

The *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas: An Overview and Analysis

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Abstract: *The Naamtho-Naamthaar of the Lepchas is a sacred literary narratives, it provides a detailed account of their culture and way of life. It is mostly based on stories from mythology. The Naamtho-Naamthaar considered to be the sacred literature, likewise the Lepchas cherished it and kept it a secret. Consequently, it encompasses the Lepchas social, political, religious, cultural, and philosophical consciousness, beginning with hunting and gathering, agriculture, cultivation, and the introduction of institutions like marriage and the family that date back to both the legendary and historical periods. It is also regarded as a significant literary achievement that helps us comprehend the existence of the Lepchas. Nonetheless, this paper elucidates the overview and analysis of the historical status of the Naamtho-Naamthaar of the Lepchas.*

Key Words: *Naamtho-Naamthaar, Lepchas, section, religious, secular*

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is thought to provide a thorough description of the historical development of the Lepchas. “*Naam*” denotes a year in the Lepcha script, whereas “*Tho*” denotes record or registration. The word “*Naamthaar*,” which is followed by the suffix “*thaar*,” refers to the process of cutting bamboo or wood in a cylindrical or slanting manner to sharpen and adorn it. As a result, it is said that the narration in the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* has been periodically revised and refined from generation to generation. Generally speaking, the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* are considered to be sophisticated literary narratives, the majority of which are regarded as sacred texts.¹ Without a set chronology, it is written in both prose and verse in the Lepcha language (*Rong Aring*) and scripts (*Rong Aming*). Two major categories can be used to study it: i) Religious and ii) Secular. A substantial insight into the socio-political, economic, and religious lives of the Lepchas is given to us by the allegorically, symbolically, mythically, and factually recorded narratives in the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*.² The *Naamtho-Naamthaar* mostly discusses the role that religion plays in influencing people’s lives.

Regarding the ownership of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, it is impossible to determine the authors. Similar to how most ancient books were unsigned and undated, the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas was written by several different people and was not dated.³ But according to Augustine Waddle, these *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas are only “fictitious writings” that were created to prove their unofficial legality and recognition.⁴ The Lepcha scriptures gathered at Leiden University by Augustine Waddell, Grunwedel, Dr. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, and Dr. Van Manen were heavily affected by the Lamaist missionary literature, according to Halfdan Siiger.⁵ However, according to A. R. Fonning, the early Tibetan Buddhist lamas’ missionary work must have been the source of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*.⁶

2. OBJECTIVES

- To illustrate the scope of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*
- Analyses the historical status of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*.

3. SCOPE OF THE NAAMTHO-NAAMTHAAR

Regarding the scope of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas, it is divided into sections covering a wide range of themes, including both religious and non-religious. The earliest sections, the *Tashey-Sung* and the *Rum-Pandi*, which still have strong male and female protagonists, have been regarded as examples of both religious and non-religious

themes. These sections detail the protagonist's life and activities, emphasizing religion and other goals of life. Since it was established in the *Rum-Pandi* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* that *Tasheything* was created to reveal the *Tashey-Sung* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* after rescuing *Rumpandi*, his wife, from the human realm, these two sections demonstrate their interconnection.⁷ At the same time, they also serve as a semi-autobiography, as the narrative describes the two well-known mythological figures who were born in human form. Throughout the *Nyolik-Nyosaong* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, the legendary nature continues until the human form, where *Mun* (priestess) is depicted as a go-between for god and people. Furthermore, both the *Kamyo-Kamsi* and *Kingchum-Darmit* sections of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* are regarded as religious forms that prioritize moral and ethical principles. Nonetheless, the *Rong Kup Lung Ten Ah-Bong Kung Sung* is a non-religious form, as it depicts the *Naamtho-Naamthaar's* approach to feminine representation, emphasizing people's everyday lives and abilities in a fairly authentic manner.

