CHAPTER VII

THE LAHULA SCHEDULED TRIBE

Ecological Setting:

The Lahul-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh is a unique socio-physical unit in the inner Himalayas near the Indo-Tibetan border. The whole district of Lahul-Spiti lies in the north western part of India. It is bounded on its eastern border by Tibet, to its north lies the Ladakh district of Jammu and Kashmir, on the western and southern borders it is bounded by the Chamba and Kulu districts of Himachal Pradesh. On its south-eastern boundary lies the district of Kinnaur. To be exact it is situated between north latitude $31^\circ 44' 57"$ and $32^\circ 59' 57"$ and between east longitude $76^\circ 46' 29"$ and $78^\circ 41' 34.\text{"}$. The district can divided into two clearly distinct sub-divisions namely Lahul and Spiti. Though administratively one they are socially and geographically two separate entities. Lahul constitutes the western and physically more accessible and fertile area of the district as compared to its counterpart the Spiti sub-division.

Lahul consists of the valleys of the Chandra and Bhaga rivers along with the mountain mass these valleys clasped between their extended arms. The two rivers join to form the Chandra-Bhaga river (also known as Chenab) near the Tandi Village which passes through the Patan valley. Geographically, the Lahul sub-division is bounded on the north by high mountain ranges forming the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, on its south lies Kulu district of Himachal Pradesh, on the east Spiti and the Chamba district lies on its west. Thus, physically Lahul is a closed unit. However, it is accessible from south through Rohtang Pass at the height of 4000 Mtrs. above sea level and from north eastern side through Baralacha Pass. The Chenab river forces its way into the Chamba district from the western side through a narrow valley known as Patan valley. Through these passes and valley Lahul remained a buffer land throughout the centuries and changed hand among the rulers of Chamba, Ladakh and Kulu. It is because of this reason we find great admixture of different people belonging to different races, religion and culture in Lahul which is ultimately reflected from the socio-

2. Ibid., p. 3.

cultural heritage of the Lahula tribal community.

Within Lahul also there is a great deal of topographic diversity of which two most important features are the high mountain ranges and narrow river valleys. Enclosed by the Chandra and Bhaga rivers is a great triangular mass of mountains which form the centre of the area. The Baralacha pass is an important feature in the general configuration of the region. It is nearly 8 Km. long and consists of a high neck of land connecting the central mountain with the main Himalayas. Its name Baralacha implies "The Pass with Cross roads on summit." The roads from Zangskar, Ladakh, Spiti and Lahul meet at the top. The mountain ranges rise to a mean elevation of about 5480 meters above the sea level. The lowest point being the Rohtang Pass at about 4000 meters above the sea level. The whole area is very much higher and rugged thereby remains covered under a thick layer of snow whole the year. As a result there is no vegetation and inhabitation in the upper regions of the area. Chandra and Bhaga are the two main rivers in the area which constituted the Chenab river after their confluence at Tandi Village. Thus

in the Lahul region there are three main valleys namely the Chandra, the Bhaga and the Chenab also known as the Patan Valley. The valley of river Chandra is locally called Rangoli. A considerable portion of this valley is just a snowbed near Baralacha Pass and is uninhabited. This region contains mainly high mountain peaks, large glaciers and vast snowfields. The vegetation exists only in patches, mainly pastures, where the nomads camp during the summer months. The valley of river Bhaga is locally called Gara. Like Chandra Valley, the earlier region of this valley also presents a deserted look however the later part shows the sign of vegetation and habitation. The valley of the combined rivers of Chandra and Bhaga is called Chandra-Bhaga valley, popularly known as Patan. This valley is wider, fertile and thickly populated. This valley has been termed as orchard and granary of Lahul-Spiti.  

On the other hand Spiti, the other sub-division of the district, in comparison to Lahul, is higher in elevation, rugged and difficult in terrain, oppressive and inhospitable in climate. There are high mountain peaks all around Spiti rising above 6000 meters from the

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Spiti region consists of mountain ranges and narrow gorges formed by fast flowing rivers and streams situated in the arid zone, this region has very little vegetation to support human habitation. Along with mountain ranges the Spiti region has two valleys mainly Spiti and Pin. Most of the population of the region live in these valleys.

From the above geo-physical sketch of the district it can safely be concluded that the whole area consists of high mountains covered with snow and narrow river valleys. Slopes along these river valleys upto an elevation of 3350 meters above the sea level are characterised by vegetation cover during summer only. The inhabitation is possible only along the river valleys. Higher reaches are sparingly inhabited. The people have achieved complete harmony with their harsh environment and have developed a social system of their own which seems to be the result of their environmental needs.

