

DZONGU



Dzongu is located in Northern Sikkim at an elevation ranging from 800m and 6,000m above sea level. The area has panoramic views of Mount Khanchendzonga (the third highest peak in the world). Dzongu along with its adjoining Khangchendzonga National Park and Biosphere Reserve is part of the Indo Myanmar biodiversity hotspot. It has particularly rich fauna and flora that is endemic to the area with many species of endangered vertebrates and invertebrates. The vegetation in Dzongu spans tropical and subtropical in the lower reaches of the valley to Trans Himalayan categories in the higher altitudinal

Figure 1: Dzongu on the larger map

Source: www.savetheteesta.com

areas. The area along with the adjoining Protected Areas is considered an important bird habitat area.

“...Dzongu is bounded to the south-east by Teesta river and north-east by Tholung chu (river) and to the west by rising mountain leading to Khangchendzonga... meaning 'bright auspicious forehead peak' that borders the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve (KBR) at north. A fairly triangular shaped Dzongu landscape covers approximately 78 km² geographical areas extending between 27°28' – 27°38' N lat. and 88°23' – 88°38' E long. (as judged from Google Earth) along the 700 m to 6000 m amsl altitude. Dzongu further extends from Sheep-Gyer in the east to Sakyong-Pentong village in the west and Kishong Cho Lake in north to Lum village in the south. The area is characterized by diverse snowy mountainous landscape with steep and narrow valleys and gorges with well drained flanking slopes, receiving high rainfall between June and September. Owing to dense forest cover, the area experiences showers almost throughout the year. The area represents three climatic zones viz. sub-tropical, temperate and alpine. Further, the area may be divided into two parts, viz. Upper Dzongu... and the Lower Dzongu... Dzongu is the abode of majority of Lepchas [21]; however, as per 2004 official list of voters, it has a total population of approximately 4513 persons (ca. 10% of total Lepcha population of Sikkim), spreads over 38 villages.”

Source: <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=2567294>

THE LEPCHAS and DZONGU



'Lepcha' is an exoethnonym (a name given by person/s outside of the tribe) that is used most commonly to denote this tribe which is spread over India (Sikkim and the Darjeeling hills), Nepal and south western Bhutan. Lepchas are indigenous to the hills of Sikkim and Darjeeling. They refer to themselves as *mutanchi rongkup* which means 'children of the snowy peak or children of the gods'. They were hunters and gatherers and lived complete nomadic lives till mid-nineteenth century when they began practicing settled agriculture. They are originally animists. The influence of Buddhism has grown since the eighteenth century. In recent times, many Lepchas have been seen to be

inclined towards Christianity also though often the original shamanistic beliefs and practices are seen to be mixed with those of the new religion¹.

Lepchas believe that they were created to protect and worship the Kanchendzonga. In the foothills of the mighty mountain they believe is a hidden paradise, the *Mayel yang* from which every Lepcha originated and is destined to go back in his/her after life.

The Lepcha people are the only residents of Dzongu. For an ordinary Lepcha, Dzongu is a pilgrimage place of superior importance. It is an area to which every Lepcha traces his/her lineage and ancestry to. The Lepcha history and culture is intricately woven into its natural environment: the mountains, rivers, lakes and forests, especially those of

Figure 3 The Teesta separating Dzongu (right) from the rest of North Sikkim



Dzongu. Almost every part of Dzongu has a legend behind it. The river Teesta, its tributaries, each hill and rock comes alive with a story that makes it seem like it always was like a human life form but has only now decided to keep silent. The elders narrate these legends believing that there are deities that reside in the rivers, forests, springs, lakes or hills and that they still exist to guide and protect every member of the tribe and would avenge any harm to nature or to the tribe if it ever occurred.

Dzongu was declared a Lepcha Reserve in the 1960's when Sikkim was still a kingdom ruled by Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal. Outsiders, even from within Sikkim require a permit to enter Dzongu. It is perhaps the only place which contains the last relics of the Lepcha identity: including traditional houses, bamboo bridges ("made from long sections of split bamboo, a

¹ Also see <http://lepcha.info/literature/>

ingenious feat of grass root engineering²), the *bongthing* (the Lepcha shaman) and the *mun* (the female counterpart of the same) - bridges between the human, the natural and the super natural worlds- revered monasteries, trees, lakes, hot springs, forests, caves, hills, mountains and the rivers worshipped and propitiated regularly through elaborate ceremonies.

Although the routes of modernity can be traced within Dzongu, the belief in ancient traditions and concepts along with the ‘new’ knowledge that ‘development’ brings finds an interesting mix within the Lepcha lifestyle of today. Since the 1980’s after A.R. Foning’s book ‘Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe’, the word “vanishing” has become inseparable with descriptions of the tribe. Aware of their dwindling identity, Lepchas from across the Himalayan countries, especially India, Bhutan and Nepal have become more and more vociferous about the need to protect their ethnicity and culture. This need is reiterated especially in face of the fact that despite being the indigenous people to the Sikkim and Darjeeling, they have been rendered as minorities in both.

STATUS OF DZONGU and THE LEPCHAS

In addition to Dzongu being declared a Reserve for the Lepchas, the Lepchas were acknowledged to be Sikkim’s “original indigenous inhabitants” by a Supreme Court verdict on 10th February 1993. The State Government also granted the Lepchas the status of a Primitive Tribe Group in November 2006.