By combining the names *Rum* (God) and *Pandi* (queen), the *Rum-Pandi* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* depicts the mortal life of *Rumpandi*, the wife of the legendary ruler *Tasheything*. In the narration, the creator sent *Rumpandi* to save all living and non-living creatures on Earth, demonstrating the creator's compassion for them. There are up to six variants for this *Rum-Pandi* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, according to Dr. Heleen Plaisier.⁸ This *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is known as *Rumpun-Di-Sa Nam-Thar* in the Van Manen Collection. Under the supervision of *Poom Shezum*, Kalimpong, and with funding from the Indian government, an anonymous calligrapher created *Rumpundi Chyosa Naongdung Aafryaon Gum*, which serves as the basis for the current piece. The Kalimpong District Lepcha Association also translated it under the title *Rum-Pandi Soong Chyo*. It is primarily composed of prose. But the first half of this section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* has been created as a long prelude to the real *Rum-Pandi* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*. The *Rum-Pandi* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is the first of its kind to introduce the present world to the legendary age. Consequently, this section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is considered to be both religious and non-religious. It explains why the legendary figure *Tasheything* himself made an appearance in the human realm alongside his spouse. She was brought down to the mortal world as the daughter of a corrupt king "to save the kings of the world from sin and to bring them to the path of religion."⁹ L. Augustine Waddell claims that due to its strong resemblance to the *Tashey-Thing* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, this composition may be as old as the latter.¹⁰ The fact that this section also states that the *Tasheything* revealed his *Tashey-Sung* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* after retaking the *Rumpandi* from the human realm lends belief to this reading of events. The *Tashey-Sung* may have been present before the *Rum-Pandi* section, though. *Rumpandi*, *Tasheything's* wife, was sent from heaven to assume the form of King *Surmukha's* daughter to save him from his immoral ways, according to the *Rum-Pandi* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*.¹¹ In this section, *Rumpandi's* selfless act after being born a princess in a king's home is described in human form. She has been confirmed as the child of *Rum* (God). With the greeting and gratitude of the whole creator of land and water, *Rumpandi* was thus referred to as the child of *Rum*, the child of God.¹² This section demonstrated the religious path and underlined the necessity of individuals being set free from sin.

The term *Tasheything*, however, has its etymological roots in the *Tashey-Sung* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, which is a composite of the three Lepcha root words "*Ta*", "*Shey*", and "*Athing*". In Lepcha, "*ta*" means "high rank" or "above", "*Shey*" refers to an omniscient person. In Lepcha, the term "*Athing*" denotes the Lord or Master. The word "*sung*" in Lepcha refers to either a sacred phrase or a story, myth, lore, legend, or narrative.¹³ Therefore, the *Tashey-Sung* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* could be described as the sacred legend of the *Tasheything*, a strong, high-ranking, omniscient master. Dr. Heleen Plaisier claims that the *Tashey-Sung* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is one of the most important works from a literary standpoint and a "pivotal masterpiece of the Lepcha literature."¹⁴ She claims that there are 23 distinct varieties of it.¹⁵ The protagonist of this section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is a celestial entity known as *Rum Tasheything*.¹⁶ This section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is considered an important work within the Lepcha religious and non-religious form, even though it is extremely difficult to assess whether it is historically authentic. L. Augustine Waddell mentions the ownership of a few Lepcha laymen as well as the *Tashey-Sung* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, which is considered to be the magnificent history of St. *Padma-Sambhava* in the Lepcha monasteries.¹⁷ The Lepcha people generally view not having or possessing a copy of this *Naamtho-Naamthaar* as blasphemy. This section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* must therefore be included and read twice, once in the morning and once at night. As a result, it can also be the most popular religious component of the Lepchas' *Naamtho-Naamthaar*. The latest compilation by Padmashree and Sangeet Natak laureate Ren Lapon Sonam Tshering Tamsangmoo Lepcha includes one of the longest sections of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*. It has roughly 3032 (three thousand and thirty-two) verses divided into 75 (seventy-five) parts. According to Sonam Tshering Lepcha, his rendition of *Rum Tashey-Sung Sa Sung* is a Tibetan work.¹⁸ As a result, the most recent translation, finished in 1991 by the District Lepcha Association, Kalimpong, serves as the primary source for this study. It highlighted the work and the significance of *Tasheything's* emancipation in a number of ways. The creator God/*Rum*, according to the author, devised this song/story for the benefit

