

preliminary report on the langtang region

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The work of Frank (1974a; 1974b) has for the first time provided researchers with a comprehensive picture of the varied populations living throughout the central regions of Nepal, but, as the author points out, it is a task which by its nature is never finished for populations are in a state of continual flux. Moreover the demographer can only paint a very broad picture, leaving it to others to fill in the details. My intention here is to provide some basic ethnographic information on the little-known Langtang region of north-central Nepal, and to compare and contrast the different groups living there with respect to kinship and ritual behaviour.¹

Langtang Lirung (23,770'), the holy mountain from which the area takes its name, stands in the far north-eastern corner of Rasuwa District, on the Nepal-Tibet border, dominating the region. For the purposes of this essay I shall take 'the Langtang region' as being the area which is drained by the Langtang Khola, the river which, rising in the glaciers of Langsisa, flows some 22 miles due westwards to its confluence at Syabru Bensi with the south-flowing Bhote Kosi (Fig. 5) (later the Trisuli) - an area of some 200 square miles completely encompassed within the boundaries of the Langtang National Park. This has a certain geographic unity for the Langtang Khola slices a deep trench between the Langtang massif to the north and the 15,000-foot hills of Gosāikunda (S.I. - Pālang Chatī Dānda)² and is furthermore closed at its eastern end by further mountain ranges. Although two passes exist south into the Helambu (Yol-mo) region they are open only in the summer months and are little-used; by and large all traffic follows the river westwards. But the principal reason for delimiting this area is that within it are found three population groups representing variations on the theme of Tibetan culture - the Tamangs living near the confluence of the two rivers who, while speaking their own language and practising their own customs, are strongly influenced by Tibetan culture particularly in their religious life; the Tibetan-speaking people of the isolated Langtang Valley itself who seem to occupy an intermediate position; and the Tibetan refugees from the Kyirong region of Tibet just over the border who have lived in Rasuwa since their emigration in 1959 and seem likely to become permanent inhabitants.

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1. Based ongoing fieldwork legun in June 1977 and financed by the Social Science Research Council of Great Britain and the Central Research Fund of the University of London.
 2. S.I. = Survey of India. Spelling according to their one-inch series map of the area.

Rasuwa District, due north of Kathmandu, is one of the most sparsely populated in Nepal; according to Frank's figures there are c. 15,000 inhabitants of whom 88.9% are Tamangs. In the northern part of the district where about 6,000 people live the proportion of Tamangs is nearer 95%. Administratively the northern region is divided into 8 panchayats:- Timure, Birdim, Langtang, Syabru, Goljung, Gatlang, Thuman and Chilime. According to 1973 Government figures the smallest of these is Langtang with 69 houses and 353 people and the largest Syabru with 272 houses and 1287 inhabitants. Average household size is 4.9. The region here considered includes all of Langtang pancayat, 5 of the 9 wards of Syabru pancayat with some 600 people and 6 households in Birdim pancayat (Syarpagaon which belies its name by being exclusively inhabited by Tamangs). The main villages are Brābal, Syabru Bensi, Thulo Syabru and Langtang, each of which also has a number of satellite hamlets.

The early history of the area is far from clear but it seems reasonable to assume that until the unification of Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769, a number of petty chieftains or rājas ruled the territory. Remains of their fortresses or darbārs may be still seen, for example at Bhargu, but of their names and deeds nothing seemingly remains. Following their conquest of Nepal the Gurkhas were still in an expansionary mood and made a number of expeditions up the Bhote Kosi and into Tibet, raiding and looting as far as the provincial capital of Shigatse and thereby incurring the wrath of the Chinese Emperor who considered Tibet as a vassal state. In 1791, according to tablets erected in Lhasa and a boundary stone at Rasuwa Garhi, a punitive expedition of ten to twelve thousand men was sent against the Gurkhas, speedily recapturing the lost territory ("crossing mountains as though they were level plains, traversing rivers with great waves and narrow gorges as though they were small streams") and pressing on down the Trisuli as far as Betrawati on the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley, where the Gurkhas sued for peace (Forbes, 1977: 126-9). The ancestor of a present Syabru family fought in these campaigns and is still revered as an almost king-like figure, his descendants also being accorded a high status.

Following the seizure of power in 1846 by the Kunwar lineage, who later adopted the hereditary title of Rana, the area came under their sovereignty and they received the land taxes - Rs. 300.50 in the case of Syabru per annum. When the monarchy once again regained power the tenure system was changed to raikar in B.S. 2007, individual villager's rights to their land being recognized by the state on condition of an annual tax being paid - Rs. 2.25 per hal of land (a hal being defined as the area of land which can be ploughed by a pair of oxen in a day). In addition, a house tax of between one and two rupees is also paid. Both are received by the pradhan pancha in the month of Baisākh who, for example, collects Rs. 2400 now in land-tax for the pancayat of Syabru.

Within the Langtang region are found a wide variety of ecological zones ranging from the semi-tropical area around Syabru Bensi below 5,000' up to the high mountain regions of 15,000' or more. Because of its precipitous and rocky nature much of the land is unusable; not surprisingly that which is suitable for crops or pasture is generally found in the

vicinity of the main villages. Owing to the wide altitude variation climatic conditions differ markedly over short distances, permitting several growing seasons and a variety of crops. Thus in the region of Syabru cultivated land extends from 7,000' to 9,000', above which the forest begins. At the higher elevations potatoes and wheat are grown; lower down, the staple crops are wheat, maize and kodo (a rye-like grain, eleusine corasana). These are supplemented by a number of other minor crops - pumpkins, turnips, radishes, nam-nam (tam.)-an oil-bearing plant, Khāru - another grain, soyabeans (tam. - mode), haricot beans (tam. - tamrra) and apples. Syabru land is of high quality, well-terraced but unirrigated, and in a good year the people are self-sufficient in food for 9 or 10 months. All families own land but the size of holdings varies considerably from 2 or 3 hal for a poor family up to 10 or 12 hal for the better-off. Most work is performed by individual family members, particularly ploughing using a personally-owned plough and borrowing oxen from the few families who own them. However, some particularly laborious and labour-consuming tasks are carried out in small groups usually of kin or friends, such as weeding, planting kodo, and reaping. Weeding is generally done by women, reaping by mixed groups and ploughing always by men. The staple diet consists of flour and potatoes, rice - imported from Trisuli - only being eaten on festival days or special occasions.