**Historical Perspectives:**

Historically speaking Lahul is situated where the kingdoms of Kulu, Chamba and Ladakh meet. It is difficult to have a connected and coherent history of Lahul because it changed hand from one ruler to another in the past. The

present inhabitants of Lahul are the mixture of various races and culture who invaded the area from time to time in the past. On the bases of linguistic researches about 2000 B.C. the Lahul region was inhabited by an aboriginal tribe which was analogous to the Munda speaking tribes of Bengal and Central India. At a later period because of the geographical proximity Tibetan settlers might have come in from the north and east from Ladakh and Tibet into the head of the Bhaga and Chandra Valleys through Baralacha Pass. Aryans also came from West and South through Chenab valley and Rohtang Pass, the only routs to enter the region from west and south. Accordingly the present inhabitants seem to be the result of the admixture of these different races. This is supported by the fact that the socio-cultural traits of the present inhabitants contain the traces of Aryan and Tibetan influences. The religion of the people was animistic in nature before the Buddhism spread into this region. Thus snake, demon and phallic worship was the religion of the people as in other parts of the hills. Triloknath Temple at Udaipur was originally a Shiva Temple. 8 Buddhism was later intro-

duced into the Lahul in the eighth century by Padama Sambhawa.⁹

From the geographical situations of Lahul it seems probable that a loose connection with Ladakh might have existed from a remote period. Chamba and Kulu princely States also had control on some part of the Patan valley and Chandra and Bhaga valleys respectively. This is further supported by the fact that there have been references of wars between Chamba and Kulu rulers.¹⁰

Dr. Francke in his book Antiquities of Indian Tibet mentioned that various invasions of Kulu by Tibet and Ladakh.¹¹ This shows that Lahul remained under Tibet and Ladakh for some times. About the middle of the 17th century Ladakh was invaded by Central Tibet, then under Mongolia,¹² but the invaders were defeated and driven back. On the retreat of the Mongols the Raja of Kulu, Bidhi Singh, seized the opportunity to bring upper Lahul entirely under his sway. He also advanced down the main valley and annexed the country from Chamba as

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⁹ Ibid., p. 475.


¹² Ibid., pp. 219-220.
far as Thirot. This invasion of Chamba by Kulu has been supported by a legend recorded in the Triloknath Temple, according to which a Kulu Raja reached Triloknath and tried to carry off the idol, but could not do so as the idol became so heavy that it could not be moved. 13 Bidhi Singh's successor Raja Man Singh further strengthened his hold on the Lahul territory by advancing to the north of Baralacha Pass and fixing the boundary with Ladak at Lghti. 14 In 1840-41 Kulu came under the control of Sikhs and as such the Lahul. Later in 1846 when Sikhs submitted to Britishers, Lahul became the territory of Britishers. Prior to 14th January 1975, the area in the Patan Valley upto confluence of Chandra and Bhaga rivers was under the Chamba district and was known as Chamba Lahul. In Jan. 1975, there was reorganisation of the district boundaries and as such the four Patwar circles namely Tindi, Udaipur, Triloknath and Miyar from Pangi sub-Tehsil (now Tehsil) in Chamba district were transferred to Lahul-Spiti district, i.e. to the British Lahul as it was understood. The transformation of the area from Chamba to Lahul-Spiti is important in our

context as the inhabitants of Chamba Lahul are now the inhabitants of present Lahul sub-division of the Lahul-Spiti District.

Though the Lahul remained under the control of different rulers at different times, the real rulers of the Lahul were the ancient petty chiefs, called 'Jo,' corresponding to the Ranas and Thakurs elsewhere. All of them were of Tibetan origin. The only symbol of subjection was the yearly tributes which they paid to the contemporary rulers. With the passage of time and domination by Hindu rulers of Kulu and Chamba, the Tibetan Customs and traditions which were being followed by the people generally lost their importance but still we find that the bulk of people belonging to the Buddhism follow the Tibetan life style with minor changes because of the separation from the main land, particularly in the upper Lahul areas.

In brief it can be said that historically the Lahul region remained a buffer land. Surrounding Kingdoms of Kulu, Chamba and Ladakh ruled over the region at different times and often changed hand. Consequently there is a great admixture of native people with the people of different races and culture
who came in as traders or invaders. Because of the proximity of the area to the Ladakh and Tibet and the better trade links with the Tibet up to the recent past, particularly prior to the formation of Hindustan-Tibet Road, we find the Tibetan influence on the people of the area.