of the Lepchas.¹⁹ The narrative explains the mythical or divine origins of *Tasheything* and how its creator, God/*Rum*, planned for it to be utilized to liberate the oppressed. The temple of the God of *Pot-Lyang* (Tibet) was constructed by *Tasheything*, who is also recognized as the founder of the king's religion.²⁰ *Tasheything*, according to the author, is the incarnate son of one lakh *Rum*, who visited this *Mayel Maluk Lyang* of the Lepchas and went about advising, instructing, and educating people about *Rum*.²¹ Thus, his teachings in the *Tashey-Sung* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* are considered to be among the most important laws of *Rum*. In addition to the text's depiction of *Tasheything* as a legendary character, his existence and deeds in the human world have also been shown as rituals related to birth, marriage, festivals, and death.²²

Another section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is the *Nyo-Lik-Nyo-Song*. In 1886, during the Lepcha year of the lamb (*Laknaam*),²³ Bhasha Samman Ren P. T. Simickmoo sharpened this section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*. The *Nyolik Nyosaong* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is a brief 68-verse composition.²⁴ The etymological meaning of *Nyolik Nyosaong* is "pompous summons."²⁵ Lyangsong Tamsang, cited by S. Lepcha, claims that this name refers to the *Nyolik Nyosaong Mun* as "the first supernatural priestess" and that she belongs to the priestess class.²⁶ The *Nyo-Lik-Nyo-song* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas is one of the most distinctive pieces among all of its sections since it is not a translation of any other previously published work.²⁷ One of the earliest and best-qualified sections of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas is regarded as *Nyo-Lik-Nyo-song*. In recent articles, Drs. Helen Plaisier and Satarupa Dutta Majumdar have both referred to it as one of the most inventive efforts to date.²⁸ In addition to the "*Mun*" priestesses, the text tells the story of how the fermented beverage Lepcha "*Chi*" came to be in the *Nyo-Lik-Nyo-Song* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*. This group is also included in religious and non-religious categories of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas. According to the text, when humans were created, the ribs and spines came from rocks and trees, while the flesh and bones came from dust. To breathe, one must employ the wind's puff and the sun god's heat from the body.²⁹ According to this, the wisdom of all the gods came together to create life on Earth. It further states that only if people follow the guidance in this holy book will they be able to enter heaven, the hallowed dwelling place of God. Additionally, the narrative tells the story of how the creator (*Tungli Tungsong*) created humans, animals, and all other living things.³⁰ The narrative claims that the *Mun* was sent to preserve the world's living things since the demon or destroyer (*Jyum Pahu Pani*) was causing them distress.³¹ Therefore, *Som-gli-som-ban*³² learned that the *Mun* and the *Boongthing* must be sent to save the living beings from the destroyer's clutches in the *Nyu-lik Nyu-Song*, a region of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*.³³ Additionally, in addition to providing the information needed to defeat the demon, the literature also described how to prepare the traditional *Chi*.³⁴

One of the sections of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is the *Kingchum-Darmit*, which focuses on the moral and ethical principles of the family. It particularly affirms these duties and obligations to the family's female members. It describes in detail how the lucky daughters were able to acquire intelligence, respect, affection, and excellent behaviour.³⁵ The everyday lives of mothers and wives, as well as their responsibilities for upholding the home, are also highlighted. The wife's duties for her husband, children, and home were also outlined in the scripture. It claims that a wife can only bring good fortune to her family if she fulfils her assigned duties.³⁶ Additionally, it advises being a good woman and treating her husband with the utmost respect; in fact, it is considered a good deed in life.³⁷ In addition, the text offers the woman a variety of pieces of advice, and the person who follows them will be rewarded with a comfortable and peaceful life.³⁸ Furthermore, the text discusses the bride price as one of the significant facets of women's lives while also reflecting their financial situation.³⁹ Nonetheless, by emphasizing that providing the poor with shelter and alms is what will enable them to flourish and obtain what they desire, this part also shares the values and practices of the good deed. It also emphasizes accomplishment and makes the observation that a person who lies, criticizes others, and lashes out at children will not succeed.