Higher up the valley around Langtang village the land becomes flatter and terracing less important, but the soil is stony and of poor quality. Because of this and the severe cold during all but the summer months the people of Langtang can only raise three crops a year - potatoes which the planted in Baisākh and harvested in Kartik, and two grains, gyā-pre and khāru which are planted in Cāit and harvested in Asoj and Sāun respectively. They can produce sufficient food for only 6 to 8 months of the year and have to import considerable quantities from Trisuli. Thus animal husbandry is of correspondingly greater importance in this part of the region.

In addition to sedentary agriculture, semi-nomadic pastoralism is practised throughout the area, as in many other hill-regions of Nepal (cf. Alirol, 1976). While agriculture may be considered the more basic pursuit, in that it provides the main food-supply and occupies the majority of the working life of the people, the ceiling imposed on landholdings by its relative scarcity means that a man can only become truly rich through his ownership of cattle. Amongst the Tamangs whilst all own some land only about half have cattle and only a few of these have substantial holdings. However, in Langtang itself which relies on them for subsistence almost everybody owns at least a few cattle and on average holdings are larger than in Syabru. Combining these two modes of life is achieved through a division of labour within the family and the system of temporary accommodations called goth in Nepal. Two members of the family, usually teen-aged children or a young boy and an older man live either permanently or in rotation with other family members in the goths, portable structures of wicker-work thrown over a frame of sticks with a covering of bracken or leaves for the floor. A minimal collection of household equipment is stocked, together with the equipment for butter-

making. Fierce mastiffs are kept both to herd sheep and to protect the property. Occasionally, a whole family may elect to live in the goth reserving their main village house for storage purposes. Every month or so the herds must be moved to fresh pastures, usually on a collectively agreed date, and the men and cattle in the course of the year thus travel considerable distances over a fairly precisely defined course. Thus Syabru cattle reach their highest point just under 13,000' in Asoj and Bhadaū, moving down in Kārtik to 9,500', then in Mangsir and Pus they graze on the stubble in the village fields manuring the ground at the same time; with the approach of winter they spend Māgh, Phāgun and Cāit at their lowest point in Syabru Bensi; the following year they reverse their course up through Syabru, the upper hamlets and then the high hills again. Further up the valley the pattern is somewhat different for the river itself rises from 10,000' to over 13,000' and the herds follow its course up and down, the herdsmen living in more permanent summer settlements.

Differing conditions are reflected also in the composition of the herds. Yak do not thrive at low attitudes and consequently are not kept in any numbers by Syabru people. They prefer the dzo-mo, yak-cow cross-breeds which give copious and rich milk; some 12 men own about 130 of these, the largest herd being 26. Their value is high, estimates ranging from Rs. 1500 to Rs. 2000. Many cows are also kept - valued between Rs. 500 and Rs. 800 - but mainly for breeding purposes rather than their milk, which is poor. The cattle are never slaughtered but if they die in some other way their meat is eaten. Many people also keep sheep and goats principally for their wool, which the women card, spin and weave to make the short-sleeve jackets worn by all men and the syāmā or back-cloth worn by women.

Langtang people, however, keep a greater number of yaks, female yak (di) and bull-di hybrids (rimzo) - these are said by Syabru people to be greedy and lazy. Males may be used for ploughing but there is insufficient trade for them to have any role as pack-animals. Pasture land appears to be of three types:- communally owned, government owned, in which case a tax of Rs. 1 per animal is payable, or under the control of the local cheese factories (at Chandanbāri, Kyang-jin and Yāla), in which case the milk must be sold to them. This last is the case in the upper valley but some Syabru people who have a choice, prefer to make their own butter and sell it for grain. The cheese factories operate for five months in the summer and produce anything from 30 to 50 kilos of cheese per day.

The exigencies of maintaining these two systems - agriculture and animal husbandry - imposes a certain amount of strain on the people and poses them a dilemma. On the one hand a man with a small family is severely handicapped for labour and has every incentive to increase his family size. On the other, since the inheritance is divided equally between sons - and all Tamangs desire sons - the more he has the more their patrimony will be reduced. This is undoubtedly an important factor

in the continuing migration of men to India either permanently or for a number of years service in the army, saving their pay to buy additional land and cattle on their return. Some of the most prosperous men in the area have successfully done this.

Various other sources of income in addition to their farming activities are also available to the people, most notably from trade and tourism. With the improvement of paths, the provision of an airstrip at Kyang-jin gomba and owing to its proximity to Kathmandu, the Langtang region has seen a steady growth in the numbers of tourists making treks - 900 in the '76/'77 season and over 700 in under half of the current season. Those benefiting most directly from this influx are the Tibetan refugees who are not permitted to own land and have very few cattle; they are thus much more dependent on trade and service activities than the rest of the populace. They own a total of 7 small lodges or hotels providing accommodation and food, often with shops attached, each of which may have a turnover in excess of Rs. 10,000 per year. It seems that the Tamangs have only recently realized the potential of this trade and are themselves hurriedly making plans to compete. A further source of income for the Tibetans comes from the manufacture of handicrafts - belts, jackets, sweaters, blankets and so on, and the sale of trinkets; the handicrafts are either sent to Kathmandu for sale or sold directly to tourists, most of the women being engaged in the work. Poorer members of the community also find employment as porters with tourist parties whose advent fortunately coincides with the slack season in the fields. This work earns them Rs. 15 to 20 per day. Also under the heading of tourism, we may mention the Gosāinkund festival at the full-moon of Bhadāu (janai purnimā) when many thousands of Hindus from the Kathmandu Valley and further afield come to bathe in the sacred lake and change their sacred threads. At this time, some 30 to 40 Syabru men take simple building materials up to the lake-side where they construct temporary shelters for the pilgrims who pay Rs. 2 per night's stay, each shelter accommodating 40 or 50 people.