LIVELIHOOD

CULTIVATED LAND in Hectares (Census 1996 – ’97)

Paddy	102.5
Cardamom	1339.36
Dry field	1219.60
Inc. Pvt. Forest	11
Barren Land	28.60
Khasmal	3438.89
Reserved Forest	160.71
<i>Gow chara</i>	1425.11

Major cultivation:

Cardamom (produce from which has drastically decreased over the past few years seriously affecting the economic well being of majority of the Lepchas within Dzongu).

Other cultivation:

Rice, wheat, pulses, ginger, potato, oranges, maize, millet, *phaper* and vegetables.

² Pema Wangchuk in <http://www.questhimalaya.com/placesofinterest/north-sikkim-dzongu.htm> (downloaded on 11.12.08)

Animal livestock:

Cattle, goats, pigs, poultry, yak and sheep (in areas like Sakyong Pentung) and horses (in Hee Gyathang).

SACRED SPACES WITHIN DZONGU



Figure 4 Sacred Tree in Hee Gyathang



Figure 5 Site of worship in a lake

Sacred spaces include lakes, forest areas, hills, rivers, caves and may also include agricultural plots or individual trees or rocks (See Map I below)³.

³ Note: the map does not clearly specify what a particular 'sacred space' is. It does point out the rivers, lakes, forests, lakes, monasteries or caves etc but does not label them as 'sacred' separately. This, being a map for eco tourism, focuses on these components from a tourism perspective only.



Map I: Dzongu Ecotourism map, Source: Mr. Ugen Lepcha, MLAS, Dzongu.

Each sacred space has a legend attached to it like the aboriginal ‘Dreamings’⁴. These legends are stories that are intrinsically linked to the identity of the Lepchas and characterize their perception towards nature and its components. The necessity to preserve the sanctity of a sacred space leads to conservation of the same.

⁴ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreamtime>

The specific sites mentioned below have not been selected on the basis of any criteria but have been chosen for documentation mainly because of the easy access and availability of information through village elders in the limited time and resources available. There are of course innumerable sacred sites within Dzongu, some of which have been documented extensively; all of which point to the intricate link between the Lepcha identity and his surrounding natural environment, efforts to protect and preserve which are driven by not only the fear of irreparable ecological damage to the fragile ecosystem but also by an ever increasing fear of losing their identity with it forever.

I. *Tung Kyong Doh*: The sacred lake of Tung Kyong

The lake is situated at Hee Gyathang village of Lower Dzongu. The legend attached to the lake was narrated by Mr. Choden Lepcha, a local elder (See Annexure I).



PROTECTION OF THE SACRED SITE

A particular clan of the Lepchas who are believed to be descendents of Hee Yong Ming Moo, Thinggockmu's second son (see legend associated with the lake), still exist in the village of Gyathang where the lake is. They worship and protect the lake. The *pooja* of the lake takes place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the Tibetan calendar⁵. The lake and the fish within are revered by all Lepchas. It is believed to be a place for wish fulfillment. The increase in the population of the fish symbolizes the potential increase of the clan itself.

⁵ As told by Mr. Choden Lepcha. The use of the Tibetan calendar denotes the Tibetan influence.

The various clans within the Lepcha tribe have their origins linked to legend like the above. And almost all of the legends include nature and its components as active players. For example, the origins Aramputso and Arampanchat clan, one of the largest Lepcha clans, is linked to the Rongyong River, the Runglee kyong water fall and stream in the Ting Bung village of Upper Dzongu. Protection of these rivers, streams etc. are therefore the responsibility of the respective clan.

II. Sacred Areas within Lindong Gram Panchayat⁶

Apart from *Tung Kyong Doh* which gives an idea of the sacredness of one particular natural resource (in this case a lake), the legend attached, the protection mechanisms and the lineage drawn from it, it is important to understand the same concepts expanding to include an entire landscape itself. Therefore some description of the Lindong Gram Panchayat below⁷.

Although all the Lepchas revere Mt. Kanchendzonga in general as sacred, every village worships the hill it resides in, in particular. Lindong is a Gram Panchayat in Lower Dzongu. It consists of about six such hills. (A short movie clip spanning these is attached). Some of the sacred areas within this little Gram Panchayat are highlighted below: .