Kamyo-Kamsi Chyo section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* addresses how to gain valuable information, and it illustrates both religious and non-religious issues. This section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is divided into different parts based on the theme. The subject of finding happiness in one's life is covered in the first part. Additionally, it outlines the methods for attaining happiness and highlights that hard effort is the only path to pleasure. Furthermore, according to the *Kamyo-Kamsi* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, a person who respects their parents would continue to be happy.⁴⁰ In addition, it serves as guidance for people, suggesting that the one who tries to please and follow everyone will end up suffering.⁴¹ Nonetheless, morality drives the second part of this *Naamtho-Naamthaar*. It claims that joy and a new life await the women, men, and children who defend integrity and ethics.⁴² Consequently, it includes the guidelines that keep an eye on the women of the family to ensure they have fulfilling lives. This discourse specifies the concerns of evil minds and unpleasant activities and is based on "bad or good" behaviours. The parents are also instructed in the second section to establish strict rules for their children.⁴³ The crucial element that the person who respects the opinions of others is clever

is considered in the last part of this section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*. It also teaches that the only one who will succeed is the one who is motivated to study. The fact that a person who works hard can accomplish anything, prosper, and receive unending blessings from God was also underlined.

Rong Kup Lung Ten Ah-Bong Kung Sung, a non-religious component, is the final section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the relevant study. The shift from hunting and gathering to seed farming and the establishment of clans are just two examples of the traditions and customs that are discussed. Two main themes are also present in this text: the first considers the Lepchas' origins, while the second section discusses the origin of the Lepcha clan/*Moo*. The story of the creation of men and women opens this section. It says the man was made first, then the women were created through his left ribcage after he was discovered to be lonely. Following that, they were taken to the Lepchas' motherland, *Ney-Mayel-Lyang*.⁴⁴ Following its discussion of the creation of men and women, the text turns its attention to the evolution of human occupation. The text reflects their shift from hunting and gathering to land cultivation as their occupation. When the text's narration claims that the couple was able to clear the forest and settle down, it gives away the family's origins. They hunted fish, birds, and wild animals to survive, and they also gathered fruits and tubers, according to the text's description of their subsistence habits.⁴⁵

Other than that, a change in the course of life has been followed by a shift in the text's focus from the story of an elderly Lepcha man's encounter with *Man-Chyo-Long*, a mythical snowman. According to the narrative, the snowman taught the elderly Lepcha man how to cultivate by giving him a variety of seeds.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the text makes clear that there is a community. When the old guy says that they assist one another in establishing themselves by clearing the forests, for instance, the wording indicates that there are other individuals besides him.⁴⁷ The origin of the Lepcha clan is also revealed in the poem. The *Laso Mung*, also known as the devil, ruined the old man's community's output at one point, according to the story. Thus, after meeting with others, the old man decided to kill the *Laso Mung* (the demon). The 10 *Rongs* (Lepchas) founded the 10 clans of the Lepchas in this manner after they decided to kill the *Laso Mung* (demon).⁴⁸ At this point, the ten Lepcha clans are established, and the *Lho* adopt the twelve-year cycle, naming each year after a different animal or bird.⁴⁹