There is little doubt that the volume of trans-Himalayan trade in the area is much reduced from what it formerly was and would stand no comparison with the more westerly trade routes in their heyday. Nevertheless, local people can still travel freely over the border as far as Kyirong and trade continues to play a significant part in the local economy, most men making a couple of trips a year. They carry products such as sakhar (unrefined sugar), rice, chillies and agricultural produce to Kyirong where they are bartered for salt and Tibetan brick tea in particular, and a variety of Chinese manufactured goods - matches, tennis shoes, pottery, cloth etc. The round trip takes 5 days and some items, particularly the tea, can advantageously be carried over to the Helambu region for resale. The profit involved would appear to be in the region of 300% (discounting the labour involved and time away from other activities). Trips are usually made singly or with a friend, the goods being carried by the men rather than pack-animals. There is also a certain amount of trade in the reverse direction, to the south, particularly for Langtang people who collect a variety of medicinal herbs in the high mountain re-

gions and sell them in the bazaar town of Trisuli for up to Rs. 30 per dharni, bringing back grain and manufactured articles. This trade seems to be diminishing as a result of over-exploitation of the natural product.

Craft activities in the area are in general unspecialized, with the exception of a few part-time carpenters who are employed for house-building and the like. There are no permanent blacksmiths or tailors but peripatetic teams travel the countryside stopping a few weeks in each village to mend tools or make clothes to order. Wickerwork mats and baskets are woven by the men while women are responsible for weaving heavy woollen cloth, but these activities are done on an individual basis and not for sale. A weaving centre under the auspices of H.M. Dept. of Cottage Industries has been established in Syabru Bensi and a number of local women, usually young and unmarried, are employed there with the object of teaching new skills and techniques to the local people.

Social Organization

As mentioned at the beginning the area contains what appear to be at least three different population groupings - the Tamangs who inhabit the region between 5,000' and 8,000', the Langtang people who live above 10,000' and the one-time inhabitants of Kyirong who, when not involved in the tourist trade, live in a number of special camps built for them.

The Tamangs of Syabru and the surrounding villages are divided into a number of patrilineal and exogamous clans. The following clan names have been recorded: - Theba, Thokra, Shangba, Lopchen, Singden, Karmapa, Plön, Waiba, Ghale, Dongba, Pidako. Each clan is associated with a number of special divinities, represented by a stone kept in the house, which are collectively worshipped at the full-moon of Baisākh. According to local tradition the Shangba were the first to settle in Syabru 7 generations ago, followed by the Thokra and the Theba. Others such as the Lopchens are more recent arrivals of two or three generations ago while some are represented only by a few women who have married into the village from other districts. No trace remains of the original habitations and there no longer seem to be special quarters or wards associated with particular clans, except in the case of Karmapas who are the sole inhabitants of the village of Chumdi. There is no trace of a horizontal division into bārajāt and athārajāt groupings such as Fürer-Haimendorf (1966) reported for eastern Tamangs, nor has the concept of 'brother-clans' which form larger exogamous groupings mentioned by other writers been discovered. One informant claimed that at one time the Tamangs were all one with the other hill-peoples and were the natural heirs to Nepal - as 'proved' by the fact that Manjushri, the god who drained the Kathmandu Valley of water and rendered it habitable, was in fact, a Buddhist god! - and that only with the passage of time had they become split up into many races and clans. He thought that the athārjāt may have existed at one time but had since disappeared.

Numerically the clans are quite unequal in size, usually one in particular dominating a village or an area. Thus in Syabru over half the population are Thebas whilst some clans are represented by only two or three families, whereas in Bhargu for example it is the P18ns who are in the greatest number. Although concepts of purity and pollution are generally undeveloped amongst the Tamangs there is a certain hierarchical ranking of clans observed. Thus from their own point of view the Ghaes who are believed to be the descendants of kings are not Tamangs at all but a group of higher status. This status is marked both by diet - they are not supposed to eat beef, pork or chicken - and by speech, there being a number of honourific terms for 'come', 'go', 'eat' which vary from standard Tamang. In all other respects of language and culture, however, they appear to be indistinguishable from Tamangs. At the top of the 'true' Tamang clans comes the Karmapas, at any rate in their own estimation, the clan from which most but not all lamas are drawn. Next are the Thokras who once fulfilled the ministerial functions but unlike the lamas there no longer seem to be any behavioural markers of their status. The remaining clans are all of equal status. The Tamangs do consider themselves superior to the 'untouchable' castes although as none live in the area they have few dealings with them. Kāmis, and Damāis are not permitted in Tamang homes and must do their work outside or on the verandah. Comensual or sexual relations with members of these castes is liable to lead to a degradation of a Tamang's status vis-a-vis his fellows. People are aware that H.M.G. has expressed disapproval of divisive behaviour between castes but nevertheless remain firm in their belief that all people are not equal.

As a group Tamangs are highly endogamous, brides always being sought within the village or the surrounding area not more than a day's walk away. Very occasionally marriages may be contracted with the Sherpas of Helambu or rarely with Tibetans. There is no intermarriage with the people of Langtang. Polygyny is permitted but found in fewer than 10% of marriages, generally only among richer men. The senior wife maintains her authority and, as friction between wives is common, peace is often ensured by the man maintaining two homes and living in each alternately. Polyandry is entirely prohibited.

Marriages may be contracted at any time after the age of 13 or 14 but it appears that customs are changing in this respect with many girls remaining unmarried until their 20s. Neolocal residence is established at the time of marriage. Occasionally, where a man has no sons his son-in-law may come to live in his house, working his fields. In return the son-in-law will inherit the property, after conducting his father-in-law's gyewa or death rites. In this event he will forfeit his rights to his own father's property. This institution is known in Tamang as mā gomma. Divorce is common particularly in the early years of the marriage before there are children. Leviratic marriage when an elder brother's dies is also practised, but marriage with a younger brother's widow is not permitted.

It has previously been reported (Höfer, 1969) that the preferred mode of marriage among Tamangs is bilateral cross-cousin marriage with the MBD and FZD. In view of this kinship terms were collected and these were found to be entirely consistent with such a system. (see Fig. 1). Thus FB and Wife are called by the same terms as MZ and husband, and their children are known by the same terms as brother and sister, all being unmarriageable. Conversely MB and wife and FB and husband are referred to by the same terms. (MB - ashang - is also used as a formal term of address for any older man, unless or course he is in fact an ahu). And their marriageable children are also referred to by the same term. Although Tamangs of the Langtang region agree that this form of marriage is permitted or is 'a good thing', genealogies so far collected indicate that in fact it is a fairly rare occurrence, not only between 'true' cross-cousins but even between classificatory kin of the appropriate clan. Further work is expected to show that in fact the demographic imbalance in the size of the clans makes this form of marriage an unlikely event, except in the cases where a) either two clans of roughly similar size form alliances in this way, or b) the major clans of two villages set up reciprocal relations. To put it another way, while members of the minor clans can always be sure of finding brides within the major clan, the greater number of available men in the major clan permits them a reduced choice, often forcing them to seek brides outside the village altogether.

