is said that one winter Azem went to Tso Kar and took out salt from the lake. He loaded this on to his sheep and was taking them to his tent when some people from Rupshu saw him. They ran after him, and when they saw the salt they were curious to know where he had got it from. Azem showed us, and then we had our own salt here."

After the border with Tibet closed in the early 1960s, Tso Kar became the new focus as a source for Rupshu's salt. Prior to this they had rarely, if ever, attempted to remove salt from the lake. In fact, many of them go so far as to claim that there was no salt there. Others said that there was salt there, but that it was not good for human consumption and so they fed it only to their sheep and goats. Yet others maintained that even if there was salt, they never bothered about it because they got all the salt they wanted from Tibet.

While some of the Rupshupa credit Azem with "discovering" salt, another version ascribes it to the intervention of the Geological Survey of India.

> "Once the Survey people from Leh came here," Tsering Paljor recounted, "They did some tests on the water in the lake. We think they put something in the lake because after that we started getting salt. But whatever it was they put in the lake we don't know. The other thing was that after that the lake never again froze in winter!"[17]

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[17] In the past, the Rupshupa used to make frequent crossings over the frozen lake and they say they are now not able to do this as the lake no longer freezes. J. T. Gergan, a geologist in Ladakh, attributes this to the increasing salinity in the lake (personal communication, Leh, August 1993).

This account is also reiterated by other Ladakhis and Tsering Dorjey, Leh's Assistant Commissioner, stated:

> "Though at first there was no salt at Tso Kar, it only came about when the Geological Survey came and put some medicine in the lake, then salt began forming in the lake."

Yet another version, maintained by the pashmina trader Baba Siddique, is that there was always a little salt in the lake but the people did not eat it because it was not considered to be as good as what came from Tibet. He added that it was some tourists who put "medicine" in the lake and then the salt became good.

I have my doubts whether the Geological Survey of India or the tourists actually "put" something in the lake. However, it was difficult to verify this. Perhaps the Survey ran some tests at the lake that showed that the salt there was suitable for human consumption. According to the geologist J. T. Gergan, Tso Kar is a lake that is drying up, with the result that its salinity is increasing and more salt is being formed.

While the Rupshupa may claim that it was only in the late 1950s that they learnt about the presence of salt at Tso Kar, other accounts disagree on this. Legend has it that at one time there used to be a *sbas-lung yul* (village in a hidden valley) near Thugje Gompa.[18]

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[18] The cult of "hidden lands" (*sbas-yul*), which mainly developed in Tibet, is said to have arisen out of pressures at times of political and religious cataclysm by offering refuge to the faithful (Aris 1990: 97). In the case of the *sbas-lung yul* at Rupshu, it was established as a result of the following events: in those days Chenrezig used to live at Thugje and one day a girl (she was probably some sort of demoness) decided she wanted to play a joke on him. She called out to him that the water in Tso Kar was rising. To save himself and all the other Rupshupa, Chenrezig ran with them into the mountain. How do we know this? There is a small tunnel in the mountain

> "There is a mountain over there called *ri dmar-po* (red mountain), and we used to be told that the *sbas-lung mi* (people of the hidden valley) lived over there," Abi Yangzom related, "The old people said that sometimes when they were herding their livestock on that mountain they could see these people. Just for a moment they would see a bit of smoke from their tents or see a woman warming milk, and then the sight would be gone."

Traditions concerning this *sbas-lung yul* recount a form of silent trade that went on between the Rupshupa and the *sbas-lung mi*.[19] It is said that in old days the Rupshupa would leave salt for them in saddle-bags in a hole in the ground, near the red mountain. When they returned the next day the salt would be gone and in its place their saddle-bags would be filled with grain. Abi Yangzom recollected that she had heard it said that when these *sbas-lung mi* did not have enough salt they grew wool on their face and hands.[20] This idea continues to be current in Rupshu and many there believe that if they do not eat enough salt they will grow "wool" on their face and body.

This silent trade with the *sbas-lung mi* does not necessarily imply that the salt was from Tso Kar. One of the first mentions of the procurement of salt from Tso Kar is made by Drew:

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that marks Chenrezig's path. At the end of this there is an outline of his body, but this is not visible to everyone and only those with good faith can see it. The result of this is that all the people whom he saved became the *sbas-lung mi* (people of the hidden valley). The monastery at Thugje was later built around this tunnel.

[19] Allen relates a similar account from the myths of the Thulung Rai, of a silent trade in salt between them and the Sherpa, who had the salt (1976: 198-200). In contrast with Rupshu's version, here the two sides eventually meet and intermarry or become ritual brothers.

[20] The reference is to facial and body hair, but she referred to it as *bal* (wool) and not *shra* (hair).

> "The salt is removed from this place by the Champas, and fresh salt forms; the deposit is best and most plentiful when a good dry season succeeds the snow-melting. It is consumed all over Ladakh, and is carried as far as Kashmir" (1875: 299-300).

This is followed by a reference in an administrative report (dated 1880) by W. H. Johnson: "The Tsokar Salt Lakes continue to deteriorate - the yield for the year having only been 415 maunds" (1923: 5). It appears puzzling then, that Francke still maintains that on the northern shore of the lake, common salt is deposited which is collected by the nomads who trade with it and this is consumed all over Ladakh, and even in Kashmir (1910: 62). However, Koelz's account differs with those given above, and though he mentions that the water there is strongly saline and that the local people collect salt, he says that it is fit only for cattle (1931: 108). His version coincides with those of some other Ladakhis, such as Tonyot Shah, who state that they never ate the salt from Tso Kar because it used to make one's stomach swell up. Based on these conflicting accounts it is difficult to deduce the events concerning the removal of salt from Tso Kar before the 1960s. It is a known fact that the salt there was fed to livestock, a practice that continues today. What is not clear is whether or not the Rupshupa traded in the salt from here. It could be that poorer people with fewer head of livestock, who could not make the long journey to the salt lakes in Tibet, went instead to Tso Kar.

While the facts regarding the presence and use of salt at Tso Kar include these various discrepancies, today the lake is renowned throughout Ladakh for its salt. However, there is another conflicting and controversial issue which concerns the ownership of the lake. While Rupshu has always maintained that it belongs to them,

since the late 1970s Kharnak has begun to stake a claim to Tso Kar. As proof Rupshu states that their traditional camping grounds are located in the vicinity, and so is their monastery, Thugje. Further, old land records in the archival and revenue offices in Leh, dating back to 1908, demonstrate Rupshu's ownership of Tso Kar.[21] On the other hand Kharnak, with the backing of Hemis Gompa, the largest and one of the wealthiest monasteries in Ladakh, began encroaching on Rupshu's land from the west, a long time ago.[22] In 1982, an agreement was made between Kharnak and Rupshu, under the supervision of the Assistant Commissioner of Nyoma, which stated that Rupshu shall supply Kharnak with 8,000 kilograms of salt annually. In exchange for this Kharnak shall pay Rupshu Rs.400. This agreement was drawn up for a period of five years, but after it expired Kharnak repeated their demand that Tso Kar belonged to them.

In 1987 and 1988 the fight turned vicious and Rupshu and Kharnak went to battle against each other. They fought with knives and sling-shots (*sgu-rdo*), and though nobody was killed, many men did get badly injured. The police were called in, and Rupshu took the case to court. Tsering Samphel, a Member of the Congress Party at that time, who was sent out to Rupshu to survey the situation stated:

> "There is little doubt that Tso Kar belongs to Rupshu. It is just that these Kharnak people are more influential and financially stronger

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[21] The land settlement records of 1908-9 to this day remain the most recent comprehensive mapping of Ladakhi space, and continue to be the most important legal document referred to in cases of disputes over land within Ladakh, but also serves to underpin Indian territorial claims (Beek 1996: 109).

[22] The most recent encroachment, that of Zara, took place in the 1970s, about the same time as when they began making claims to Tso Kar.