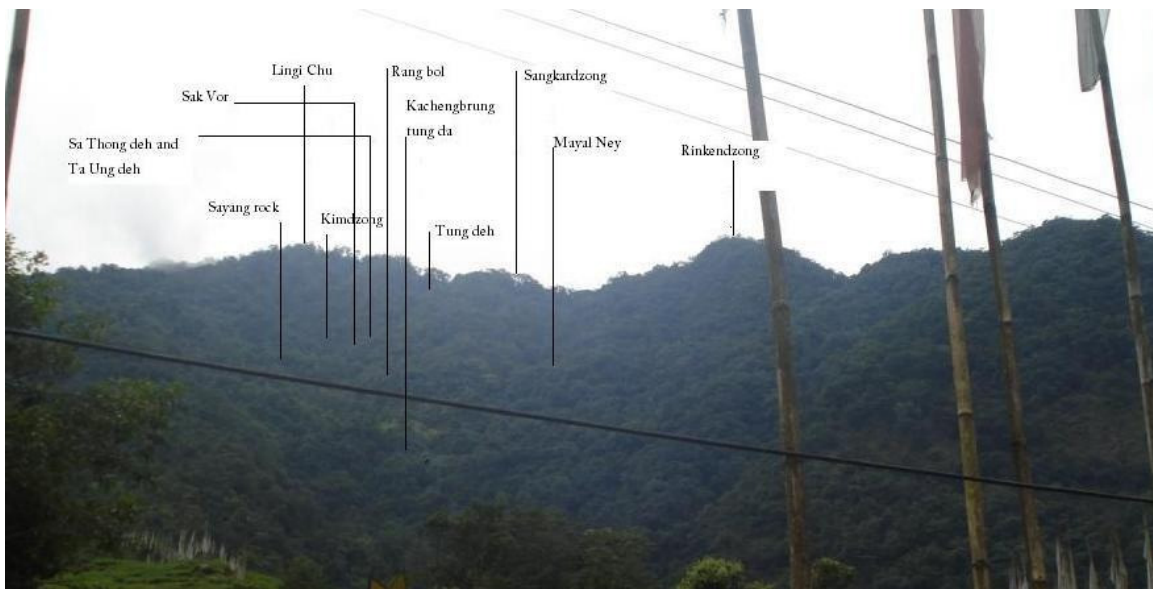


Figure 7: Sacred sites within Lindong

⁶ A Gram Panchayat (mainly a village) is the lowest unit of the local institutional structure in the rural areas as per the Indian Constitution.

⁷ As told by Mr. Lazang Lepcha and Mr. Norgay Lepcha, elders from the Lindong Gram Panchayat

Hills and Sacred Groves: In the above picture, three sacred hills are highlighted: *Lingi Chu*, which is the most important for this village with *Tung Deh* (who/which is considered *Lingi Chu*'s 'wife'), followed by *Sandkardzong* and *Rinkendzong*.

Kanchenbrung tung da is a sacred grove: its forests and rocks are revered and worshipped by the locals.

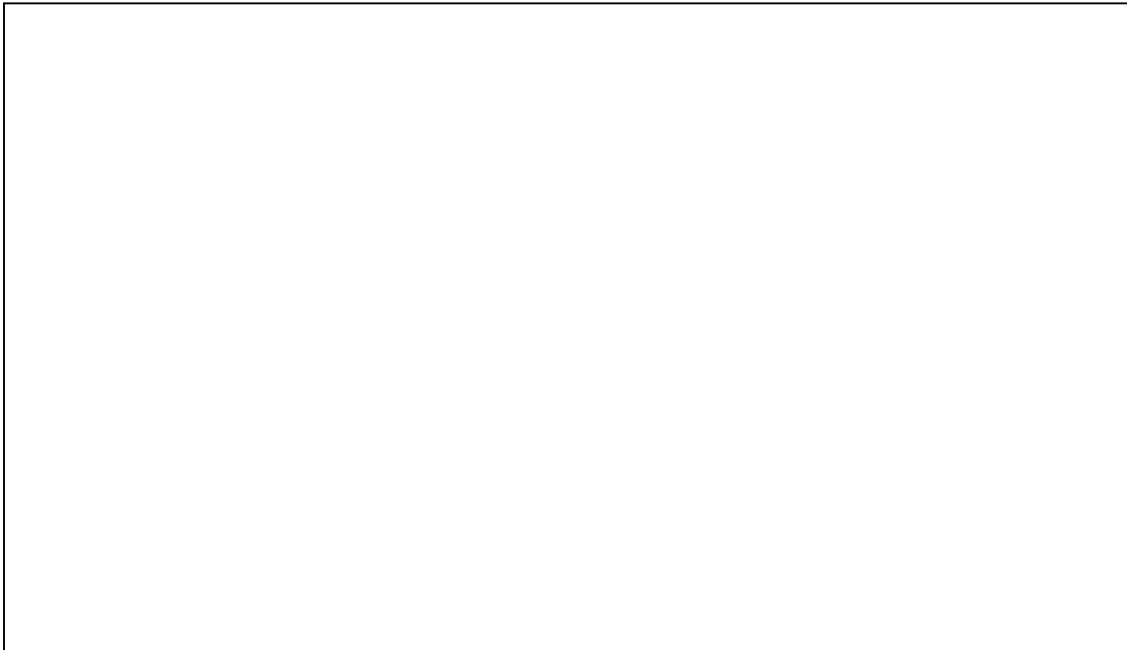
Holy Lakes and water sources: The holy lakes like *Sa Thong deh* and *Ta Ung deh* are revered and worshipped by the villagers.

Mayel Ney, another sacred spot, is a perennial water source, which is quite surprising, the elders say, because the area otherwise is dry.

Known habitat: *Rangbol* within the forest is a habitat for the jungle bee (species unknown).

PENALTY ON DEFILEMENT OR DEGRADATION OF SACRED SPACE:

In the event of any defilement of a sacred space, there is no organized mechanism to charge penalty or issue a punishment. It is mostly believed that the local deities (of the respective lake, forest, spring or field) will issue the retribution. Locals cite numerous examples of people falling sick because they polluted a lake or damaged a sacred tree etc. The process of collectively drawing a set of rules and regulations to protect the sacred sites has not taken place presumably because the faith in supernatural retribution is so strong.