Social Setting: People:

It is difficult to have a connected and systematic past account of the inhabitants of the Lahul region. Lahul has been a home to these sturdy people who could only endure and withstand the rigours of nature but loved solitude and extremely hard life of these forbidden mountain and valleys. Who are the first settlers in this region? No definite answer is available to this question. However, the district gazetteer provides:

... This area in about 2000 B.C. was inhabited by aboriginal tribes, in language and perhaps, also in stock analogous to the Munda-speaking tribes of Bengal and central India. Survivors of the same ethnological stock are to be found in the Kanwar Kothi of Rupi Waziri in Kulu, in the isolated village of Malana and in the Bushahr tract on the Satluj. At a later period, Tibetan settlers came in from the north and east from Rupshu and Ladakh into the head of Bhaga valley, and from Spiti and Tibet into the head

of the Chandra Valley near Khoksar, where the language spoken approximates rather to that of Spiti than to that of Ladakh. Aryans and semi-Aryans also came from the West and South and the present Lahulas must in all probability, be the ultimate product of the amalgamation of these different races.

Whosoever they may be, they are fine people and have earned acclaim of the British rulers of the past. 16

In fact, there is no particular community which inhabited the whole of the Lahul region at any time. Mangoliod Tibetans from Ladakh and Tibet and Aryans from Chamba and Kulu form the main bulk of the present population in the region. Historically, Lahul was a buffer land between Ladakh, Tibet, Kulu and Chamba and it changed hand from one ruler to another. Consequently, there was intermixing of people belonging to different races and culture in this buffer land. Hence, we find no racial and cultural purity among the population of Lahul. The term 'Lahula,' therefore, implies to every person, irrespective of his caste or race, who resides in the territory of Lahul region. Thus 'Lahula' in fact is not the name of a tribe or community inhabiting the Lahul region. The term 'Lahula' has been included in

in the list of scheduled tribe along with the other communities, who inhabit different valleys in the region as a matter of abandoned precaution so that if a particular person residing in the area does not belong to any one of the specified communities in the list of the scheduled tribe may not be denied the benefits given to such communities. Such persons are termed as 'Lahula' and thus included in the list of scheduled tribes. Thus those persons who migrated to the Lahul region in the recent past and got themselves assimilated socially and culturally with the other communities of the region are called 'Lahulas. The fusion of races lead to the abolition of their physical racial character, however, culturally the people have retained their racial characters which are reflected in the customs and traditions of the various principal communities of the region.

The population figures of Lahul-Spiti district since the beginning of the century till 1981 are given in the following table. The table also shows the male and female population.

Table

Table Showing the Population of the Lahul-Spiti District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>10444</td>
<td>5198</td>
<td>5246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>10903</td>
<td>5427</td>
<td>5476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>10660</td>
<td>5290</td>
<td>5370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>11481</td>
<td>5724</td>
<td>5757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>11986</td>
<td>6210</td>
<td>5776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>12728</td>
<td>6558</td>
<td>6170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>20453</td>
<td>11519</td>
<td>8934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>23538</td>
<td>12975</td>
<td>10563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>32100</td>
<td>18171</td>
<td>13929</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above reveals that there is a steady growth of population. Till 1951 the growth in population was slow. The reason for such a slow growth of population is ascribed to the custom of Polyandry in the area. The population figures in 1961 show a steep rise in population as compared to 1951 figures. The reason for this large increase is that during the year 1961 the Lahul-Spiti sub-division was elevated to a district and as such a large number of persons came from outside to man
various administrative departments and other developmental activities in the district.

The following table shows the percentage of scheduled tribe and scheduled caste population to the total population of the area for the last two decades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>% of SC to total Population</th>
<th>S.T.</th>
<th>% of S.T. to total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>27568</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>21563</td>
<td>78.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>32100</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>23766</td>
<td>74.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that the majority of the population is scheduled tribe. Percentage of scheduled tribe population in 1981 is less than that of 1971. This decrease is due to the increased number of non-tribals, in the area for the developmental activities under various central and state projects. When tribal and non-tribal people interact with each other in a tribal land, the former are bound to be influenced in their socio-cultural aspect. Interaction of tribal with non-tribal is one of the reasons which explains the deviation of the tribal from the observance of their century old customs and traditions. That is why we find decline
in the custom of polyandry in the tribal areas of Lahul and Spiti also. Because of interaction between tribal and non-tribal population social customs in respect of marriage has undergone a change and we find that the younger generation is opting for the love marriages instead of their traditional forms of marriage.