> because they have the support of Hemis that they are trying to take it away from them. In the courts it was agreed after the fight that Kharnak would pay a fine of Rs.3,000 to each family in Rupshu, but when the agreement was written up it said that Kharnak would pay Rs.3,000 to the whole of Rupshu!"

When the courts proved futile, Rupshu approached the LBA for an out-of-court settlement and a compromise was reached between the two places. The terms of the agreement state that while only Rupshu has access to the lake, they must give a portion of the salt to Kharnak. This was fixed at eight hundred *lug-sgals*, in exchange for which Kharnak would pay Rupshu twenty-five paise for each bag. Thus, as soon as the salt reaches Rupshu a message is sent to Kharnak to come and collect their share of the salt. Each tent in Rupshu contributes eight or nine *lug-sgals* towards Kharnak's share. Some men in Rupshu deride this agreement saying it was made only because their chief at that time had been weak: "Look, we do so much hard work removing this salt and Kharnak gets it for free!"

However, the issue is not simply one of salt, but concerns the larger one of land and grass. The vicinity of Tso Kar yields some of the best grazing lands, and it was this along with the salt lake that Rupshu was trying to protect from a take-over by Kharnak. What has now become a major concern of Rupshu's is to prevent trespassers from encroaching on Tso Kar. These may be in the form of "salt thieves" ("*tshwa rkun-ma*"), or other livestock from neighbouring areas such as Korzok or Kharnak. To deter intruders, guards (*srung-pa*) are posted at the lake and its precincts for a period of four to five months, from June to October or November. Five guards are posted at one time, and they are changed every eight days. Four guards are chosen

from each *chu-lag*, and the fifth is a Tibetan.[23] Encroachers are fined, and stray livestock are generally apprehended and brought back to Rupshu. If no one comes to claim them then the chief sells the animals and the money goes towards Rupshu's communal use. After Kharnak has received their share of the salt, the rest is then dispersed or consumed. The next section looks at the manner in which this is done.

9.2.2 The Distribution of Salt

Though three varieties of salt exist at Tso Kar, it is only the salt fit for human consumption that they go to collect each year and use for trade. Once Kharnak has been given its due, each tent then keeps what they require for their own consumption.[24] Depending on the number of people in the tent this can vary, but usually about seven *lug-sgals* are kept back for a year. Each man will also give a certain portion of his salt to the monasteries at Korzok and Thugje, and to any visiting religious heads. The remainder is bartered or sold for cash.

Most of this exchange is carried out with the villages on the other side of the Taglang La: Gya, Meru, and Rumtse. The more enterprising men will carry their salt

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[23] Though the Tibetans living in Rupshu are not allowed to join in the salt march their livestock are permitted to eat the grass growing there. Therefore, they are also responsible for guarding the area.

[24] Some of this salt is also given away on the second day of the salt march when the Rupshupa sit filling their saddle-bags. Men from Korzok, or the Tibetans, turn up at the lake and plead for salt, or ask if they may be allowed to remove some from the lake themselves. Since no one but a Rupshupa is allowed to remove salt, they generally give away a little from their own piles.

on to Leh, and trade it there and in the villages along the way. However, the men make it a point not to trade their salt with villages further up the Indus valley, generally because these places are not directly accessible by road from Rupshu.[25]

Salt is usually bartered for barley; in 1992 the rate of exchange was by equal volume: one *lug-sgal* of salt in exchange for one *lug-sgal* of barley. It is rarely sold for cash, but in the odd case when it might be the price for that year was Rs.2 for a kilogram.[26]

The salt trade does not hold the same prominence as it once did, and the Rupshupa say that their salt is now practically given away for free - "This is because now everyone buys government salt and no one wants our salt any more."[27] This salt trade, which once extended across the entire Himalayan regions, is declining in most areas (cf. section 1.2.2).[28] In Tibet, Goldstein and Beall report that the nomads' trek for salt has now become an option because cheaper ocean salt competes with their rock salt, and the Chinese government has made dirt roads leading to many of the

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[25] This does not mean they will not trade their salt with people from these areas. What happens nowadays is that the two sides generally meet in Leh, and the exchange of salt is carried out there.

[26] Goods are weighed in Rupshu using a scale (*nya-ga*), which is a stick calibrated with twenty-seven lines totalling five kilograms.

[27] However, in the summer of 1996 the roads from Srinagar and Manali to Leh opened late because of a bad winter and uncleared landslides from the previous year's monsoon. As a result most supplies, including salt, were not available in Leh and it made people there realize that they could not always depend on imports.

[28] In the context of Eastern Indonesia, where salt also once played a major role in local and inter-island trading, today its production is often an undertaking of the last resort, engaged in when everything else fails and hunger threatens (Barnes 1993: 185).

main salt flats in Western Tibet and has started hauling salt from the lakes in trucks (1990: 122). This has meant that the trek is no longer profitable for the nomads. However, these changes have decreased, but not eliminated, the market for this salt. Goldstein and Beall state that the reason why this salt trade continues, though in a marginal form, is that many Himalayan and Tibetan villagers still prefer the taste of the local salt (ibid).[29] The same is true for Ladakh, as Angchuk reaffirmed: "Except for us Changpa, whether Tibetan or Ladakhi, we still like the salt from here and we still use it. As long as that doesn't stop we will go on taking out salt from Tso Kar." The salt is also popular with some of the elderly people in Leh, and Baba Siddique is one of them who ensures that he always has a supply for his butter-tea. He adds that without this salt Ladakhi tea just does not have the same taste, and so it cannot be replaced by the government salt. Tonyot Shah remarked that the difference in salt from Changthang and that supplied by the government was that he never fell ill when he consumed the former - "And now I eat this government salt and they say I have blood pressure!"

The decline in Rupshu's salt trade is not reflected in the trade of their pashmina and wool, both products in which the Rupshupa continue to prosper. The next section now turns to this.

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[29] This is in contrast to the cessation of the trade in salt in most parts of North India. Brown reports that in the regions of Garhwal and Kumaon this is largely attributed to the closure of the border with Tibet in the early 1960s and the influx of Indian salt (1984: 47).

9.3 Trade in Meat, Pashmina, and Wool

The trade in pashmina and wool begins soon after the shearing of the livestock is over, and must be completed before the roads get blocked with snow. The chief holds a meeting to officially declare the season open, and to discuses prices for the current year. He reminds the men that they must return in time for the prayer ceremony at Norchen as no transactions are permitted for the duration of these prayers, but in fact these do occur.

"Look, now the world is getting ready to get out there and sell!" Angchuk commented referring to all the activity in the camp as men were busy filling their saddle-bags with pashmina and wool, each preparing for their trading journey. Tharchen was making his own plans, and it was agreed that while Angchuk set off for Thiksey with the family's wool, Tharchen would wait in Rupshu for the traders to come and buy their pashmina. Angchuk would be accompanied by Paljor and Skarma for part of the way, but the younger brothers had plans of their own as well. They had decided to carry their wool, as well as pashmina, and first stop in Gya. Here they would exchange their wool for barley with relatives and friends. Once that was done, they would leave the grain with a cousin in Gya and proceed to Leh with their pashmina. Finding a buyer in Leh would be a little more tedious they commented, but this is how it is done:

> "We'll wear our Changpa clothes, then take some goat hair and rub it all over ourselves. Then we'll walk through the bazaar in Leh, and just you watch all the Kashmiris will come running after us and ask if we have pashmina to sell!"