MAJOR THREAT:

There are about 29 mega hydel projects coming up within the small and fragile state of Sikkim. The river Teesta, which is a turbulent river, drops from an elevation of 5, 280 metres to about 230 metres over a distance of 175 km⁸, makes itself ideal for generation of hydro power. But the scientific logic behind the number of projects planned is questionable, especially considering that the area is geologically very fragile⁹ and that the glaciers feeding the river will soon be dry. Apprehensions against the projects, being expressed from all quarters including local citizens, civil society and the scientific community, are also based on the fact that they would change the ecology of the region irreparably as the river Teesta would be reduced to a trickle in some parts, forest and agricultural areas will be submerged and the blasting conducted during dam construction would lead to frequent landslides. The Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, necessary under law to acquire and environmental clearance, are shoddy¹⁰ and lack even in factual clarity. The result of the blasting are already being felt especially in the areas of Stage V (already under construction) of the project, in the vicinity of Dzongu, where houses and land have started to disintegrate and slip.

WITHIN DZONGU

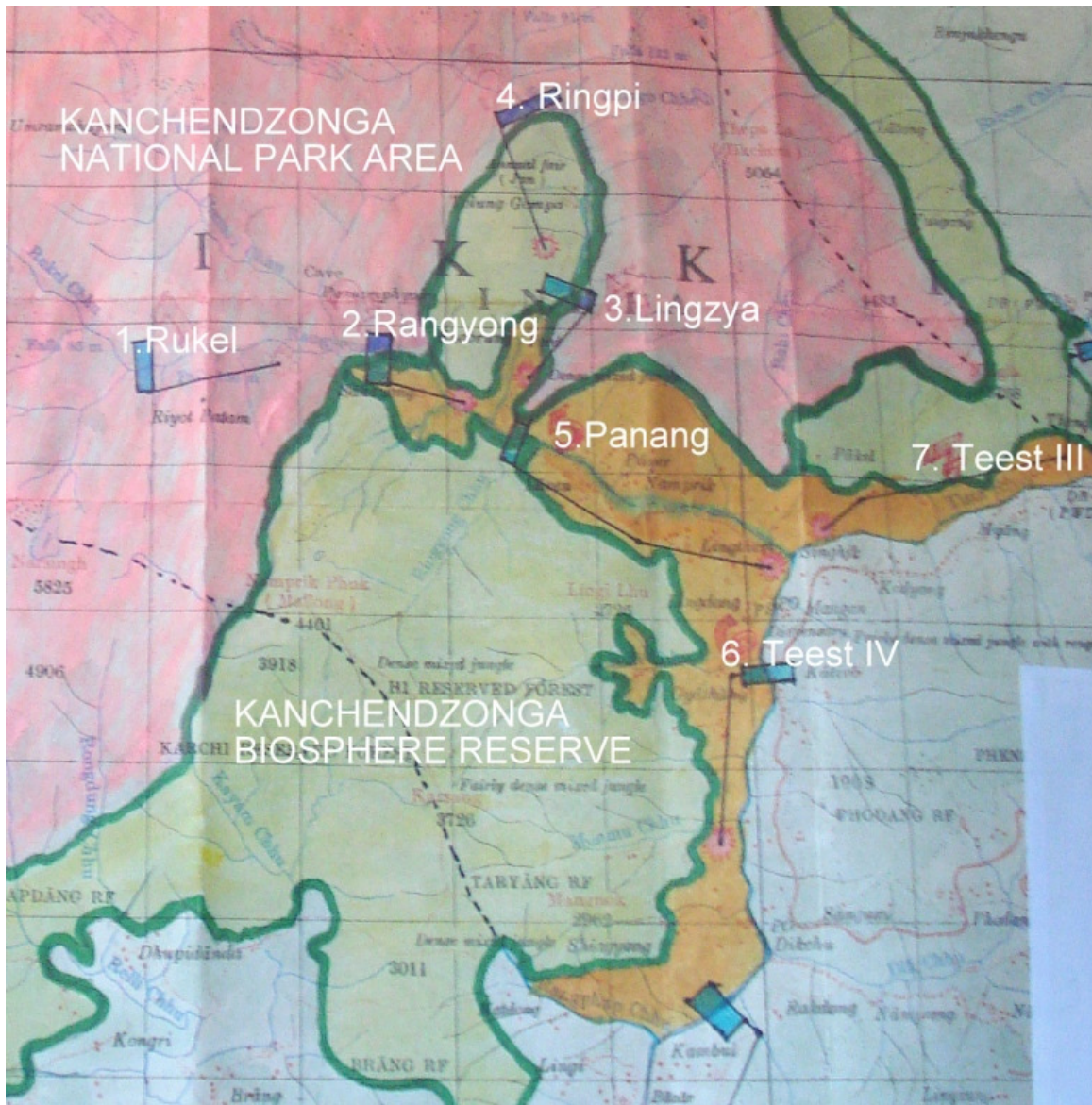
Two of these large hydro power projects: the Panang / Panan hydel project on the Rongyong chu and the Teesta IV on the Teesta are proposed to be located within the Lepcha Reserve of Dzongu. A large component of Teesta Stage III also falls within the Dzongu Reserve.

⁸ www.actsikkim.com

⁹ Sikkim falls within seismic zone IV and thus is extremely earthquake prone. Almost every village of Dzongu has notice boards put up by the Government on community preparedness for earthquakes.

¹⁰ See for example article on the EIA report of Teesta Stage III. If you know who has written the article and so on please give a full reference here along with the website. Web links may change over the years and then people will not know which article you were talking about.