The Kyirong Tibetan system is quite different from that of the Tamangs. Polygyny is rare but until recently polyandry was a usual practice, several brothers marrying one woman. The Tamangs frankly recognise the superiority of this system to their own for it tends to conserve family wealth rather than dissipating it. The practice now seems to be falling into desuetude for a number of reasons: it is forbidden by Nepalese law and seen as unusual by the westerners on whom Tibetans increasingly model themselves, but more significantly given the restrictions placed on their freedom of travel and the small number of other Tibetans in the area (some 300 who have been omitted from Frank's survey) its continuance would lead to large numbers of women remaining unmarried. Moreover with their lands gone and few with much wealth to conserve its rationale has all but disappeared. Cross-cousin marriage is not permitted this being considered incestuous; exogamy is defined by a bilateral kindred of several generations' depth and there is no clan system. Kinship terms are much less clear-cut although not without similarity to Tamang terminology. There appear to be no special terms for the spouses of MZ and FB and all cousins except the children of FZ are known by the terms 'son' and 'daughter' (see Fig. 4).

Finally, there is the somewhat vexed question of the status of the Langtang people. To all enquiries from the time of Tilman's first visit to their villages up to the present day they have consistently given the reply Tamang or Lama-Tamang when asked their 'jāt' (Tilman, 1952). Frank, however, who made a special visit to the region, decisively identified them as 'Bhotiya and Sherpa' and gave their numbers as 219. As we have

Fig. 1. - TAMANG KINSHIP CHART

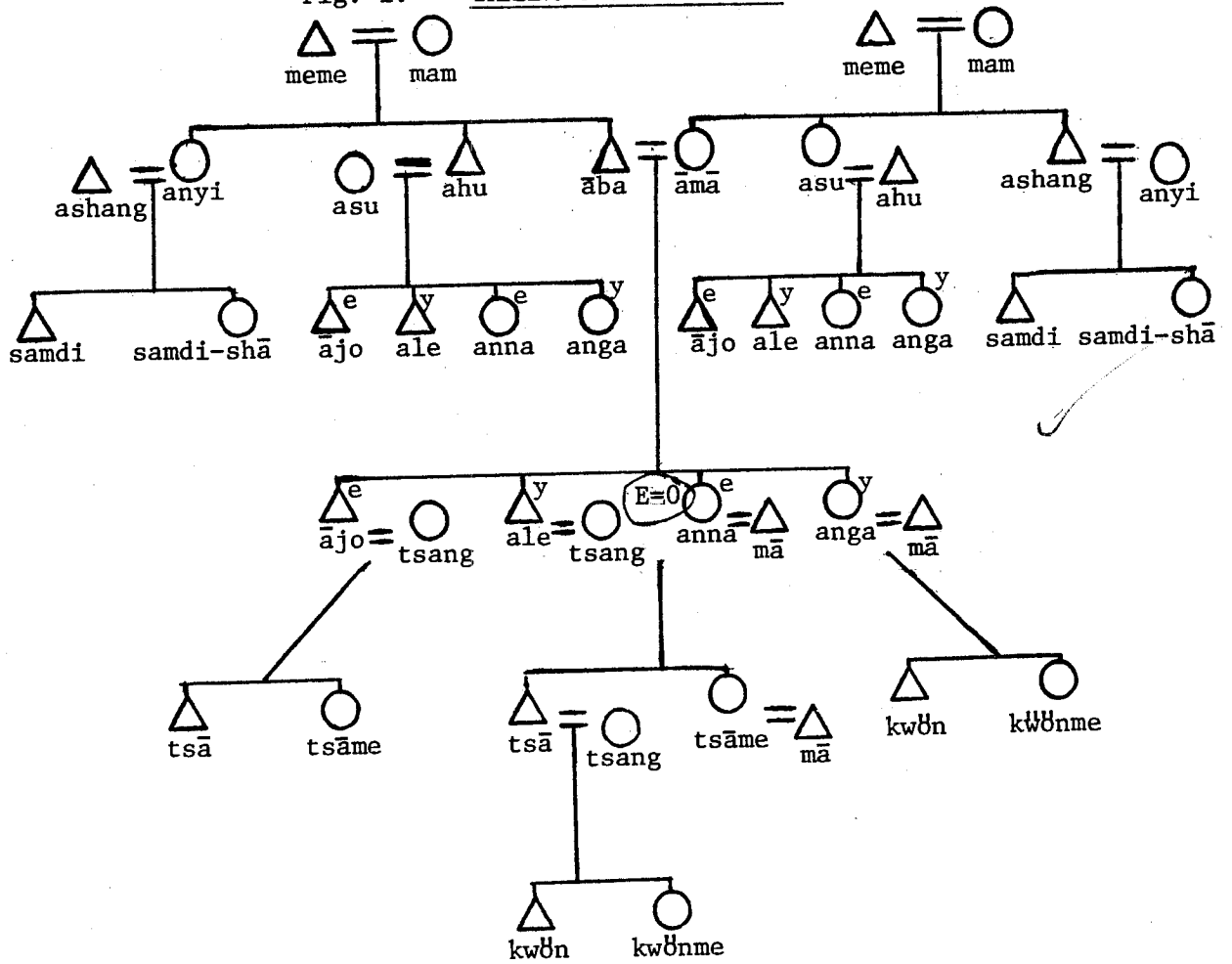
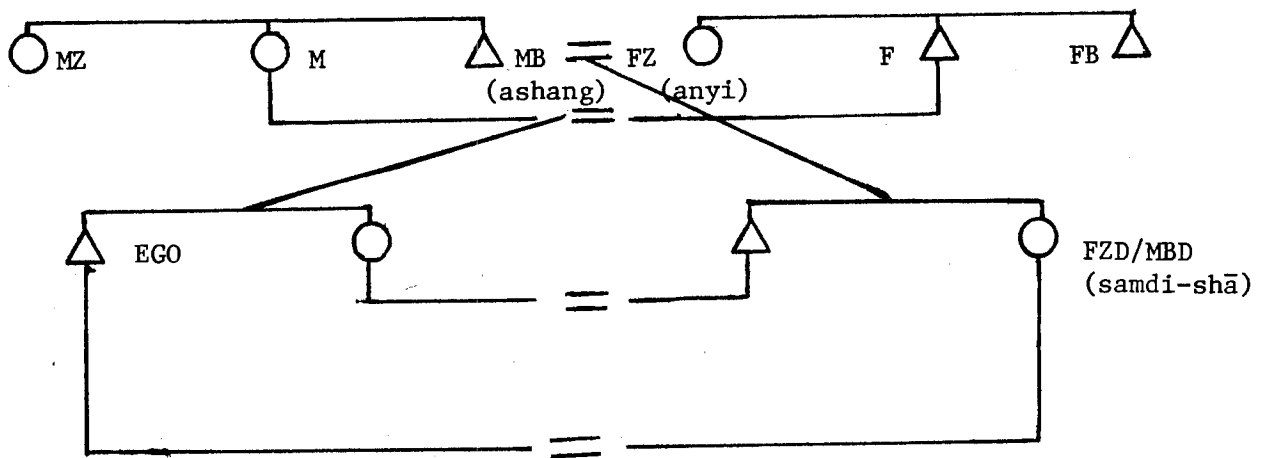