The largest purchasers for pashmina in Ladakh are the private traders from Leh, followed by those from Himachal.[30] Other buyers are the Jammu and Kashmir Wool Board, the Changthang Tibetan Refugees Service Co-operative,[31] and government-sponsored handicrafts centres in Leh such as the Cottage Industries, Central Handicrafts Department, and the Industrial Cooperative Society.[32] Apart from the private traders from Leh, who purchase only pashmina, all of the above also buy wool.[33] However, wool is also largely bartered against grain with villagers on the other side of Taglang La and those in the central Indus valley in much the same way as salt described in the section above.[34] In keeping with the practices of the past, the bulk of the pashmina goes to Kashmir and a smaller amount to areas in North India, mainly Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. The wool is either utilized within Ladakh or is sent to weaving centres in North India, including Tibetan handicraft centres.

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[30] In the past the traders from Himachal were the largest purchasers of pashmina from Ladakh's Changthang, but lost out on this business in the 1960s when the border with Western Tibet closed and traders from Leh began coming to these areas. Unable to match the high prices offered by these traders, they now buy up whatever little pashmina they can and concentrate on wool instead.

[31] This Co-operative was set up in 1980, and is the major buyer of pashmina and wool from the Tibetans in Changthang. According to Topgyal Tsering, Chief Representative of the Tibetans in Ladakh, the main purpose of the Co-operative is to sustain a market for the Tibetan's produce. The Co-operative buys from Tibetans as well as Ladakhis, but gives preference to the former. However, it is not mandatory for the Tibetans to sell to the Co-operative.

[32] Non-government organisations, such as Ledeg (Ladakh Ecological Development Group) and Leho (Ladakh Environment and Health Organisation), have recently begun to purchase and process pashmina and wool in Leh. It is still too early to ascertain their effects on the market and reactions to them by other traders.

[33] While government organisations buy only from Ladakhis, private traders do business with both Ladakhis and Tibetans.

[34] In a reverse of old trading practices, men from Zanskar have recently been coming to Rupshu to purchase wool because they said the wool was missed there.

At the moment the pashmina trade is going through a period of transformation, and trading patterns are changing. New traders have emerged, and their effects on the market are gradually being felt. One group is from Changthang itself, and consists of men from families who have recently migrated and settled in Leh. These new traders now act as middlemen for their family members or others in Changthang, and bring the produce to Leh where they sell it to the private traders or directly to the Kashmiris. The next group are Tibetans, and their purchasing power is significant enough to alarm local private traders. They are also altering the market, which always sold its pashmina to Kashmir, by now selling it to the Chinese. In turn, Kashmir has begun importing pashmina from other areas. In 1995 the "All Changthang Pashmina Growers Co-operative Marketing Society Limited" was registered with the government for the purchase of both pashmina and wool, but this has still to come into operation.[35] The changes in the market and their effect on the price and demand of pashmina are discussed in the next section.

Within Changthang traders assess pashmina and wool in terms of quality, stating that the best comes from the areas of Rupshu, Kharnak, and Korzok (cf. section 1.1). The next best comes from regions farther north, mainly Hanle and Koyul, and the third best quality is from Chusul and villages along the Indus. However, even within the first category traders tend to make distinctions in terms of quality, and there are those who will say that Kharnak's pashmina and wool are better

[35] The same year a Pashmina Guild was set up in Ladakh, to monitor the quality of finished goods produced from pashmina and wool.

than Rupshu's or that Korzok's are the worst of all three. These differences are largely attributed to the manner in which livestock is cared for (cf. section 4.2.1).

That there is a great demand for pashmina and wool from Rupshu is undoubted, and price and timing are crucial deciding factors. It is the private traders from Leh and Himachal who dominate the scene in pashmina and wool respectively. Government organisations are not perceived as a threat to their business because of the low prices they offer, the meagre quantities they purchase, and delayed payments. The Rupshupa have their own way of phrasing this with regard to pashmina:

> "We always keep our best pashmina for Kashmir, the inferior quality for Himachal, and we try to avoid selling to the government."

However, government departments state that they are constrained by their low budgets and not by an aversion to trading. Chemit Namgyal, Superintendent of the Cottage Industries, remarked that with an annual budget of only Rs.2 lakhs,[36] how much pashmina could he really buy? In contrast a private trader would have Rs.2 lakhs or more to spend solely on the purchase of pashmina.

It is sometimes said in Leh that there are five families who have a monopoly over the purchase of pashmina from the areas of Rupshu, Kharnak, and Korzok. However, there are discrepancies among the traders and others in Leh as to who exactly these families are, and if in fact there are five and not more. Mohammed Ramzan Abdu, who belongs to one of these families, said:

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[36] 1 lakh equals Rs.100,000.

> "This is because there is only that much pashmina available there, there just isn't any more. Between us five we buy up everything. There is pashmina in other areas, but it's number two quality and so we don't go there. But other traders and the government, they go and buy pashmina there."

The trade in pashmina continues to some extent to be dominated by descendants of the palace traders (cf. section 1.2.2), and other private traders from Leh, who are mainly Muslims. Since the sale of pashmina is often conducted alongside the sale of livestock this often causes the Rupshupa to remark that it is the butchers who are the principal buyers of their pashmina.[37] In effect, what happens is that the butchers (who are also Muslim) and pashmina traders are quite often related to each other and at times visit the place and work alongside each other, hence the confusion.[38] For instance, Baba Siddique has five sons out of which the eldest and youngest purchase pashmina, one is a butcher and owns a meat shop in Leh, and the youngest drives both a taxi and a truck which is convenient when they have to make frequent trips and transport goods. There are also butchers who have given up their former profession and switched over to the pashmina trade, which is more lucrative, but people still remember them as the former. One such person is Abdul Hakim Ghani, whose father and elder brother were butchers, but he decided to break out. Now his nephew manages the family's meat business, and he concentrates on pashmina.

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[37] "All the butchers buy our pashmina," was a common response I received in Rupshu when I asked who bought their pashmina.

[38] On the other hand, pashmina traders abhor this confusion between them and butchers since the latter profession is not as high in status as the former, no matter that they may all be from the same family. This is not to say that there are no butchers buying pashmina, because in fact some do.

Rupshu's largest buyer of wool is Nawang Dorje from Himachal, whose forefathers have been coming here for generations (cf. section 1.3).[39] In an area devoid of shops, Nawang's mobile one is a veritable delight for Rupshu. He generally reaches Rupshu towards the end of July, and stays for six to eight weeks.

> "I come when the camp is at Norchen and move with them to Debring," Nawang remarked, "I bring everything from tea, rice, flour, lentils, potatoes, sugar, spices, onions, velvet dresses, cotton cloth, woollen and nylon socks, dyes, playing cards, and prayer flags."

In addition, Nawang will also have received requests for specific articles (such as a silver butter lamp, a pair of cymbals, or a piece of brocade for a forthcoming wedding), from people the previous year, and he always tries to bring what he can. His makeshift shop in a tent is the centre of activity: men gather there to hear the latest news and play cards, women visit to see what new fashion he has brought and ask if they can try it on, and children come with their small bundles of pashmina and wool to exchange for sweets. Nawang still buys a little pashmina, but nothing compared to the vast quantities he used to purchase in the past.[40] With all the uncertainty in the

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[39] Unlike his forefathers, Nawang has stopped going to Kharnak and Korzok, because he feels that all his business requirements are met in Rupshu. According to him there is one trader from Himachal who still goes to Korzok and another who visits Hanle and Koyul, but none make the journey to Kharnak these days. In retrospect, it could be that because Rupshu is more accessible from the road Nawang prefers to go there.