<http://www.businessstandard.in/india/storypage.php?autono=311143>



Map II: Dams proposed within Dzongu Source: Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT)

The Rangyong, Ringpi, Lingzya and Rukel projects (shown in the map above) were scrapped by the State Government in June 2008¹¹ on the grounds of both local protests and lack of fulfillment of formalities on behalf of the project proponents.

A section of the Lepchas within Dzongu organized themselves as Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) are now strategizing to pressurize the Government to also scrap the Panan Project on the Rongyong Kyong and the Teesta Stage IV.

These projects have severe impact on not only the ecology of the region but also the cultural and democratic identity of the Lepchas who consider Dzongu their last bastion ¹².

¹¹ See <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2008/06/17/stories/2008061751272100.htm>

The Lepchas also feel that the influx of labour from the plains will reduce them to a minority even within the Reserve. There are also serious health concerns that are raised not only because of the ecological impact of the dams but also because of the labour migration.



Unfortunately for the Lepchas, as so for majority of the communities within India, the social, cultural and ecological costs of a ‘developmental project’ are highly subsidized while clearing the project.

That is why the members of ACT are still in a relay hunger strike in Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, and now complete over 500 days of their *Satyagraha*¹³ to preserve Dzongu.

Figure 7: Photo of Dawa Lepcha in a restaurant in Mangan, North Sikkim. Dawa, along with Tenzing Lepcha went on a 96 day hunger strike to protest against the dams.

Watch monks pray to bring enlightenment to the policy makers:

<http://ibnlive.in.com/videos/45230/buddhist-monks-pray-for-sikkims-sake.html>

Watch CNN IBN report on the hydro power projects impact on the Kanchendzonga National Park as being representative of the classic environment vs development debate.

<http://ibnlive.in.com/videos/45441/html>

SOME LOCAL REACTIONS

Not all residents of Dzongu oppose the hydro power projects. For most of these Lepchas, who till now were mostly reliant on cardamom as their main source of livelihood (which is now failing), to oppose the Government would mean inviting unfavourable implications: including family members losing Government jobs etc. Some locals also feel that to be compensated financially for the lands which anyways do not yield any economic benefits (land in Sikkim cannot be bought by a non Sikkimese) is an easy way of earning money. Not much has been documented on arguments in favour of the dams in this Report. They exist within Dzongu itself and the tension between the ones in favour and the ones against is palpable even to an outsider. Individuals opposing the dams report of unfair means being used to influence public opinion including the use of force and finance. But this situation is not new in Sikkim and adjoining hills, which has a history

¹² ACT gives a list of 12 monasteries that will be affected by the projects.

¹³ *Satyagraha* is a concept propagated by Gandhiji. It refers to the power of the truth coupled with non violence can be a force greater than that of any other force. He also called it the ‘soul force’ or ‘love force’ that changes ‘the other’ by vindication of the truth through one’s own suffering and pain.

(even recent) of public opinion being influenced, not so much by awareness and information that strengthens and refines individual awareness and decision, but through subtle dictatorship which is founded on the manipulation of class insecurity and is asserted through coercive mob pressure.

Within Dzongu, the locals who oppose the dams are aware of the damage that the projects are going to cause, they also still believe in the lineage and the history that Dzongu holds for them and feel the need to preserve that.



Figure 8 Mr. Lhazang Lepcha (with the list from the DC) and Mr. Norgay Lepcha

Lingdong (sacred landscape mentioned above) is one of the villages which stands in opposition to the hydro power projects being proposed within the Dzongu Reserve by the State Government of Sikkim, especially State IV of the project which is said to wipe out almost the entire GP. People within the GP are united in opposing the land acquisition that is being carried out through the District Collector's office. Even while the researcher was

there, Mr. Norgay, Gram Panchayat member of Lingdong GP demonstrated a letter that had arrived from the DC's office that summoned the villagers

whose lands are to be acquired for the project.

“Local perspectives on the hydro power projects change because people are innocent; there is a great dearth of awareness and opinion is mainly manipulated by the Government through strategies like compensation and muscle power.”

Tsering, Lingdong GP

“I will not leave my land till I die. This land has been bestowed to us by our ancestors. Our deities of the forests, the streams and lakes reside here and we live in their shelter. If this perishes, the Lepcha will perish. If we sell our lands, we will write off our own doom”.

Norgay Lepcha, Lingdong GP

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE:

‘The Chief Minister (Mr. Pawan Chamling) said on the 7th of March: *“I want this on record and maintain that we will go ahead with all the power projects in Dzongu. These projects will not be called off because we refuse to compromise with any initiative we know to be for the development of the people of this land and state. We will complete these projects and make Sikkim the top-revenue earning state in the country. A few anti-development people cannot deter our vision; we will not allow development to be held hostage by them.”* His comment in lieu of any official publishing of a fair and transparent

review of the projects shows that his promises to the Lepchas and the people of Sikkim about sustainable development are hollow.’ Source: www.savetheesta.com

Unheard voices of Protest in Sikkim

Vibha Arora

Economic and Political Weekly August 25, 2007

For the Lepchas, the implementation of the Teesta hydel project and the loss of Dzongu (the ancient Lepcha reserve) may result in ethnocide, the disappearance of their cultural heritage that is rooted to their ancestral connections and performance of rituals connected to the land, forests, mountains, lakes, and nature, in general. Dzongu and the sacred peaks of Mt Khangchendzonga are considered a ‘mayellyang’ (a celestial paradise) in Lepcha cosmology and revered by all Lepchas. The historic Tholung monastery safeguarding Sikkim’s nationalist treasures and sacred texts is also located in this endangered reserve and has survived many earthquakes over the last few years. It is a very sacred site associated with Lhatsun Chenpo, one of the patron saints of Sikkim.