Fig. 2. - CROSS-COUSIN MARRIAGE



seen though, there are certainly more - between 350 and 400. Unfortunately he does not make it clear what he understands by the term 'Bhotiya' although this is generally accepted as referring to 'Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burman and culturally distinct people of the higher Himalayaa' (cf. Manzardo, Dahal & Rai, 1976: 83), the term 'Bhote' or the neologism 'Tibetanoid' referring to Tibetan speakers of specifically Tibetan descent living in Nepal (cf. Goldstein, 1975: 69). However, Frank, in specifically separating them from the other Tibeto-Burman groups which he deals with, gives one to understand that in fact he intends the latter term, or meaning. Now, it is undoubtedly the case that the Langtang people are true Tibetan speakers. Tamang on the other hand is a Tibeto-Burman language with large numbers of loan words from both Tibetan and Nepali (which is spoken as a second language) but not mutually intelligible to Tibetans. By contrast Langtang speech shows a 75% correspondence in vocabulary for the Swadesh 100-word list with Kyirong Tibetan and is mutually intelligible although spoken more quickly.

However, when it comes to kinship behaviour the Langtang people clearly follow the Tamang pattern. They are divided into a number of clans of which the following names were recorded: Shangba, Dongba, Lopcen, Nakpa, Chusang and Waiba. Some of these it will be seen are the same as Tamang clan-names in the lower valley and they are accepted by others as being Tamang. All informants were agreed that there were no Sherpas amongst them and according to tradition they are supposed to have emigrated from the Kyirong area of Tibet 3 or 4 generations ago. As amongst the Tamangs polygyny is practised but polyandry forbidden. Cross-cousin marriage is preferred and parallel-cousin marriage forbidden. A glance at the kinship terminology bears this out: although the terms themselves approximate to Tibetan terms, the pattern is of standard bilateral cross-cousin type, FB's children and MZ's children being referred to by the terms for brother and sister, separate terms being reserved for the cross-cousins. (see Fig. 3).

Thus it would appear that Langtang people represent another of those rare cases, like the Helambu Sherpas (Goldstein, op. cit.), of bilateral cross-cousin marriage amongst a Tibetan speaking population. It still remains unclear as to how such a situation has arisen. It can only be guessed that they either brought these marriage customs with them from Tibet or that their kinship behaviour has undergone conscious and far-reaching changes during a relatively short period. It is of course not unknown for Tibetan groups to adopt Nepalese names in a bid to improve their status vis-a-vis the dominant groups but rare indeed that a whole clan-system and new marriage patterns are taken over. It could perhaps be surmised that their isolated location with few opportunities for inter-marriage with other groups made the Tibetan system of exogamous kindreds unworkable with such a small population impelling them to adopt the Tamang model. But until further work can be done amongst this group it remains an open question.