4. HISTORICAL STATUS OF THE NAAMTHO-NAAMTHAAR

Since there is no exact history for either the Lepcha language or the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, some insights into its early evolution can be gleaned by examining the various sections of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* and their diverse contexts. As mentioned in the *Rumpandi Sung Chhyo/Rum-Pandi* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, for example, the realm of *Raja Bitha* (Bharat) encircles the holy place where this book was composed.⁵⁰ It further adds that, in the north of that kingdom, there was a lake, and in the vicinity, there was a large sal tree. Additionally, it states that there was a lake in the kingdom's north and a big sal tree nearby.⁵¹ Numerous clumps of bamboo also surrounded the location. However, it might be the *Mayal Malook Lyang* (the land of paradise),⁵² which is home to Lepchas, that is likely mentioned in this connection. The mentioned land, which is probably referred to in this context, is home to a large number of Lepchas. In actuality, the terrain, as mentioned earlier, encompasses both the present-day Sikkim and the regions that have been ceded to neighbouring countries.⁵³ Additionally, the significance of the bamboo groves—which are highly important in this area—is reflected in the folklore surrounding the Lepcha marriage.⁵⁴ Regarding the massive Sal tree, it can refer to the country of Nepal, located next to the northern *Bitha* or Bharat region, where Gautama Buddha was born. This suggests that the Lepcha Holy Manuscripts are believed to have come from *Mayal Malook Lyang*.

On the one hand, the location of the *Mayal Malook Lyang* is hinted at when *Rumpandi's* father states that he wants *Rumpandi* to marry in the same place where they belong, referring to the kingdom of Bharat as *Loom Lyang*, which is home to the same community of *Tak-Boongthing* (the creator of the Lepchas).⁵⁵ Fonning's interpretation of the *Mayal Malook Lyang's* geographic boundaries, which stretch up to the rivers Arun and Tambur of Nepal to the west, *Punakha* (Bhutan) to the east, north up to the mountains, and Duars to the south, is supported by the physical differences between the Bharat as *Loom Lyang* and the *Mayal Malook Lyang*.⁵⁶ Similar geographical locations have been proposed as the homes of the protagonist *Tasheything's* wife in the *Tashey-Sung* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*. Three *Lum Lyang* (India) consorts, one *Pot Lyang* (Tibet) consort, and one *Rong* (Lepcha) consort are represented by it. Moreover, *Rumpandi* is the *Rong* (Lepcha) companion of *Tasheything*, according to the records presented in the *Rumpandi* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*.⁵⁷ Thus, it suggests that the ancient location of the Holy Manuscript, the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas, was encircled by Tibet, India, Nepal, and Bhutan. According to the facts above, the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* must have been composed before Bhutan's 1700 invasion of Sikkim and before Kalimpong's 1706 accession to Bhutan.

Furthermore, the story of the *Tasheything*'s travel to *Potlyang*, Tibet, in the *Tashey-Sung* section of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* emphasizes that Tibet did not have a religion at the time. It is further supported by the fact that *Tasheything* was summoned by the then-king of Tibet to bring religious scriptures from *Lum Lyang* (India) in order to construct the home of God.⁵⁸ This tale makes us wonder if *Tasheything*, who spread religion throughout Tibet, is the same person as Padmasambhava, who founded the first Tibetan Buddhist School in the eighth century CE.⁵⁹ Thus, according to Halfdan Siiger, who draws on Lepcha folklore, "Lamaism had almost reached its peak in Tibet, and by the second son of *Zo Khe Bu* and his two brothers introduced it into Sikkim around the middle of the 16th century CE." All Lepcha texts and books, including mythology, stories, laws, literature, and other historical data, are allegedly collected and destroyed.⁶⁰ According to Padmashree and Sangeet Natak Awardee Sir Sonam Tshering Lepcha, the traditional idea expressed above is true. Furthermore, according to him, the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* was first composed in the *Rong* script of the Lepchas before being translated into Tibetan.⁶¹ However, it raises many questions when we see so many customs from Bhutan, Nepal, and even the pre-merger province of *Zhang Zhung*, as well as simultaneous reports of Tibetans burning their sacred writings. However, trustworthy historical evidence does not support this position. A few nominal and phenomenal connections discovered by some researchers lend credence to this theory.⁶²