[40] Nawang was once one of the major buyers of pashmina from Rupshu. Abdul Hakim Ghani recalled that in 1962 he lost out on the business when a lengthy series of price negotiations took place between him, traders from Leh (of which Hakim was one), and the Rupshupa. At the end of them Nawang had to accede his position to the traders from Leh because they offered higher prices that he could not match. At this time the traders also secured a huge chunk of the market by obtaining the chief's word that from now on they would only sell to them and not to those from Himachal. In effect though, Nawang is still able to buy a little pashmina, and he attributes this to his long relationship with the Rupshupa.

pashmina trade Nawang says that he prefers to concentrate on wool, and as yet no one has attempted to encroach on his territory there (Plate 67).[41]

During the recent social and economic boycott called by the LBA (cf. section 1.3), the pashmina trade was severely affected and went through a process of upheaval. In comparison the wool trade went through no such crisis. Throughout Changthang trade with the Muslims, both pashmina buyers and butchers, was prohibited.[42] In the absence of these traders there was much confusion in Rupshu and many feared they might not find a market for their pashmina. In their anxiety at not being able to sell at all, Rupshu was even amenable to selling to the government, but though a message was sent to the various departments the government remained as elusive as ever. The boycott also witnessed the emergence of new traders from amongst the Buddhists, largely encouraged by the LBA, who hoped they might break the monopoly of the Muslims in the pashmina business. The Rupshupa were apprehensive about these new traders, but in the absence of their traditional trading partners they had little choice. The Rupshupa complained that the new traders could not comprehend the workings of the trade, nor did they give them a good rate for their pashmina, and in fact were taking advantage of the situation by offering them lower rates. When deals were eventually struck and prices agreed upon, they often did not keep to their word. Many Rupshupa received the first instalment of money, but few

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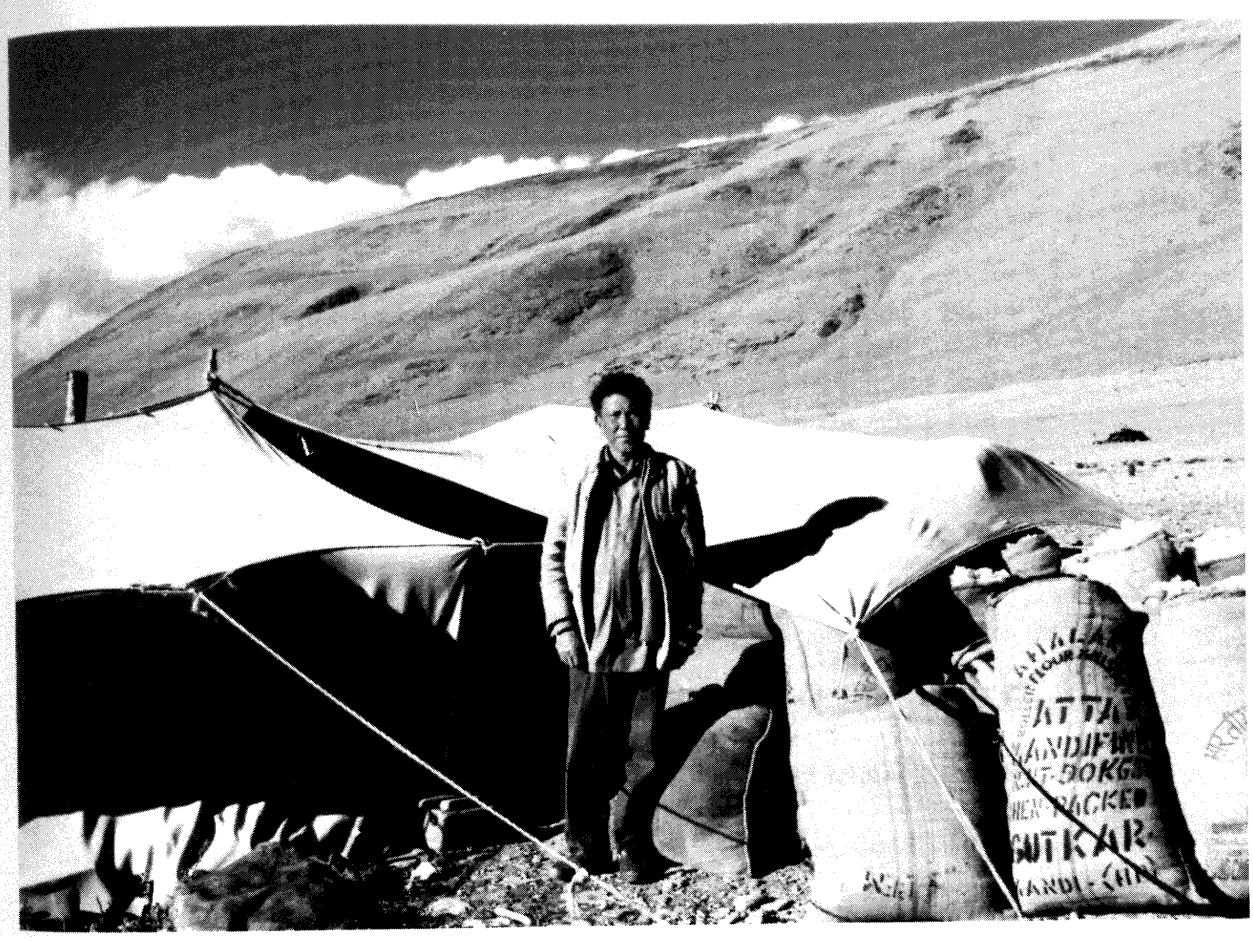
[41] Though a few other traders from Himachal also come to Rupshu their purchasing power is too small, nor do they have the backing of Nawang's long-standing relationship to make a dent in his market.

[42] During the years of the boycott Nawang was once again able to buy pashmina in Rupshu, but the sales to him stopped as soon as the boycott was over.



67. Nawang Dorje, the trader from Manali. Behind him are the sacks of wool he has purchased in Rupshu.

saw the second.[43] When the LBA called off the boycott the Rupshupa reverted to their old trading partners, who at least guaranteed their payment.

Once these relations resumed I learnt that throughout the boycott men in Rupshu had continued to sell their pashmina to the Muslim traders, though secretly and at night. One trader from Leh described how they circumvented the LBA's surveillance:

> "We would either meet late at night or very early in the morning. But there used to be a problem. They would take advantage of the situation, because usually we would be in a hurry and often it was dark, so we were never able to check the quality of the pashmina. Therefore they would mix bad pashmina with the good pashmina, or mix wool with it."

The Rupshupa complained that since they were always in a rush, because of the fear of getting caught, the traders never weighed the pashmina properly. Sometimes the two sides would meet in Leh, at other times they arranged to meet on specific dates and times in certain valleys along the way. When it became difficult for the two sides to meet they would conduct their business through a third person, usually a Tibetan who lived in Rupshu or Choglamsar.

Finally, decisions regarding who to sell pashmina and wool to are usually individually, and not collectively, made in Rupshu. The Rupshupa do not have fixed trading partners, though there are fixed parameters within which they trade laid down by the chief at the beginning of the season. However, the buyers are a little more

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[43] By 1995 many of them had not been paid their full money by these traders for the pashmina they had sold them during the boycott.

selective and say that they are more inclined to buy from the same people every year because everyone is different in the way they handle their pashmina. Mohammed Ramzan Abdu remarked:

> "Once you get to know people in one place and they become your friends, then one prefers to do business with them. There are some people who mix the pashmina with wool or other dirty things. I know the Kharnak people better and that is why I prefer to do business with them. Sometimes I also give advance to the Kharnak people and when I go later and buy pashmina from them I cut off the advance."

The Rupshupa's sole criterion is that he sells to the highest bidder. The next section turns to the pricing of pashmina and wool.

9.3.1 Setting the Price

Before the trading season commences the Wool Board makes an announcement over the radio, from the All India Radio station in Leh, informing all Changpa of the price of pashmina and wool for the current year. They also advise them that if the private traders cannot meet these prices then they should wait and sell to the Wool Board or other government agencies. However, the word on prices is out much before the Wool Board's announcement even reaches the radio station.[44] News travels via the road - up from Kashmir or Himachal.