The river Teesta is not merely a source of water, but the very lifeline of Sikkim. Sikkimese folklore is aflush with myths and stories about how civilisation and humans settled along the course of the river and the Lepchas skillfully constructed cane-bridges across this river. According to an ancient Lepcha myth, an infuriated Teesta caused a deluge when he lost the race to his lover, the sacred river Rangit. In this ancient myth, the rest of Sikkim was flooded and all life perished in that great deluge. On August 8, the Lepchas annually worship Mount Tendong, as this mountain offered sanctuary to human, animal, and other living creatures during the deluge caused by the river Teesta. During these prayers, gods and the spirits of the land are propitiated to ensure the fertility of the land, maintain the environmental balance, and ensure peace and harmony in Sikkim, the Darjeeling Hills and the entire world. This myth of deluge has a renewed ecological relevance in the current context of objections raised to the implementation of the Teesta hydel project in north Bengal and Sikkim. This myth encodes an environmental wisdom that has sustained the Lepchas in this shifting precarious landscape for centuries...

CONCLUSION

When the human’s relationship with Nature is traced back to the primitive days, one finds that the concept of conservation is not new. Communities across the globe have been worshipping and conserving Nature and its various components since ancient times. But this act of conservation was an intricate part of the everyday lifestyle and world view of the communities. The belief in the need to conserve was substantiated by other aspects of an individual or community’s life including social relations, religion, economics, trade etc. As time has passed, this equation between Nature and human has changed drastically and so has the understanding and need to conserve. Today, conservation ironically derives its importance from the human’s new realization of the mostly utilitarian significance of nature in its otherwise disconnected existence with the latter. It is primarily a western concept that is based on the essential dichotomy between human and nature. Therefore, the need to conserve is essentially an action ‘to be done’ ‘from the outside’, the dichotomy between the human and nature still exists.

On the other hand most tribal cultures view nature not as an externality, but a manifestation of life in general of which they are a part. Thus, their social, cultural and religious beliefs and practices are based on the inherent belief in nature and its 'living presence' in all its aspects like trees, rivers, mountains, birds, animals etc; all of these hold a sacred significance in the tribal's life and is manifested in the tribal's folk lores, legends, religious beliefs and practices, healing methods etc. 'Conservation' of these aspects of nature, therefore, is largely a subtle but inbuilt by-product of these beliefs and practices.

In the event of increasing pressure on natural resources followed by the 'development' practices of the globalized era, the everyday practices of the tribal which were otherwise fairly in harmony with the natural systems of degradation and regeneration, have become polarized into either 'conservationist' in nature or 'degrading'.

The modern day tribal whose lifestyle, belief and culture is already marginalized from the mainstream western 'development' processes be it in education, health, livelihoods and sometimes even religion, is left with no choice but to adjust his/her orientation to the 'modern' definitions and perspectives, especially of conservation¹⁴. Therefore practices which were otherwise only a part of a 'whole' culture that were relatively congruent to sustainable lifestyle are segregated from the 'whole' and studied or analyzed in its exclusivity, typical of western methods of analyses. Therefore the concepts of sacred groves, forests, rivers etc. are increasingly being seen as fascinating 'tools' towards conservation being 'offered' by traditional tribal cultures.

Such a practice gives the modern day 'conservationist' to sit judge of an ancient culture and decide the 'good' and 'bad' in it. The concepts of sacredness and conservation are only a part of an entire belief system that is still in many ways regarded as 'unscientific' and also 'superstitious'. If these cultures are to be truly preserved, it would have to be done in totality with respect and reverence for even those aspects which modern day 'science' cannot/has not been able to validate.

The above analysis is not bereft of the understanding that the tribal may no longer be one in the modern day scenario. This process of losing identity (the one that is reflected in one's life, religion, politics, economics etc.) has been long and gradual. It owes itself to factors intrinsic within the tribal community as well as external. But to be part of a country which consciously decided to ignore the diversity and inexplicability of the tribal culture and over ride them with a uniform development paradigm riding largely on western 'scientific' knowledge, the tribals of the country had no choice but to be victims of circumstance and lent themselves to a slow process of denying and disconnecting from their own beliefs and practices.

¹⁴ This viewpoint is based solely on personal observations.

But the cultures exist, especially in parts where the ‘medusa haired’ pathways of ‘development’ have not reached. The people there of course wait for a metalled road, a television or maybe still electricity, all of which are the ‘boons’ of modern civilization. What they probably do not foresee is that, these ‘gifts’ also carry a price with them. But in the present day context, the need to rise above externally defined poverty is so high that the ‘price’ seems only too little to sacrifice.

Our perceptions towards tribal communities are mostly coloured and determined by our own view points of reality. Where our romantic view of the tribal as conservers of the forest was mostly to do with our romanticizing the ‘simple’, ‘close to nature’ life when we became more and more conscious and guilty of our consumeristic lifestyles and what it was doing to Mother Earth, movements such as the Narmada Bacchao Andolan, the Fish workers movement and the Chipko Andolan widened this view to also include the material livelihood aspect to the incentives behind community conservation. In lauding these efforts by the community, we also attempt to create for them a permanent identity, turning a blind eye to the fact that communities are dynamic and so is their reality, their perceptions towards natural resources and their motives for conservation or even exploitation.