The bulk of the scheduled tribe population of Lahul-Spiti district belongs to the Thakur, Bhot and Swangla communities. Thakur generally trace their lineage to some illustrious clans such as Chandra or Surya. Thakur formed the aristocracy of Lahul before the abolition of their Jagir and considered themselves superior to other communities in the region. Thakurs correspond to the Rajputs of the Himalayan area but are more or less pure Tibetans by Blood and Buddhist by religion.

Bhots or Bodhs who form the middle and most numerous class are generally of Mongoloid stock and profess Buddhism are pure Tibetans or nearly so. Swanglas are Aryan and their religion is Hinduism. Beside these upper class communities there are few others namely shipis and Lohars etc. belonging to the menial classes

and are treated as low caste among Lahula society and have been declared as Scheduled Castes. Thus the term 'Lahula' for the purpose of our study comprises of Bhot or Bodh and Swanglas communities. Bhot and Swanglas both are principally agriculturists however, culturally and ethnically the two, differ from each other. In the following pages we shall discuss each of them.

**Bhot or Bodh: Their History and Socio-Economic Setting:**

'Bhot' or 'Bhotia', are of Tibetan origin. Mr. Crooke while describing 'Bhot' says that the inhabitants of Lahul-Spiti district returned themselves as 'Bot' implying thereby that they are of Tibetan origin.¹⁹ The name 'Bodh' has been derived from Tibetan origin, Tibetan themselves call their country 'Bod-yul' or Bod land and the people 'Bod-Pas' which is corrupted by the Indians into 'Bhotiyas.'²⁰ In ancient literature, Tibet was known as 'Bhot-Desha' and the inhabitants of that country 'Bhot'. From such an origin, many communities in some of the Himalayan region are known as Bodh or Bhot or Bhotia. In the first land revenue settlement by Mr. Lyall, 'Bhots' or 'Bodhs' were

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²⁰. Ibid., p. 61.
recorded as Kanets in the revenue records. However, after 1950-51 they have been recorded as Rajputs. Bodh's or 'Bhots' are universal in upper Bhaga and Chandra Valleys. They are also found in small numbers in Patan Valley where they are overshadowed by Swangla Tribe. There is no doubt that the 'Bodh's' or 'Bhot's' are of Tibetan origin. It appears that most of their ancestors came from Tibet and Ladakh as invaders and later on settled down in this region and mingled with the aborigines by marriage and other modes of social intercourse. These Tibetan invaders were followed by the influx of their religious missionaries etc. They penetrated into the culture and religion of the aborigines with the result that the later lost their distinct entity forever.

The 'Bhot' community of Lahul can be divided into an upper class of Thakurs who are the gentry and were the rulers of Lahul in fact during the historic period. They now consider themselves as

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Rajputs. Kanets who form the middle and most numerous class, and few menial classes like 'Sipis' and 'Hesis'. Thakurs and Kanets follow the gotra system while the menial classes have no gotras. Field study reveals that the main class distinction among the Bhots of Lahul is not on the bases of caste but on the bases of occupation. They are divided between the agriculturists and the wage-earning classes. Major part of the Bhot population belongs to the former class. This line of demarcation, though it prevents intermarriage, does not separate the classes in the rigid way that the institution of caste would do.

The economic life of the 'Bhot' is generally based on the agriculture. They have also adopted other professions like livestock rearing, muleteering, labour etc. Before the Indo-China war in 1962, they had good trade links with Tibetan counterpart. But now this aspect of their economic life has received a great set back. Almost all the Bhots possess the agricultural land of their own. The allotments of land supposed to have been made authoritatively at a remote

period. 26 All the sons are considered entitled to equal shares of their father's holding, but in practice they seldom divide. They cannot afford to live separate because the holdings are small. In order to protect their land from division, the people follow the practice of polyandry. When asked to defend their repulsive custom of polyandry, they say that their holdings are too small to divide. There is truth in this statement. Because of high altitude, winter season is very large. Monsoon does not reach there and as such area remains without rain. Irrigation facilities are negligible. Cultivation is possible only in summer and hence only one crop in the year could be obtained which in turn is not sufficient for the family for whole year. They have to pool extra-resources for their livelihood which needs more manpower. With the practice of polyandry where one wife is shared by more brothers in the same household, each one of them contributes by one way or the other to the common income of the household. Kuth and potatoes are the only cash crops which the people are now exporting to outside world on a much larger scale due to vehicular road over the Rohtang Pass.