Rupshu, unlike Kharnak and Korzok, lies along the Leh-Manali road and they are generally the first to hear the current year's prices. Shrewd businessmen, they are

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[44] "Since the Wool Board only buys about 10% of the raw material the set price ultimately has had very little direct affect on the prices actually paid to the herdsmen" (Commonwealth Secretariat Report 1993: 7).

occasionally known to take advantage of the situation. Sonam Rinchen boasted about the time he went to Korzok when news came in that the new rate was Rs.750 a kilo. The unsuspecting Korzokpa sold him their pashmina at a little over last year's price of Rs.325. Sonam brought the pashmina back to Rupshu and later sold it for double the price!

Prices are set depending on the previous year's rate and the current year's demand. While the prices of both pashmina and wool have been steadily increasing over the years, those for pashmina are known to fluctuate a great deal more with the price even dropping occasionally (Table 3). Before negotiations with the traders can begin, the year's prices are discussed in Rupshu, in the meeting called by the chief, and minimum and maximum rates determined. Though a standard rate is set by the chief jointly with the men, each family can decide on actual prices individually with the trader who purchases their produce.

The pashmina buyers tend to distinguish between themselves and those who purchase wool, by their mode of payment. The former insist that all their transactions are done on the basis of cash payments, whereas the traders of wool always practise barter. Deen Khan states that at least within Ladakh wool is bartered for grain, but with the traders from Himachal it is exchanged for all kinds of junk:

> "Plastic shoes, glass bangles, tins and cans. Don't you see how much more litter there is these days in Changthang. The Changpa don't know how to deposit this garbage of plastic and polythene, it's making an ecological mess of the area."

Table 3 Pashmina and Wool Prices from 1991 to 1996

Price of Pashmina from 1991 to 1996 (for 1 kilogram)

Year	Wool Board (A Grade)	Private Traders
1991	Rs.250	Rs.700-750
1992	Rs.300	Rs.300-500
1993	Rs.350	Rs.300-400-475
1994	Rs.400	Rs.750-900
1995	Rs.800	Rs.1,500-2,000-2,500
1996	--	Rs.1,375-1,500

Price of Wool from 1991 to 1996 (for 1 kilogram)

Year	Price	Quantity of Grain for 1 kilo of Wool
1991	Rs.50-55	7 kgs
1992	Rs.50-60	8 kgs
1993	Rs.55	10 kgs
1994	Rs.56	14 kgs
1995	Rs.62-75-80	15 kgs
1996	Rs.70-80	16 kgs

However, Nawang Dorje insists that he never barters with Rupshu, and carries out all his transactions on the basis of cash: "Money! I sell everything here for money, and they also sell their wool for money." In effect, what occurs is not a direct exchange of money as the Rupshupa seldom take hard cash from him in exchange for their wool. What Nawang does is to convert the amounts in cash and then allow them to spend that at his shop. Invariably, people will have debts with him from a previous year, and these are generally cleared up first before he allows them to make fresh purchases.[45]

The trade of wool for grain operates in a similar manner to Nawang's transactions, and all amounts are eventually translated into monetary terms. In 1994, Tharchen agreed to trade all his wool with the Thiksey Goba, and Angchuk left for Thiksey with seventy-four kilos of wool.[46] The price for that year was one kilo of wool for fourteen kilos of grain, which roughly translated to Rs.56 for a kilo of wool. Angchuk returned with a quarter of the amount of grain, the Goba saying that he would give the rest after the harvest. However, the harvest turned out to be poor that year and the Goba was not able to meet his dues in grain. Since he had already taken the wool he could not return it, because he had given his word. Thus, the Goba had to give them the equivalent in money, and with the cash Tharchen bought grain from Leh and Gya.

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[45] Debts are cleared up at the previous year's prices and not the current year's.

[46] The Thiksey Goba would not be utilizing all this wool, but merely functioned as a middleman who would sell the wool to others in Thiksey or neighbouring villages. Angchuk realized that he would make a small profit, but at the same time he said it saved him the time and effort of peddling his wool from village to village.

Though the Rupshupa realize that the further out they travel from Rupshu, the better a price they will get for their wool, they are apprehensive about making long journeys because of the large expenditure they incur in transporting the wool and grain.[47] After the trouble with the Thiksey Goba, Tharchen was a little more reticent about where to take his wool: "The best would be if someone came here with a truck full of grain and we could exchange it with our wool, and are saved the trouble of taking our wool out." This is why Rupshu looks forward to the annual visit of Nawang Dorje, who in one year purchases approximately fifty to sixty quintal of wool (Plate 68).[48]

Decisions regarding the price of wool have none of the intrigue or protracted debates surrounding those of pashmina. This is because pashmina is a luxury fibre, and due to its high value there is more at stake. Deals are often struck even before the fibre has been combed off the goat's back.[49]

As soon as the traders from Leh reach Rupshu a series of meetings are held to discuss and set the rate for that year. These can be held individually, or jointly with

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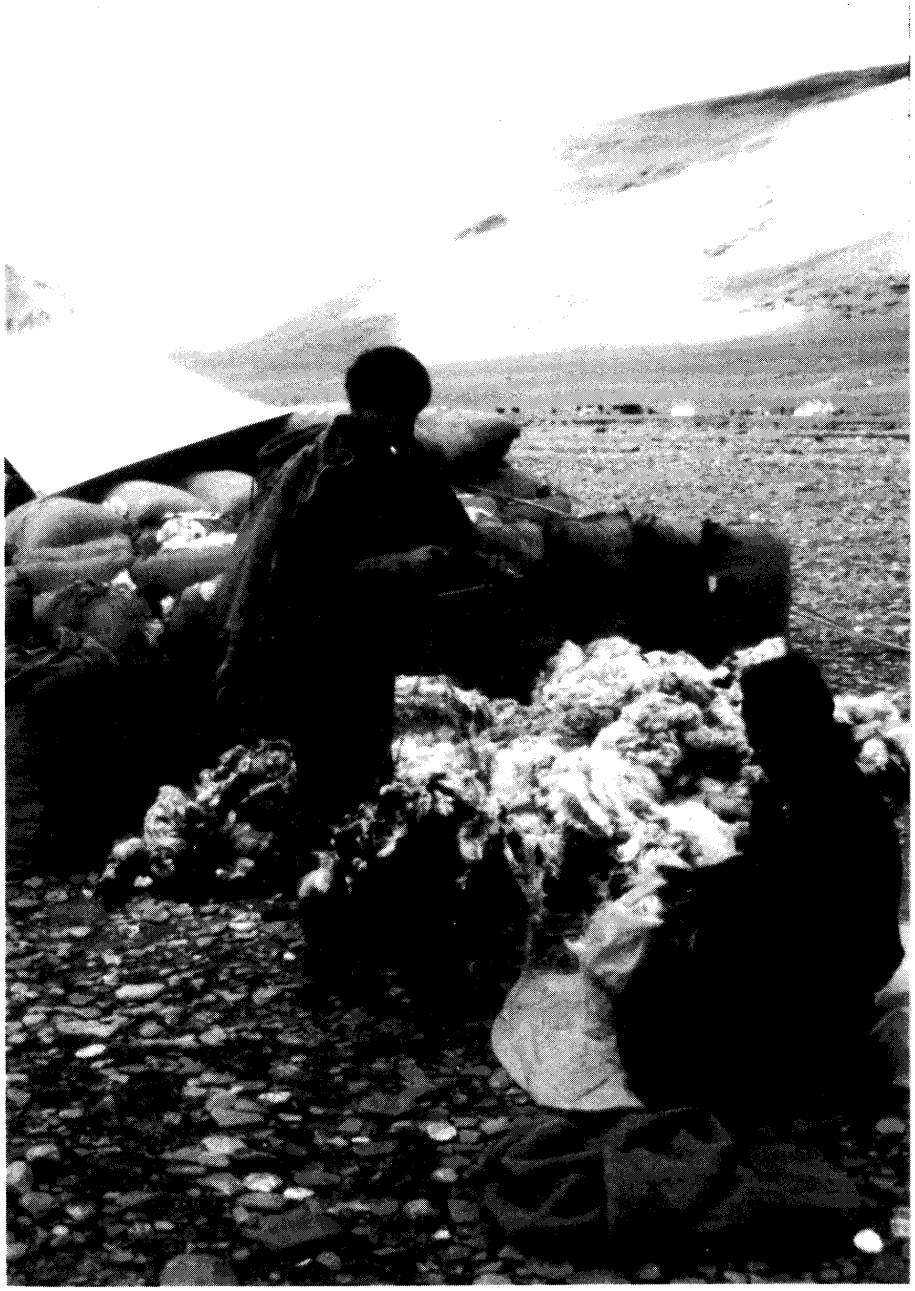
[47] A kilo of wool would probably double in price as it travelled from Rupshu, via Leh, to Zanskar.