Lepchas as the guardians of the sacred grove are gaining ground in the current context of their cultural revival in the regional ethnopolitics. Such a politicisation of indigenous knowledge and sacred landscapes is discernible... in development contexts such as implementation of hydel projects in Sikkim (India) and Canada. Ideas of indigenous conservation cannot be divorced from the context of peoples’ material practices, their ethnic aspirations and relations with the state. Any state policy aiming to revive community conservation needs to recognise the cultural politics materially expressed and ritualised in the sacred grove.

Source: Arora, Vibha: **Conservation and Society**, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2006

Thus my unwillingness to call Dzongu a Community Conserved Area. For I do not know if the efforts to conserve by a fraction of this population will last another decade. I do not know if the rest of the community can be questioned as lacking in conservationist intention just because some of them do not have the luxury or the information to decide whether or not to give away their lands for the power projects. I also do not know if left up to the Lepchas, the Biosphere Reserve, the National Sanctuary and the Lepcha Reserve itself will not have any ‘developmental’ activities that are ecologically destructive.

What I am only sure of is that the decision of a group of Lepchas to now portray themselves as ‘primordial environmentalists¹⁵’ to protect the landscape that is the only haven to save their otherwise “vanishing¹⁶” identity. But I refrain from calling them ‘environmentalists’ or ‘conservationists’ as these terms are not inclusive of a tribe’s ever

¹⁵ Arora, Vibha, ‘Conservation and Society’, 2006

¹⁶ The word “vanishing” was used by A. R. Foning in his book ‘Lepcha, my Vanishing Tribe’ 1987.

varying, ever so dynamic existence. But I do see a value to documenting the Lepcha transition because it has reached a stage where all cultures and lifestyles that have so far supported or are congruent with conservation and which have so far lived in harmony with Nature will eventually reach: in direct confrontation with the demands of present day ‘development’.

I see a value to lend support to the Lepcha struggle against the hydro power dams mainly because it is a way by which a tribe’s relationship with nature and its own sustainable lifestyles can be revisited and reinvented. After all it is in these lost cultures which were much in harmony with nature than we have been or ever will be, lie the answers to the present impasse that ‘development’ as of today has reached.

It is in this context that the games of bargain are being played in modern day Dzongu. Dzongu, with its scenic landscape rising above the esoteric¹⁷ Teesta is rich with its forests, lakes, hills and rivers. But what gives it life are the Lepchas. The Lepcha life which is intricately connected to the Mt. Khangchendzonga, the Teesta, the forests, the birds and the wildlife that makes the entire landscape breathe into existence for a newcomer.

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS:

	ORGANIZATION / GROUP	FOCUS	CONTACT
1.	Affected Citizens of the Teests (ACT)	1. Struggle against the hydro power projects.	2. Mr. Tseten Lepcha, Phone: 09434033777, e mail: golden_hope@hotmail.com 3. Mr. Dawa Lepcha, e mail: someray2000@yahoo.com
2.	Mutanchi Lom Aal Shezum (MLAS)	1. Health 2. Education 3. Livelihoods (Ecotourism and Self Help Groups)	4. Mr. Ugen Lepcha, e mail: upl_2002@hotmail.com , mlasngo@gmail.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

1. Mr. Tseten Lepcha
2. Mr. Dawa Lepcha
3. Mr. Pema Lepcha

¹⁷ Meaning “Confined to and understandable by only an enlightened inner circle” Word Web

4. Ms. Mayalmit Lepcha and family
5. Mr. Ugen Lepcha
6. Mr. Choden Lepcha
7. Mr. Norgay Lepcha
8. Mr. Lhazang Lepcha
9. Mr. Tsering Lepcha
10. Mr. Loden Lepcha and family

ADDITONAL information:

On Sikkim's biological diversity:

<http://www.questhimalaya.com/moreabout/sikkim-biodiversity.htm>

<http://www.sikenvis.nic.in/docs/checklist/RARE%20AND%20ENDANGERED%20FAUNA%20OF%20SIKKIM.pdf>

<http://www.sikenvis.nic.in/docs/checklist/Endangered%20Species.pdf>

http://www.wii.gov.in/nwdc/threatened_plants_sikkim.pdf

On Dzongu

<http://www.questhimalaya.com/placesofinterest/north-sikkim-dzongu.htm>

On Lepchas and ethnomedicine:

<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=2567294>

On the Lepcha struggle against the hydropower projects:

www.actsikkim.com

www.savetheesta.com

Newsreports on the anti dam struggle:

'Debating Development with Gandhigiri in Sikkim' by Vibha Arora
(*'Now!'*, Sikkim, July 1, 2008)

'Dammed in' by Neeraj Vaholika (The Hindu, December 23, 2007)

(<http://www.hindu.com/mag/2007/12/23/stories/2007122350030200.htm>)

'Teesta's Tears' by Dionne Bunsha

(<http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2512/stories/20080620251209500.htm>)

'Plumbing the Teesta' by Neeraj Vagholika (The Statesman, November 19, 2007)

'Satyagraha for The Teesta' by Neeraj Vagholika (Tehelka, 29 September 2007)

Annexure I

Legend of the Tung Kyong lake as narrated by Mr. Choden Lepcha

Thinggockmu, a monkey like God lived in a place called Tungprumrul. He and a priest called Lickkumzergen met at Gyathang. They came to know of a goddess called Nyu Kyongbu in the Tung Kyong duh (the holy lake). They uncovered her from the earth in the lake. The goddess was extremely flustered by this act.