Fig. 3. LANGTANG

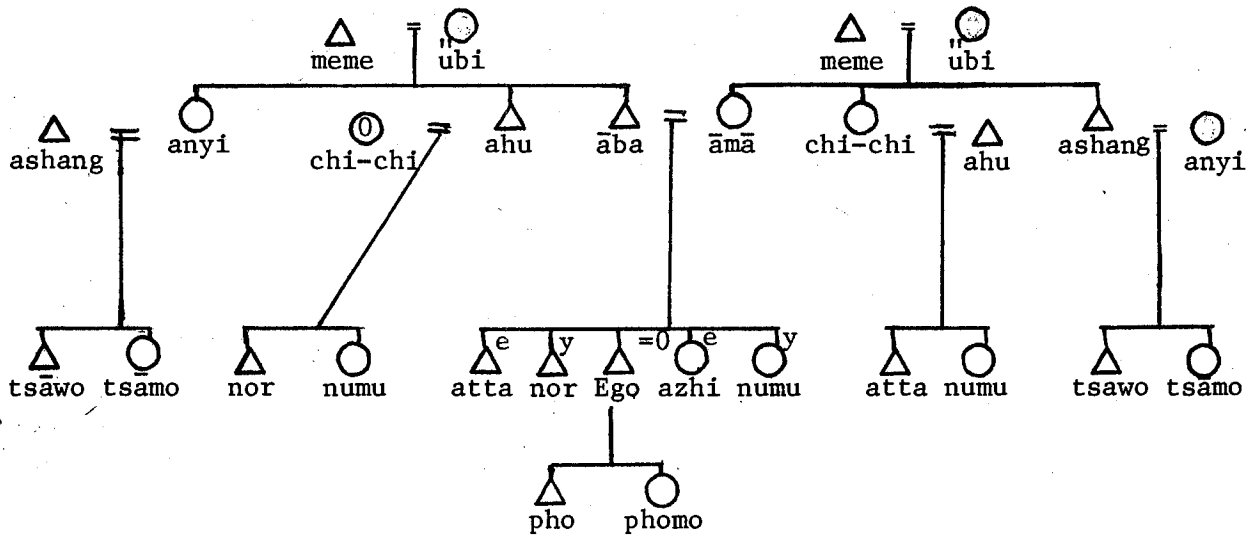
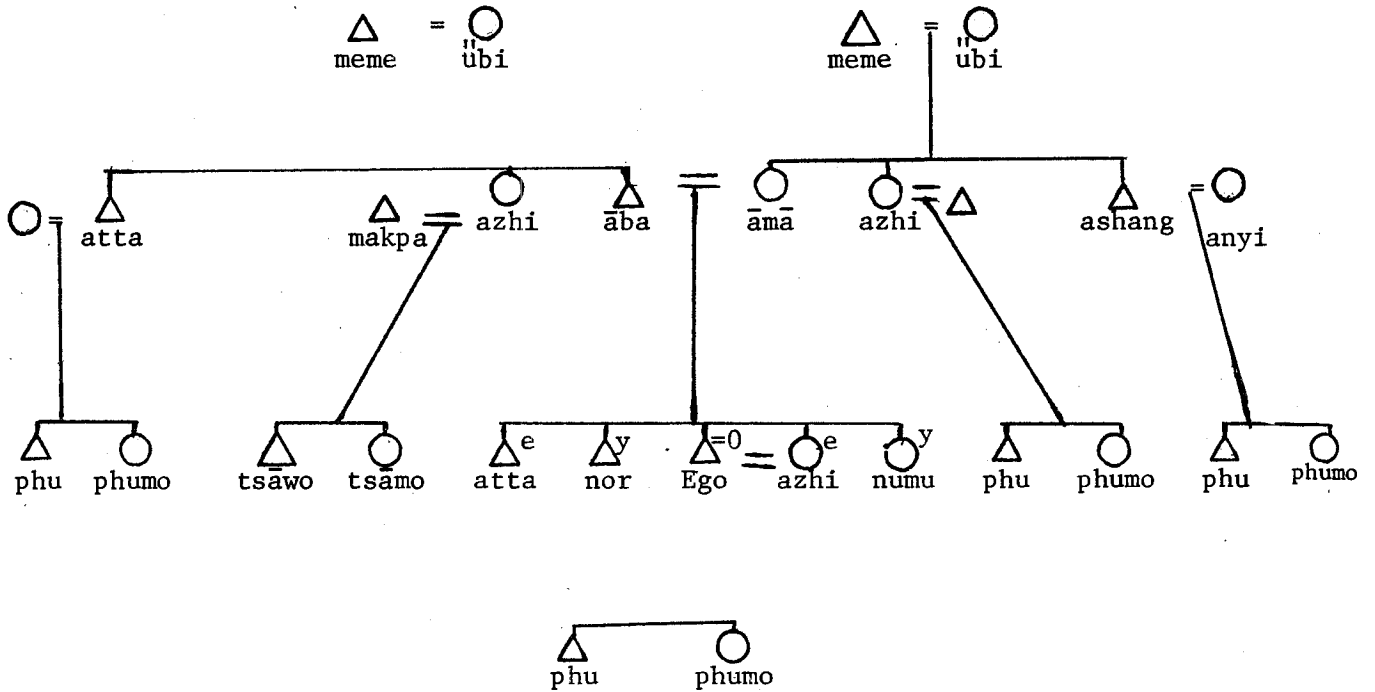


Fig. 4. KYIRONG



Religious Life

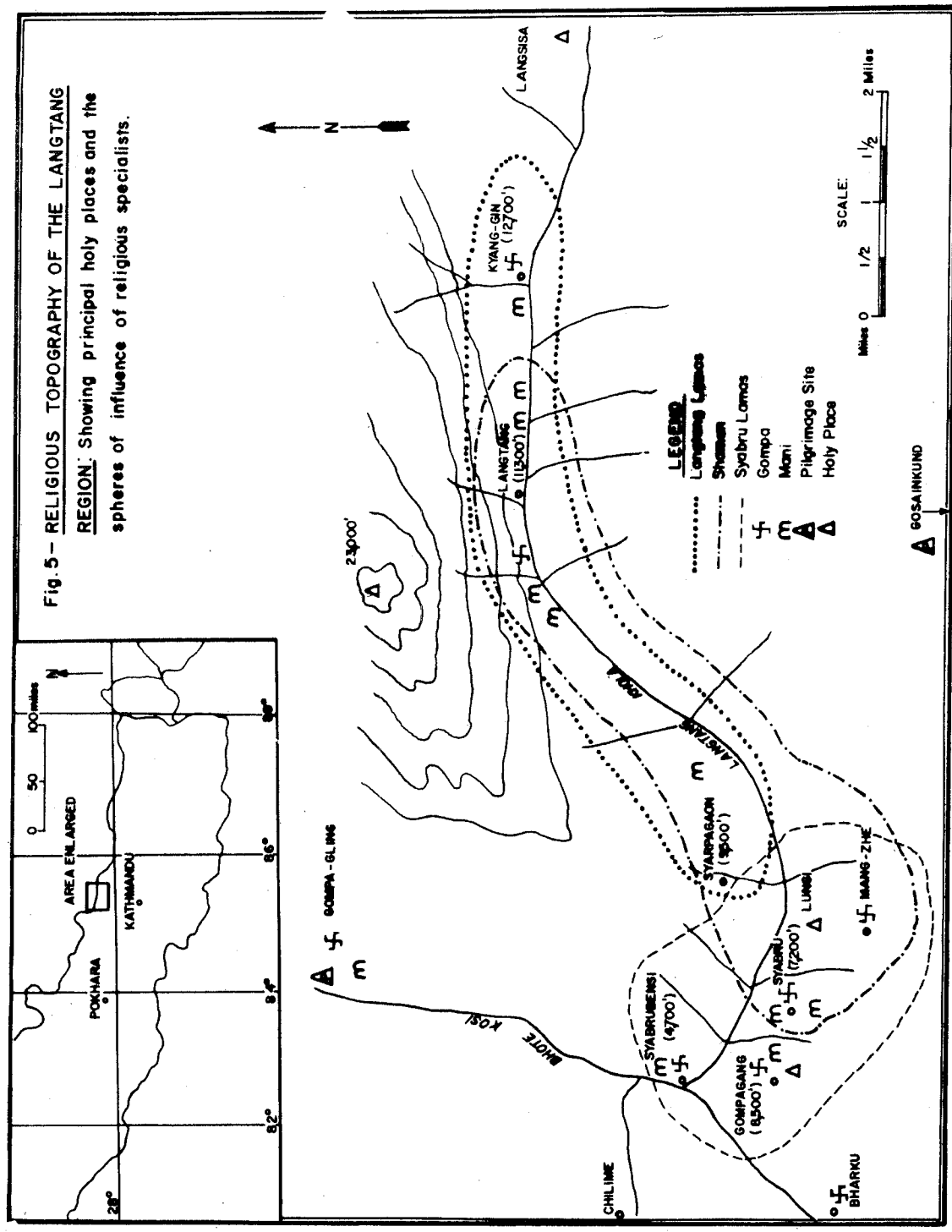
Religious life is not for the people of the Langtang region conceptually separable from any other sort of life for their houses, fields and countryside are suffused with the supernatural at every turn. When illness strikes, crops fail or wild animals raid the fields it is taken for granted that malignant demons and spirits are responsible and periodically rites to protect the home and village must be undertaken. But for present purposes it may be considered as a complex blend of Tibetan Buddhism and shamanism together with elements of Hinduism. Of these the former is undoubtedly predominant, but although practised by all three groups in the area each maintains its rituals separate from the others and conducts them in slightly differing ways. Only a broad outline of the main features can be given here.