[48] 1 quintal is approximately 100 kilograms.

[49] Pashmina prices are also bid for ahead of the combing season, usually in spring, which is a lean period for the Rupshupa. Money is advanced to the Rupshupa at no interest, and these prices cannot be changed later on in the year even if the rate is more or less than the speculated price. The traders maintain that "*zaban ho gaya*" (Urdu: "given our word") has taken place between both sides and hence the price cannot be altered. This system has its own drawback, and some people say that the traders use it to exploit the Rupshupa.



68. Nawang Tsering, Nawang Dorje's nephew, weighing Tharchen's wool. He is using the scale known as *nya-ga*.

all the men attending. The process can be lengthy as Mohammed Ramzan Abdu describes:

> "When the rate is quickly agreed upon we weigh it there and then, pay them and leave. If not, then we return to Leh and leave them to discuss the matter among themselves, or they ask around and find out what the rate is in other areas. Only once we hear they have reached a decision do we return again."

Once a price is reached, the traders pay an advance of roughly 50% to each man, and leave with the pashmina. The balance payment is made a month or two later, and this is usually when the Rupshupa go to Leh to make their purchases for the winter. At times the Rupshupa complain that these traders take a long time to pay them, or that their payments are irregular, and so they are kept waiting. However, there are diverging views on this, and some men stated, "When they say they will pay us within this period of time then they do so, they keep their word."

The method of appraising pashmina and setting the price differs between these local traders and the government. The former assess pashmina in terms of the areas it comes from, as mentioned earlier on in this chapter, and the price remains uniform within an area. Thus, Rupshu's pashmina will be more expensive than Hanle's, and Hanle's more expensive than Chusul's. In contrast, the government recognizes three grades of pashmina which they categorize as: A, B, and C, depending on the quality and colour of the fibres, A being the best.[50] Prices vary with the grade and there can be as much as a hundred rupees difference between each grade. At times the difference is more extreme, and C grade can be half the value of A.

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[50] Pashmina with a longer fibre length will have a higher grade than one with a shorter length, and white pashmina is costlier than all the other colours.

The grading of pashmina is a sensitive issue among the Rupshupa, and other herders in Changthang, and is one of the main reasons for their reluctance to sell to the government. They take exception to this system because they state that after all the hard work they do grazing their goats in the bitter cold, why should their pashmina be separated and bought in lots, why can it not be bought all together. The other point is that people with few goats may have as little as six to ten kilos of pashmina to sell, and if the government were to differentiate between them then how much money would they earn? Thus, few Rupshupa want to sell to government representatives, who therefore have a hard time obtaining pashmina, as one trader rather cynically put it: "If the government goes and buys its two kilos from every place in the Changthang then only is it able to fulfil its quota." The government is aware that grading is a deterrent for the Changpa to sell their pashmina to them, yet they say they have to work within the parameters of grading because that is the rule. Further, their budgets are not as large as those of private traders, so they cannot always afford the high prices in the absence of grading. In turn, the government accuses private traders of exploiting the Changpa, especially when it comes to weighing, saying that they always give a lower figure. However, the Changpa have their own methods of surreptitiously increasing the weight of their pashmina.[51] The government also claims that private traders have a better relationship with the Changpa because they have other systems of working with them, which the government is not used to. These include giving loans in advance and buying livestock. The question then is why the Rupshupa, or other herders in Changthang, ever bother to sell to the government when private buyers give

[51] These include placing the pashmina on the ground during the night so that it absorbs moisture, or intentionally mixing dirt and small stones with the pashmina.

them higher prices and do not practise grading. The Rupshupa reply that they always sell a bit to the government to keep them happy, so that they continue to give them their rations, or send books for the school, or come out there with doctors and medicines. In 1995, the government finally realized the futility of their grading system and abolished it.

The All Changthang Pashmina Growers Co-operative Marketing Society now hopes to break the monopoly of the private traders through standardising the price, giving the Changpa bank loans (though these will not be interest-free), and preventing exploitation by eliminating the middleman. The other intention of the Co-operative is to develop a market for Ladakh's pashmina outside Kashmir, and they are setting their sights on the big names in the Indian textile industry (such as Raymonds, Grasim, and Arvind Mills). The Co-operative is a local effort at addressing the problems in the pashmina market and not, the co-ordinators claim, supported by the government of Jammu and Kashmir. Tadbar Jolden, Assistant Registrar Co-operatives, commented: "The government will always favour the five lakh people there [in Kashmir], rather than twenty thousand people in Changthang. They are not interested in the Changpa getting higher rates." These same officials also suggest that pashmina rates in Ladakh should be set along the same lines as international rates of cashmere, and wonder why the Wool Board never did this. They criticize the Wool Board for intentionally keeping the prices low because they wanted to keep the people in the Valley (i.e. Kashmir) happy. The other strange thing pointed out is that the Wool Board has no office in Leh, despite the fact that Ladakh is the only pashmina-growing area within the State.

The Changpa have remained cautious with respect to the Co-operative because they still recall the government's previous efforts in this area, which failed (cf. section 1.2.2).[52] By 1996, most men in Rupshu had joined the Co-operative but those from Kharnak had not, and their decision remained ambiguous. The Co-operative is also facing opposition from traders in Leh and Kashmir, because some say it will work against their interests. A letter from a friend in Leh says: "I am still apprehensive that the Kashmiris may be all out to jinx the efforts, such as they only can through intrigues. And this I've reason to believe because perchance I happened to meet a fellow in the bazaar and it slipped out from him in the course of the conversation" (name withheld, Leh, 15 July 1995). On the other hand, other traders such as Baba Siddique said they had not even heard about the Co-operative and Abdul Hakim felt that it would not make a big difference to his business or to the lives of the Changpas.

A greater threat is perceived from the flow of pashmina across the Tibetan border, which jeopardizes the trade for both the Changpa and traders within Ladakh. Local prices fell in 1992 and 1993 because pashmina came from Tibet into Ladakh,[53]

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[52] Another effort at breaking the monopoly of the middlemen in Leh was made in the late 1980s. Deen Khan said LNP had tried to intervene between the Changpas and the Kashmiri traders, who had unionized themselves to an extent, to get both sides to agree to doing business directly and thereby eliminate the middleman in Leh, who was making all the money in any case. This proposal never took off because in 1989 the separatist violence in Kashmir began.