However, R. K. Sprigg refutes the assertions of G. B. Mainwaring (1876) and K. K. Das (1896) by offering three arguments for why literature did not exist before the Tibetans arrived in their native land.⁶³ The testimony of *Song Tsang Thung Sa Shu-Suk Gum*, the first source cited by Dr. R. K. Sprigg, has tracked the historical status of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*. The Eyewitness of *Gyamu*, *Gyamunum Shyu Gum*, was added to the second list. Kazi Gorsk of Illam's plea to Captain Lloyd (1828) was the third, and the Lepcha tests of the *Deeds of Grants of Darjeeling* (1835) were the fourth.⁶⁴ During the 7th Raja of Sikkim, Tshugphud Namgyal (1790-1861), *Tsong-Tsang-Thung* and *Gyamu*, who witnessed the assassination of Sikkim Prime Minister Bho-lod, provide the first two accounts. About historical information from "The Gazetteer of Sikkim," Dr. R. K. Sprigg suggested that the murder may have occurred about 1826, marking the end of an era for the Lepchas of Sikkim (1894/1972).⁶⁵ Later, at the request of J. W. Grant and Capt. G. W. A. Lloyd, *Tsong-Tsang-Thung*, and *Gyamu* wrote down their statements. On April 14, 1828, the National Archives in Delhi acquired these documents, which were kept under the Foreign Department, Persian.⁶⁶ Dr. R. K. Sprigg says these are the oldest dated Lepcha documents. They were probably written sometime that year.⁶⁷ Illam Kazi's letter to the British commanders is contained in the third account. It offers a plethora of details about the intra-royal events that shaped the Lepcha people's general fate.⁶⁸

The "Lepcha Text of the Deed of Grant of Darjeeling, 1835," penned by the Maharaja of Sikkim, is another historical *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas.⁶⁹ In "The Road of Destiny: Darjeeling Letters 1839," Dr. Sprigg analyzed the evidence presented by Pinn and concluded that the Rajah of Sikkim did not write the Deed of Grant himself. The Lepcha translators helped Capt. G. W. A. Lloyd prepared it instead. In August 1835, the Sikkim Rajah's authorities forwarded the same document to Capt. G. W. A. Lloyd, stamped with the Raja's seal.⁷⁰ The historical proof that Darjeeling was a part of Sikkim before joining the East India Company and subsequently being a part of present-day West Bengal gives the Lepchas of both states a claim. Many scholars have cited these historical documents as evidence of the Lepchas' heritage, which documents their historical identities.

Additionally, some references are made to the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas, including Dr. Fr. Samuel Lepcha's historical *Naamtho-Naamthaar*.⁷¹ In a similar vein, the old *Naamtho-Naamthaar*'s references to Van Manen, who Heleen Plaisier stated said, "New manuscripts will become rarer and rarer," are repeated by several subsequent generations.⁷² This is representative of the general reality that all manuscripts undergo rapid alterations from their original form as they are reproduced.⁷³ Such impacts were unavoidable because the Lepchas were ruled for a very long time by the Tibetans and the Bhutanese. As a result, there are several linguistic interpolations from the neighbouring Tibetan and Bhutanese languages in the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*.⁷⁴

The research on the genesis of the Lepcha script shows that the script was created by Turve Pano (1400), the first known ruler, and his minister *Thikung Men-Chyo-Long*.⁷⁵ Fonning, who backs up the previously mentioned facts, also asserts that the writing script was created by the third raja of Sikkim because it was deemed unsuitable. According to him, the third Maharaja of Sikkim faced challenges due to the ferocity of the Bhutanese and a dispute with the Kirata chief. Furthermore, he claims that the raja had to deal with a plot involving his half-sister.⁷⁶ Similarly, the History of Sikkim states that Chador Namgyal, the third Maharaja of Sikkim (1700-17), created the Lepcha script.⁷⁷ It is challenging to pinpoint the precise moment that *Naamtho-Naamthaar* composing started because of the numerous disputes surrounding the beginning of the Lepcha scripts. However, the written version of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* likely existed before the arrival of the Tibetans in Sikkim, assuming that it was known orally for many centuries until it was eventually written

down. The aforementioned discussion that the historical development of the origin of the Lepcha script must have, in all likelihood, started before the arrival of the Tibetans is somehow consistent with this idea. The commonly held notion that *Thekung Men Chyo Long* is credited with creating the Lepcha script in the 17th century CE serves as additional evidence for this. The writings of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* must have begun around the 16th century CE, based on this indicator.