In addition to the profusion of earth spirits and deities inhabiting trees, rocks and streams the countryside and the villages themselves are filled with the physical manifestations and symbols of Buddhism. These include various natural features such as strangely shaped or coloured rocks which are associated in legend with the activities of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhāva) the principal Buddhist deity; physical structures such as 'māni-walls' and Chöstens - either those supposedly built by the Guru himself, or those erected to commemorate the dead which line the approaches to every village; water-driven prayer wheels situated over streams and the prayer flags which flutter from the roof of every house (dar-chö); and the gompas (tib. dgon-pa) found in principal villages and in various isolated places in the countryside. These monasteries are generally uninhabited buildings in which are housed an altar, statues and paintings (thangka) and various items of ritual paraphernalia such as drums, butter lamps and offering bowls together with such books as the monastery owns. Generally the building is kept locked, being opened by the kon-yer (sacristan) only on the occasion of a religious ceremony. Their quality varies considerably from the highly ornate and elaborate, such as Langtang gomba to the generally shabby and run-down. Some have received government grants in recent years in order to carry out repairs and renovations. What may be called the religious topography of the region - the principal holy places, pilgrimage sites and religious structures - are represented in Fig. 5. In addition to its prayer flag every household maintains an altar - an elaborately carved wooden cabinet which houses pictures of Buddhist deities and the Dalai Lama, 7 offering bowls filled with clean water and offerings of maize and grain.

The main religious specialists in the village are the lamas (tib. bla-ma), members of the Nyingma-pa ('the old one') sect. In general this is a hereditary position passed from father to son for in addition to their religious functions the lamas are married householders with fields and property of their own. Amongst the Tamangs almost all lamas are members of the Karmapa clan (because it is said, one of their ancestors was in fact a Karmapa lama). Although all sons are trained to be lamas only those who have a certain religious vocation participate in the majority of ceremonies, the others merely assisting with reading, chanting or

playing musical instruments at large festivals. Lamas are of high status and treated with considerable respect by the villagers. Their most marked behavioural restriction is the prohibition on smoking which is observed by all; they should also refrain from drinking, eating meat, adultery and generally set a high standard of behaviour although this is not always the case. Inevitably lamas from outside any particular village are held in higher esteem than indigenous ones: people one has grown up with and whose foibles are intimately known command less respect than those from further away who retain a certain aura of mystery and power. Tamang lamas are never employed by Tibetans who have their own emigre lamas from Tibet nor by Langtang people who are self-sufficient in lamas. However, there are a few Tibetan lamas who have taken over formerly dis-used gompas in the area and these are also employed by Tamangs particularly to help in conducting the death ceremonies. In addition to their ordinary income from their own property, lamas are paid Rs. 5 or 6 per day for their services and given all meals during the course of a ceremony. In the month of Mangsir, they undertake the traditional begging for alms incumbent on all Buddhist monks, and known as the me-tog, calling on every household which on a makeshift altar offers plates of grain and serves raksi; the lamas bless each house as they go. Only the most senior lamas are eligible to share in this collection and what they receive is determined partly by how good the harvest has been and partly by the esteem in which they are held. Thus one particularly powerful magician-lama collected 65 pathis of grain in Syabru village while the four eligible local lamas only raised 35 pathis between them - no more than a token addition to their yearly food consumption.

The lamas' main duties are connected with the complex death ceremonies which last for 49 days, during which period their task is to see that the spirit of the dead person is kept on the right path to avoid incarceration in one of the many hells and ultimately to reach the heaven of O'pa'me whence he has a chance for favourable re-birth. Elaborate ceremonies are conducted at the time of the death, at the immediately following cremation, and to expel the death-demon from the house. Thereafter, they must return every 7 days to continue with their readings and to oversee the feeding of the dead man's spirit. Finally on the 49th day the spirit is given its final send-off at the gyewa, a two or three day festival during which the gompa is lavishly decorated with dough images (gtor-ma) and butter-lamps, the spirit is fed for the final time and friends and relatives from miles around come to pay their respects and to feast and drink. This ceremony has reached its greatest heights amongst the Tamangs who expect to spend from Rs. 2000 upwards on the gyewa, an expenditure which if repeated several times in short succession (for a man is responsible for his two parents, his wife and children if they predecease him) can quickly turn a rich family into a poor one. Amongst the Tibetans and the Langtang people, although the pattern is the same, the festivities are on a much less lavish scale.



In addition to the death-rites the lamas may also be called in times of sickness to individual households to conduct day-long readings from the holy books, to blow mantras (tam. cyeng-ah) to protect the inhabitants of the house, and to offer up serkim (tib. gSer-kyems) - grain beer and juniper smoke - to the gods. They may also erect new prayer flags outside a house to earn the occupants merit and protect them. Some lamas have the reputation as particularly powerful magicians who can compel rain, protect crops or rid the countryside of pests or predators such as bears and wild pigs (N - banel). When people are sorely troubled by the latter they will approach the lama in question with gifts and seek to convince him of the justice of their case; if he agrees to undertake it for them and it will involve the killing or harming of other living creatures they will be requested to make many offerings and burn many lamps in the gompa to atone for the sin involved. Other lamas, particularly those resident in Langtang valley have a more scholarly reputation and leave magic to other practitioners, preferring to immerse themselves in their books or to undertake long periods of solitary meditation (tsam).