[53] Prices were also low in these years because of the boycott and the trouble in Kashmir, but most traders and Changpa attributed the fall to the presence of Tibetan pashmina in the market. Fashion swings have also affected prices: "The early 1980s was a boom period for luxury fibres when a generally buoyant market created increasing demand and higher prices. But towards the end of the 1980s several factors, combined with a general economic recession, contributed to the disruptions felt in the whole of the luxury fibres industry" (Commonwealth Secretariat Report

and in 1994 the reverse occurred and local prices increased because pashmina went from Ladakh to Tibet (see Table 3 for price fluctuations).[54] Newspapers reported that 33,000 kilos of pashmina were bartered by shepherds in Changthang with Chinese traders for tea, silk, velvet, and electronic goods leaving government officials in the lurch - "the state-run wool board procured only two kg of pashmina wool this fiscal year against 13,800 kg last year" (Reuter Report 16.2.1995: 14). The pashmina going into Tibet was bought directly from the Changpa, as well as from traders in Leh. In 1995 rumours were heard both ways: that pashmina would once again go to Tibet and that two trucks had crossed into Ladakh with pashmina from there.[55] While the former piece of news could not be confirmed, some people said that the report about the trucks was just hearsay and a ruse to bring the price of pashmina down among the Changpa, just when they were negotiating a rate of Rs.2,500 per kilo. Opinions also differ regarding the quality of pashmina that is entering Ladakh. Traders initially said it was of exceptionally good quality and wondered if it had something to do with the quality of grass there. However, government officials doubted its authenticity and were convinced it was mixed. Dr O. N. Muku reported that his Department had run some tests on a sample and determined that the pashmina was not pure. It was in fact what they call "cashgora" - a cross between pashmina and mohair (from the Angora goat), a fact several traders were ignorant of.[56] However, most traders referred to the

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1993: 15).

[54] It was said that in Lhasa a kilo of pashmina sold for as much as Rs.3,000.

[55] It was also reported that some people in Korzok had received advances for their pashmina from traders who would take it into Tibet.

[56] Dr O. N. Muku explained that cashgora has an increased staple length and less hair, but is not as fine as pashmina. The reason for the high demand is that after

pashmina coming from Tibet as "*topi*" (Urdu: hat).[57] Nawang Dorje said he had heard it was mixed with nylon, but was not sure as he had not seen any.

The trade in pashmina from Tibet to Ladakh is as old as the Treaty of Tingmosgang (cf. section 1.2.2), and even after the border closed there have been instances reported of pashmina entering Ladakh via the same routes (Rizvi n.d.1: 32). However, the reverse trend is a new phenomenon in Ladakh and both the Changpa and traders are perplexed by it. It is not clear who is buying this pashmina, whether they are Tibetans or Chinese, and why, since Tibet has an abundant supply of its own. In Rupshu I heard that Tibetans came to purchase the pashmina, but in Leh Abdul Hakim mentioned that he sold his to a Chinese trader. While the Changpa are pleased with the high prices, local traders are alarmed at the thought of these new traders negotiating directly with the Changpa and putting them out of business. This new angle to the trade has also unsettled the Kashmiris who only got 10% of Ladakh's pashmina that year and had to import pashmina from other areas, such as Mongolia and Nepal.[58] A representative from the Wool Board said the Changpa should be cautious about these changes because what would happen if this suddenly stopped and

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dehairing, a kilo of cashgora will yield more fibre than a kilo of pashmina. His findings correspond with Abdul Hakim's reflections: "When I asked the Kashmiris why do you run so much after this, they say that from 100% of the goods we get about 70% [after dehairing]. Yours, what comes out from Ladakh, from that we get 25%. This is the difference."

[57] The pashmina, Mohammed Asghar Khalsawar explained, acquired this name because when it is cut the fibres are close together resembling a hat. He also commented that this quality pashmina was new to the market and not something he remembered from his days as a palace trader.

[58] Pashmina is grown in Mongolia, but not in Nepal. The latter is only the route by which pashmina from Tibet travels to other areas.

at the same time there was no demand in Kashmir for their pashmina?[59] However, Abdul Hakim affirmed that because of the fine quality of Ladakh's pashmina there would always be a demand for it in Kashmir.

Another fibre that surfaces in the cross-border trade from Tibet to Ladakh, and influences market prices of local produce, is shahtoosh (*btsod-khul*).[60] This is a luxury fibre from the Tibetan antelope (*btsod*), or *Pantholops hodgsoni*, which inhabits Western Tibet. Shahtoosh is a banned fibre and trade in it is illegal in India, because it is said that the antelope is killed before the fibre is removed from it.[61] However, the trade continues despite this ban, though any one caught with it is apprehended and their cargo impounded. Shahtoosh has always commanded a higher price than pashmina as it is extremely soft and very delicate, but because of the ban prices of the fibre are now exorbitant. In 1994 the price of a kilo of the raw fibre ranged from Rs.22,000 to Rs.32,000.[62] Several traders in Leh and Kashmir deal in shahtoosh alongside their trade in pashmina, and often the two are combined to deter officials

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[59] The Wool Board is also accused of artificially affecting prices of pashmina. For example in 1991 they bought up all Kashmiri shawls when business was getting difficult, but did not follow this up in 1992 (Commonwealth Secretariat Report 1993: 7-8). This procedure also had a detrimental effect on the trade in raw material, as is obvious from the fall in prices in 1992 and 1993 (see Table 3).

[60] Shahtoosh is a Persian word, derived from "shah" meaning king and "toosh" wool. Thus, making it the "king of all wools".

[61] Protective legislation prohibiting the trade in shatoosh is listed in schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 of India and in the Appendix of Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (Aziz 3.3.1995: 7).

[62] Shawls from the wool cost anything up to Rs.50,000 a piece, and in Western countries they sell at a much higher price of U.S. $.3,500 (Aziz 3.3.1995: 7).

who may be checking on their goods.[63] The annual production of shahtoosh is said to be roughly twenty-five quintals a year, and the greater quantities available in the market are detrimental to the price of pashmina. However, there seems to be some confusion as to the actual method by which shahtoosh is obtained with some people saying that the ban on shahtoosh is a Chinese ploy to divert the trade from its traditional Tibetan traders, who sell it to the weaving centres of Kashmir, to new ones in China and Pakistan.[64] Representatives from the Kashmir Handicrafts Traders Welfare Association deny the charge that shahtoosh is procured by killing the animals (Zaidi 24.2.1995: 15).[65] However, opinions differ and some traders profess that at times the animal is killed. It is difficult to ascertain the truth as to how the fibre is obtained, because documentation in this area is limited.[66] Tibetans who have traded in this fibre before 1959 maintain that the animal is never killed, and that they were driven into pits or narrow valleys where they were tied, the fibre removed, and then

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[63] The fibre also enters India via Nepal and Arunachal Pradesh, and ultimately makes it way to Kashmir.

[64] It is also alleged that Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence is behind this Chinese move (Zaidi 24.2.1995: 15).

[65] To support this they claim that since the herders are Buddhists their religion prevents them from taking lives, and that fibre taken from a dead animal lacks the lustre and shine that fibre removed from a live animal possesses. However, there seems to be no objection on their part to buying pashmina combed out of dead goatskins!

[66] I was told about an American journalist who visited these parts of Western Tibet and photographed the dead antelopes to get world-wide support for the ban on shahtoosh. However, traders in Leh and Kashmir claim that the photographs were a hoax on the part of the Chinese so that the Indian government would be forced to declare the trade illegal. They claim that shahtoosh is processed in China and then exported to Japan and other countries, and ask why no one has objected to this.

freed.[67] They also point out that at the most one animal yields only 100 grams of raw shahtoosh, and that meant an awful lot of killing - "if we were killing them there wouldn't be a single antelope left there now, so where is all this shahtoosh coming from?" One individual said that the continued presence of shahtoosh in the market meant nothing because very little of it was pure, and that it was usually mixed with ibex hair or flax.[68]

The Rupshupa are threatened by the cross-border trade, which leads to uncertainty and speculation surrounding their own business prospects and causes extreme price fluctuations. On the other hand, government officials see this as a temporary phenomenon linked to inefficient surveillance along the border:

> "It has come before in the past also. We had closed it, and then one year it came again. Of course when it does come in the market then the price of the other pashmina will be affected. But it is not something that comes every year and so one cannot depend on it. Sometimes the border becomes very tight and then it can't come over. At other times the border becomes loose and then it finds its way through."