26. Ibid.
With the developed means of communication and transportation with the main land of the country, the economic position of the Lahula has improved considerably.

During the past decade there has been a change in the occupational tendencies among the scheduled tribes of Himachal Pradesh. A comparative study of the occupational distribution charts during 1971 and 1981 census reveals that the shift is towards the non-traditional occupations i.e. agriculture and animal husbandry. The people have been attracted towards other services like government jobs, labourer etc. This trend is because of the governmental policy to give special treatment to scheduled tribes. Moreover, with the governmental emphasis on the construction of roads in the tribal areas and some hydro-electric projects being constructed in the tribal areas or near proximity to such areas have attracted the tribal population to undertake the jobs of labourers in such construction works. Because of rough climate and non-fertility of land the tribal people find the

occupation of agriculture less economically compared to work as labourers in the construction of roads and hydro-electric projects. Table below shows that Lahulas are no exception of this occupational shift.

Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cultivators</th>
<th>Agril.Labourers</th>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Other Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lahul</td>
<td>7819  6994</td>
<td>59   197</td>
<td>39   33</td>
<td>4920  5104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiti</td>
<td>2640  2564</td>
<td>220  253</td>
<td>56   11</td>
<td>1437  3811</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the above discussion that among Bhots there is no caste system in the rigid sense. The community is divided into classes on the bases of their occupation. This class distinction is, however, material in respect of matrimonial relations among the Bhots. Main occupation of the people of this community is agriculture along with animal husbandry, trade etc. But because of governmental policies to uplift the tribal people, they are entering into government services and other more economical occupations.
The economic-position of the Bhot community as a whole has been improved during the past decades.

Religion:

'Bhots' of Lahul are of Tibetan origin. As in Tibet the early religion here was also a kind of nature worship which has been described as 'Shamanism' in Tibet. Animal sacrifice and magic played a very important role in it. Tibetans believed in spirits everywhere, good or evil. These spirits reside in trees, mountain peaks, under some rock or on mountain passes. This religion was known as 'Bon'. In Lahul region it is still known under the name of 'Lungpachhoi', i.e. the religion of valley. Animal sacrifices are still made to please the evil spirits on every important function. Buddhism entered into Tibet in 5th Century A.D. and flourished in 7th Century.

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30. Ibid., p. 10.


From Tibet the Buddhism entered into Lahul in 8th century by Padma Sambhava who, it is said, visited Lahul. Bhots of Lahul believe that the idol of Triloknath temple is the incarnation of Padma Sambhava. Padma Sambhava was a Tantric Buddhist from Udayane School. Because the inhabitants of Lahul already believed in magic etc. Teachings of Padma-Sambhava were readily accepted by the people. Buddhism became the religion of the people. According to the census reports the religion of 'Bhot' is Buddhism. But, is not pure Buddhism. The religious believes of 'Bhot' have been influenced by their 'Hindu' neighbours through out the centuries. This is possible because of the geographical conditions of the area. Thus the god of the pass is La-tse, Zhing-Tha is the field god and Lu is said to be a Nag or snake deity and is worshipped with milk and water. His shrine is usually a spring and it is kept clean. Women donot worship him. A lama or a Buddhist monk is normally associated with

34. Census of India, 1981.
all types of ceremonies of religious nature. People of Lahul particularly 'Bhot' still continue to believe in a great many spirits or demons known as Ihas. These spirits are supposed to dwell in trees, rocks or on the hill tops and before whom these people sacrifice sheep and goats. Buddhism, however, does not provide for animal sacrifice.

In short we may say that the 'Bhot' are Buddhist by religion but animal sacrifices are still practiced by them. They believe in superstitions. Lama or a Buddhist monk normally performs the various ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death. Lama enjoys a respectable place in the 'Bhot' society.