As well as these individual rites the lamas officiate at a number of calendrical ceremonies commemorating significant events in Buddhist religious history. These are timed according to the Tibetan calendar (beginning in mid-February). They vary slightly from place to place (see Table 1) but mostly follow a similar pattern: the lamas are responsible for constructing and decorating the tormas and for preparing the altar in the gompa. To a musical accompaniment of drums, bells, cymbals, horns and conch shell they read and chant from the appropriate books usually with only a small audience. This done there is generally a large feast afterwards for the whole village, the food being provided by a number of jindars (sponsors). Rice tormas are also made and once blessed are distributed to every member of the village as prasād (tse-tup).

The other principal religious specialists in the region, apart from the lamas are the local shamans (N - jhānkri; tam. - bombo). The people are plagued with a number of evil spirits as well as well as by the spirits of men who have died (shin-de). There are also a number of named witches (sōn-de), always women, whose glance, touch, or presence is liable to bring illness and the same result is expected of the malicious envy or gossip of neighbours. All these cases fall under the provenance of the bombos who are, however, much less numerous than the lamas. Like them they are often members of the Karmapa clan and although it need not be, the position is often hereditary. For the most straightforward rites it is not necessary that the bombo become possessed, his role in this case being more that of the diviner. When major trouble strikes, however, lengthy rites are conducted in which the bombo constructs tormas although of a different significance from those of the lamas, offers serkim to his familiar spirits and invokes their protection and goes into a trance to learn the causes of the problem and the wishes of the gods.

Often these will involve further protection rites and the sacrifice of a cock or, very rarely, a goat.

Many of the present bombos are very old and there seem to be few new recruits to the profession. There is no bombo at all in the upper Langtang valley, the Syabru bombo visiting occasionally to minister to their needs. The bombos seem in general to be overshadowed by the lamas and for this a number of reasons can be deduced. Most importantly there are few situations which are solely the preserve of the shaman for in many cases of illness it is equally possible to employ lamas. Moreover, the orthodoxy of Buddhism with its sacred scriptures and long tradition carries more weight and prestige. The financial incentives of shamanism are also less attractive for although the rewards may be great in the case of a successful cure in a particularly difficult case, the shaman cannot rely on any regular round of festivals to maintain his income, nor does he receive alms like the lamas. Whereas most Buddhist rites in any case require the services of several lamas, the bo always operates alone, easily covering the requirements of several bo households. Although there would seem to be a spiritual divide between the shaman who must propitiate his bloodthirsty gods with animal sacrifices, and the lamas who have the malevolent demons firmly under their thumb as guardians of the doctrine, in actual fact relations between the two types of specialist seem cordial and the boundaries between them sometimes become blurred. Thus in some rites the bombo may even be found assisting the lamas and in old age some turn away from shamanism to the study of lamas. Each seems to respect the other as a powerful practitioner in his own right although the methodology is different.

Finally, there are those household ceremonies which do not require the services of any specialist. These are found exclusively amongst the Tamangs and, besides the worship of the clan deities (ke-lha) at the full-moon of Baisākh already mentioned, several Hindu festivals are also observed. These include Dasain, a time for feasting and drinking and the slaughter of animals - to which the lamas turn a blind eye, holding their own fast a few days later to atone for the sins committed at this time - Tihar, again a time for special foods, much gambling and the giving of gifts to sisters in exchange for the placing of tika marks on the forehead, and the two Sankrantis which celebrate the winter and summer solstices, ensure good harvests and expel ghosts and witches.

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Table 1
Calendar of Festivals

Month :	Festival :	Description
Baisākh (April-May)	Ki-lha	Ancestor worship of the clan divinities. Tamangs only.
Jeth (May-June)	<u>Nyung-gnas</u> 15th of the 4th month	A day of silence and fasting by the lamas and lay people at Mang-zhe Compa.
Asār (July-August)	Dalai Lama's birthday 20th of 5th month	Tibetans only. Three days of prayers for His Holiness, feasting and dancing.
Sāun (July-August)	Sāune <u>Sankranti</u>	On the 1st of the month, special food is prepared and eaten, offerings to the spirits and expulsion of demons. Tamangs only.
	<u>Tukpa tse-zhi</u> 4th of the 6th month	Tibetans undertake pilgrimage for 3 days to Gompaling with feasting and dancing. Tamangs hold small ceremony.
Bhadāu (August-September)	<u>Ekadasi</u>	Day of fasting, Hindu pilgrims begin arriving Gosainkund pilgrimage.
	<u>Janāi Purnimā</u>	Tamangs only, led by their shamans, make 3-day pilgrimage to the holy lake.
Asoj (September-October)	<u>Dasain</u>	3 days holiday, special food prepared and eaten, goats slaughtered, visits to neighbours. Tamangs only.
Kartik (October-November)	<u>Nyung-gnas</u> 9th of 9th month	All Buddhists. Day of fasting and silence, followed by religious ceremonies and feast. Held at different <u>gompas</u> annually.
	<u>Lhababs duschen</u> 22nd of 9th month	All Buddhists. Festival of the descent from heaven.
	<u>Tihar</u>	3 days holiday. On the 1st dogs are garlanded, on the 2nd cows. Special food, <u>puris</u> etc. eaten on the 3rd. Perfunctory worship of goddess Lakshmi, sisters garland brothers and place <u>tikas</u> receiving gifts in exchange.
Mangsir (November-December)	<u>Hyu m</u>	Tamang, Lamas read the sacred books only, for 5 days, culminating in village protection rite and masked dancing.
Māgh (January-February)	Maghe <u>Sankranti</u>	-
Phāgun (Feb.-March)	<u>Lo-gsar</u> 1st of 1st month	All Buddhists. Tibetan New Year celebrated for 15 days with feasting, dancing, singing.

Conclusion

Although much further work remains to be done we have seen in this brief survey of the Langtang region that, although the different population groupings living there share much in terms of a common economy, mutually intelligible languages and a common religious tradition, relations between them, while cordial, are never intimate. Each holds itself aloof preferring to maintain their own ceremonies with their own religious specialists, avoiding intermarriage or close economic ties. Of the three, the Tibetans are the most outward-looking by force of circumstance, realizing their need to create new economic opportunities and fully endorsing the value of modern education. The Tamangs have been most affected by the influence of Hinduism and while there seems no likelihood that Buddhism will decline in the foreseeable future they accept their place in the multi-ethnic mosaic of Nepal. Education and innovation, still regarded with suspicion by some, is being increasingly endorsed by the younger generations and it cannot be long before their effects make themselves felt.

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