5. CONCLUSION

The Lepchas' way of life and culture are explained via a literary work known as the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*, or the Holy Scriptures. The *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is arguably one of the most important sources for writing the history of the Lepchas, although the Lepchas often kept it a secret and held it in high regard. Although there are disagreements about who wrote the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* and when it was written, most Lepcha beliefs and potential textual references suggest that the writing of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* must have begun in the 16th century CE. Furthermore, it is impossible to determine the precise historical period of the text due to the difficulties caused by the Tibetan invasions, the following burning of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas, and the process of text rewriting and sharpening. According to Lepcha history, *Men Chyo Long* is credited with introducing the Lepcha writing in the 17th century CE. Turve Pano, the first Lepcha king of Sikkim, who reigned in the 15th century CE, is also known to have had him as his minister. It is possible that the writing of the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* was started about this time as well, since *Men Chyo Long* is also recognized for having introduced the Lepcha script. The fact that "*Men Chyo Long*" is listed as one of the main characters in the text is important to note here. He is recognized as the one who taught the Lepchas about farming, even if the text does not link him to the creation of the Lepcha script. By citing examples from "*Men Chyo Long*," the text alerts readers to the possibility that the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* of the Lepchas existed earlier. If one follows the pattern or traditions of writing history, this may be the case. After the advent of the script, all written texts were first recorded orally. Furthermore, it's possible that the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* was revised and sharpened as a result of the numerous difficulties brought on by waves of Tibetan incursions and shifting monarchical control. This is also one of the main issues with giving a precise time frame for the *Naamtho-Naamthaar*.

The *Naamtho-Naamthaar* thus fills us with a vast amount of historical material on the Lepchas, despite its many shortcomings in terms of factual information and a good timeline. Additionally, it provides information about the culture and way of life of the Lepchas. Some of the information offered in the text may have been diluted, nevertheless, as a result of the editing and polishing process. However, the *Naamtho-Naamthaar* is one of the key accounts of the Lepchas that can highlight it as a useful tool for researching the history of the Lepchas, and it never ceases to astound us with the unique characteristics of their lived reality.

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- ¹¹ *Rum-Pandi*, p. 3.
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- ¹⁹ Lepcha, Sonam Tshering, *Rum Tashey Thing Sa Sung*, (Private collection) verse. 48.
- ²⁰ *Tashey-Sung*, p. 39.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- *Note: The text reflects the mythical birth of the *Rum Tashey*, in which he has appeared as the 8-years-old son of a king in the center of the flower.
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- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ³² Note: She is considered as the life and soul of mother earth, the creator of *chi*, lord of soil and water, and mistress of the medicinal yeast.
- ³³ *Nyu-Lik-Nyu-Song*, p. 1.
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- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
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- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ⁵⁰ *Rum-Pandi* p. 1.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ⁵² Note: It is a paradise on earth and the Lepchas' sacred and eternal homeland, according to *Nye Mayel Kyong* folklore of the Lepchas.
- ⁵³ Thakur, R. *Himalayan Lepchas*, University of Michigan: Archives Publisher, 1988, p. 30.
- ⁵⁴ Note: In the folklore of the Lepcha marriage, bamboos represent forever and the lasting relationship between the families. The bamboos were also highly valued by the Lepchas of Sikkim.
- ⁵⁵ *Rum-Pandi*, p. 2.
- ⁵⁶ Fonning, A. R. *Lepcha*, pp. 141-142.
- Note: It indicates the time period prior to the merger of Sikkim and Darjeeling as part of India.
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⁷⁷ Tamsang, K. P. *Unknown*, p. 26.