The priest advised Thinggockmu to marry the goddess. After testing his own prowess, the god decided to win over Nyu Kyongbu. When she challenged him to an exhibition of power, he threw a plate shaped rock up the hill. The rock landed in Gockmukung, a place above which now is the Hee Gyathang monastery. This rock still exists and the place is revered. When Thinggockmu asked Nyu Kyongbu to demonstrate her powers, she let loose her hair and dropped lice into the lake which later became fish called Dengnuelick.

Annexure II

SACRED BELIEFS (examples) of the Lepchas:

1. Deforestation can cause generations to perish.
2. Birds are used to predict cropping patterns, rainfall, existence of root tubers, ominous news etc.
3. Worship of snakes and snake habitats.
4. Natural objects including stones etc. should not be displaced from their natural surroundings like a forest or a stream. It brings ill health.
5. Forest fires portend famine and therefore should be prevented.
6. Separate religious prayer ceremonies for the worship of forests, grain, to propitiate hail and prevention of sickness.

Annexe 1:Format for the preliminary database of CCA sites in India

Basic data (please provide all)

Site Name (in local language and in English)	Dzongu
Country (include State and Province)	Sikkim, India
Area encompassed by the CCA (specify unit of measurement).	78 km ²
GIS Coordinates (if available)	
Main ecosystem type	The area represents three climatic zones viz. sub-tropical, temperate and alpine.
Whether it includes sea areas (Yes or no)	No
Whether it includes freshwater (Yes or no)	Yes
Marine (Y or N)	N
Concerned community (name and approx. number of persons)	The Lepcha community: population of 4513 as per the 2004 census.
Is the community considering itself an indigenous people? (Please note Yes or No; if yes note which people)	Yes, the Lepchas.
Is the community considering itself a minority? (Please note Yes or No, if yes on the basis of what, e.g. religion, ethnicity)	Yes, in terms of ethnicity and religion.
Is the community permanently settled? (Please note Yes or No; if the community is mobile, does it have a customary transhumance territory?)	Yes.
Is the community local per capita income inferior, basically the same or superior to national value? (please note how confident you are about the information)	
Is the CCA recognised as a protected area by governmental agencies? (Yes or no; if yes, how? If no, is it otherwise recognized?) If yes, legal document? Establishment date?	Lepcha Reserve
Conflicts with land tenure, natural resource use?	
What is the main management objective (e.g. livelihood, cultural, spiritual...)	Cultural, spiritual and against development projects.
By definition, a CCA fulfils a management objective. To which IUCN management category ¹⁸ do you consider it would best fit (this does not imply that the management objective is consciously pursued by the concerned community, but that it is actually achieved)	Protected Landscape also including Natural Monuments.

Additional qualitative information

Description of biodiversity & resources (ecosystems, species, functions) conserved by the CCA	Dzongu along with its adjoining Khangchendzonga National Park and Biosphere Reserve is part of the Indo Myanmar biodiversity hotspot. It has particularly rich fauna and flora that is endemic to the area with many species of endangered vertebrates and invertebrates.
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¹⁸ Please see http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/wpc2003/pdfs/outputs/pascat/pascatrev_info3.pdf

	The vegetation in Dzongu spans tropical and subtropical in the lower reaches of the valley to Trans Himalayan categories in the higher altitudinal areas. The area along with the adjoining Protected Areas is considered an important bird habitat area.
Description of local ethnic groups and languages spoken	Lepchas speaking Lepcha, Nepali and English.
Broad historical context of the CCA	Dzongu was declared a Lepcha Reserve in the 1960's when Sikkim was still a kingdom ruled by Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal. The Lepcha people are the only residents of Dzongu. For an ordinary Lepcha, Dzongu is a pilgrimage place of superior importance. It is an area to which every Lepcha traces his/her lineage and ancestry to. The Lepcha history and culture is intricately woven into its natural environment: the mountains, rivers, lakes and forests, especially those of Dzongu. Outsiders, even from within Sikkim require a permit to enter Dzongu. It is perhaps the only place which contains the last relics of the Lepcha identity.
Governance structure for the CCA (who takes management decisions, how?)	No formal management systems.
Length of time the governance model has been in place	
Land and resource ownership in the CCA	Individual and community
Type of land use in the CCA	Protected areas like the National park and the Biosphere Reserve, agricultural land, sacred groves and other traditionally protected areas.
Existence of written or oral management plans and specific rules for the use of natural resources in the CCA	Oral- traditional
Map and zoning of the CCA (please attach if available and relevant,)	Attached, in the Report
Relevant pictures with captions (please attach if available)	Attached, in the Report
Major threats to biodiversity and/or the CCA governance system	Mega development projects
Local CCA-relevant features, stories, names, rules and practices	Attached, in the Report
Gender aspect of the CCA (elaborate)	
Climate change attributes(elaborate)	

Contact individuals and organizations: here it is vital to have names of contacts directly related to the community governing the CCA: Attached, in the Report.

References¹⁹: please stress references describing the conservation, cultural and socio-economic values of the CCAs.

¹⁹ Please use the same format of the references in:

<http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/Publications/TILCEPA/guidelinesindigenouspeople.pdf>