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[67] One of the earliest mentions of this is made by Moorcroft who says that the animal rarely ventures within gunshot and the fibre is obtained only by snares at night, when they come down from the mountains to browse in the valleys (1841: 350). The Hebers also write that the animal is captured (1978: 121). Dr Mohammed Deen informed me that the present practice in Mongolia, where most of these antelopes are kept in national parks, is to drive them through narrow lanes of thorny bushes at the time of moulting.

[68] This fits in with the fact that very few pure shahtoosh shawls have been woven in Kashmir since the 1960s. "A shahtoosh shawl will contain about 20% of pashmina fibre to add strength. Another acceptable type of shahtoosh shawl is woven on a pashmina warp, thus making it 50% shahtoosh/50% pashmina" (Commonwealth Secretariat Report 1993: 13).

However, others accuse the government of being indifferent to the situation, claiming that in spite of repeated requests to stop this they have done little.[69] They add that it may reach a point when it will be too difficult to stop. Local leaders in Ladakh have for some years now been requesting the government to open a trading post along the border between Ladakh and Tibet, as they have done in the North Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh. Demchok has been suggested as the place, as it also marked the border before 1962. This would hopefully stop the smuggling and legalize the trade. It might also mean a return to the old trade routes, a fact the Rupshupa are apprehensive of because once again their pashmina prices would go down.

"The whole market is very confused right now," is Abdul Hakim's reaction to the present state of the pashmina trade in Ladakh. "There are so many small buyers entering the market," Usman Benares, Baba Siddique's eldest son, commented, "that it just isn't the respected business it once was." At the same time, Nawang Dorje also reports that there is a drop in the demand for wool and this is unsettling the market. He attributes this to the introduction of synthetic wool mixes in the market, further exacerbated by the entrance of merino wool from Australia. Previously, Nawang would sell his wool to government handicrafts centres in Jammu and Kashmir, and Himachal, and to private traders from North India, some of whom would take the wool as far as Bombay. Now he says that it is only the government handicraft centre

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[69] In 1995 the government is said to have tightened its surveillance along the border, and people in Leh complained that Chinese goods had become very expensive. Velvet, for instance, had doubled in price.

in Himachal that is buying from him. Does he feel threatened by these changes? Nawang remains ambiguous as to whether or not he will continue to come to Rupshu and concludes by saying that as long as he makes a small profit he will.

Profit is what attracts all traders to Rupshu, including those who purchase livestock. The last section looks at the trade in sheep and goats.

9.3.2 The Meat Market

The sale of sheep and goats from Rupshu to the meat shops in and around Leh is another of the important features of trade from the region. Only sheep and goats are sold to butchers, yaks are rarely, if ever, traded. The trade in livestock is also dominated by the Muslims, since they own most of the meat shops in Leh.

The butchers usually make three trips each year to Rupshu to purchase livestock. The first is in spring, the second in late autumn, and the third just before winter sets in and the roads and passes get blocked with snow. At the most a single butcher may purchase as many as four to five hundred sheep and goats on one trip, though on average they buy two to three hundred - it all depends on their capital. Occasionally, butchers also make a fourth trip during winter if meat stocks in Leh are low.

The third trip usually coincides with Ladakhi New Year, as meat is a prerequisite for their celebrations, and this is the time when they purchase the largest

number of livestock. Culling is done in the autumn, ideally in October, and this is also said to lessen pressure on winter pasture, which is particularly sensitive to overstocking. Fewest livestock are bought in spring because after the harsh winter the animals are at their leanest. The weight of the animal begins to decline in winter as they use up the fat stored in their body. However, if the winter has been an exceptionally bad one then desperate sales of livestock, as well as of pashmina, are made by the Rupshupa who are usually in dire need of cash. During spring and summer most meat in Leh is brought up by road from Kashmir.

In a year Rupshu may sell as many as two thousand sheep and goats. On average individual families sell about ten to fifteen livestock a year, but it all depends on the size of their herds. Tharchen rarely sells more than twelve sheep and goats in a year. The tendency is to sell older livestock instead of younger ones, in spite of the former having less meat than the latter. This practice prevails because they state that they would accrue a great deal more sin if they were to sell the younger livestock. On the whole the butchers respect this practice of theirs and only give them less money if the animal is really old and thin.

Goats are usually leaner than sheep and so always fetch a lower price. Females also always cost less than males. In the winter of 1994-95 prices were: Rs.2,300 for a ram and Rs.1,800 for a ewe; Rs.2,000 for a male goat and Rs.1,000 for a female goat. These prices are not fixed, but vary slightly depending on the size of individual animals. Similar to the increase in the prices of pashmina and wool,

livestock prices have more than doubled since 1992.[70] In that year a ram cost between Rs.1,100 to Rs.1,200, and a male goat between Rs.700 to Rs.1,000. I found no one who could offer an explanation for this increase in prices, apart from an increase in demand.

Once the deals are struck, the livestock are usually loaded onto trucks and taken to Leh. If it is winter and the roads have already closed then the animals have to be walked to Leh. For this the butchers generally hire two to three men from Rupshu, depending on the number of livestock, and they drive the animals there for a fee of Rs.100 to Rs.200 (including food), depending on the distance. Unlike payments for pashmina, which are paid half at time of delivery and the balance deferred to a later date, those for livestock are made immediately on collection of the sheep and goats.

During the boycott the LBA tried to encourage Buddhists to begin trading in livestock. However, only a few did, and somewhat reluctantly, because they said it went against their religious beliefs.[71] Kunken Dorje, a Rupshupa who now lives in Leh, said it was at the insistence of Tokdan Rinpoche, from Phyang Gompa, that he took this up but stopped soon after the boycott was over because of the sin involved in such work. At the same time, the LBA also encouraged butchers among the Hindus

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[70] Cunningham valued a sheep at an average price of Rs.2.50 each (1854: 212). The price does not appear to have changed much over the following hundred years as Tonyot Shah recalled that in the period before 1962 a sheep cost Rs.2.50 and a goat Rs.2.

[71] This differs with the view of old Buddhist traders, such as Tonyot Shah and Meme Shunu, who both told me that in the past they went to Rupshu and Kharnak to purchase livestock during winter.

and Sikhs to set up meat shops in Leh but this failed because many Buddhist Ladakhis said that they preferred to buy meat that was *halal* versus that which was *jhatka* (Hindi for meat that is cut without draining the blood).

It is the trade in pashmina and wool, along with livestock, and their spiralling prices that continue to make life on the Changthang still worthwhile for the Rupshupa. It is also the lucrativeness of the trade in pashmina that attracts local and international attention to Ladakh's pashmina-growing areas. However, each year a few families in Rupshu close their tents, sell off their herds, and settle in Leh. What the future holds for the Rupshupa and their coming generations is the subject of the final part of the thesis.

CONCLUSION

ARE THE RUPSHUPA STILL WEAVING?

- CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN RUPSHU

It is a common sight in Rupshu to see the men and women gather in their pens after the sheep and goats have left for the day's grazing. While they bask in the sun's warmth, exchange news or gossip with each other, drink numerous cups of butter-tea and consume spoonfuls of barley flour, they occupy themselves with wool-related activities. Two or three women stretch out their looms in the pen and weave a *snam-bu* or rug, an older woman nearby is busy spinning, and another may be carding her wool (Plate 69). One man is making felt, another may be stitching up his tent, and a third could be weaving a saddle-bag to carry his salt in. Even the children are involved. They scrounge around the pens for any stray bits of wool and hair, and soon fill their small bags. These wool-oriented activities occupy the Rupshupa for most of the day, and as the sun sets they roll up their looms, gather up their belongings, and vacate the pens for the livestock.

The above scene is no different from that described by early travellers, such as Dainelli or Prince Peter, who passed through Rupshu over sixty years ago (cf. section 1.2.1). However, life has changed for the Rupshupa and transformations there are visible. The first roads were built into the region in the 1970s and 1980s, and in 1994 the area opened to foreign tourists. The benefits of tourism are beginning to be recognised in Rupshu and some of the men have set up tea-stalls at tour bus halts,