Swangla: History and Their Socio-Economic Setting:

The other major community inhabiting the Lahul region is Swangla. They are confined mostly to the Lower Lahul or Patan Valley. It is not certain whether the Swanglas are the original inhabitants of Lahul, but the Lahul valley does happen to be called Swangla Desh by some i.e. the Manchadpas. But the popular legend regarding the origin of Swangla community suggests that their ancestors had migrated to the area from outside. According to these legendary tales some

Brahmins used to come to the confluence of the Chandra and Bhaga rivers to perform the obsequials of their Yajmans as this place was considered sacred like Haridwar. It is said that once a father and his son came here to perform the death rites. The saying is that they used to fly in the air, as they had such superhuman powers. Once they felt hungry and they asked the people of the area for food and were offered meat. The father refused to take meat while the son took it. Thereafter, the father flew back but the son lost his flying power by taking the meat. He remained here and married a local lady. His off-springs spread. Swanglas are those offsprings according to this legend. Whether this is true or not cannot be ascertained but the Swanglas call themselves Brahmins and place themselves over and above the Thakurs of the region in the social hierarchy.

Swanglas are Hindu by religion but influenced by Buddhism which is the predominant religion of the people in the upper region. They worship the Nâg as well as the Ling.

Economically their lot is not in any way different from other people of the region. But they are slightly better off as they occupy the lower region where

climatic is less hostile as compared to the upper region. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. However, side by side they have been following diversified pursuits to make their both ends meet. Young generation seems to be inclined towards the government jobs with the spread of education and better opportunities of getting the job because of the government policies. Cash Crops like Potato and Kuth cultivation which have been adopted by the people in the recent past has elevated the economic status of the people considerably.

Judicial Administration:

It is a common belief that the earliest inhabitants of Lahul and Spiti region must have entered these valleys after crossing the geographical barriers and inhospitable climate in search of peaceful abode in the lap of nature. To begin with they must have been nomads, with the passage of time they must have settled in small helmets with their headman and possibly deities. Among them the physically most powerful must have grown to the position of Thakurs on Rajas. On the basis of 'Might is Right' an autocratic polity must have grown separately in different valleys of Lahul and Spiti. Geo-physical compulsion must have given certain degree of freedom from the Thakurs and Rajas
to the people, who, it seems, used to organise themselves freely on the basis of self-help and co-operation among themselves. Such division of several valleys amongst various Thakurs or Rajas is evident from the fact that the contemporary rulers of Kulu, Chamba and Ladakh found it convenient to enforce their rule on people through them. This had also the practice of the British rulers of the area during the 19th century to divide large portions of area among the *Lambardars*, *Zamindars*, *Talukdars* and *Rajas* for effective administration of the region.

In Lahul the groups of houses were settled in small villages. Several villages grouped together formed *Kothis*. The whole of the Lahul region was divided into fourteen such *Kothis*.\(^{38}\) Each *Kothi* was divided into *Puttees*. Each *Puttee* was under a *Lambdar*. Every *Kothi* was under a *chowkidar*. Several *Kothis* were under the charge of a *Patwari*. All *Kothis* were under the charge of a *Negi*.

A *Lambdar* used to be a man with superior position in terms of land and was appointed by the common consent of the inhabitants of the *Puttee*. A

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\(^{38}\) Chandra and Bhaga Valleys had four *Kothis* each while the Patan Valley was divided into six *Kothis*. 
chowkidar was a hereditary official. Patwari was appointed on several Kothis. Negi was a hereditary official in charge of the whole region. Lambardar was responsible for the collection of revenue from the farmers. He was exempted from begar i.e. forced labour and was getting small percentage of revenue as his fees. The chowkidar used to get regular grain supplies from the Kothi. Patwari was a village accountant. His duty was to register all deeds of sales and transfers of lands and to keep in proper order the maps and plans of various kothis under his charge. At times he used to work as registrar of betrothals etc. Negi was responsible for providing begar as and when required. He used to get small percentage of the revenue collected. This administration of Lahul was continued when the territory was under the rule of Kulu. In 1846 after the treaties of Lahore and Amritsar the whole region came under the British East India Company. Lahul-Spiti and Kulu were placed under the charge of the Assistant Commissioner, who himself was subordinate to the Deputy Commissioner of Kangra. However, for the administration of Lahul the earlier arrangement of administration through Negi continued.

The position of administration in Spiti was not different from that of Lahul. The Spiti region was divided into five Kothis. All Kothis were under the charge of Nono instead of Negi of Lahul. Nono was assisted by five Gyatpos, one each in each Kothi. Each village was under a Lambardar who was subordinate to Gyatpo. This system continued even after the East India Company took over the region under the treaty of Amritsar in 1846.

This was the general administrative set-up in Lahul and Spiti divisions of the region when district was created on 14th July, 1960. This gradual development in the general administrative set-up of the region suggests that the judicial administration in the area must also have grown gradually along with general administration.

The socio-economic conditions of the people of the area suggest that the system of judicial administration has been very rudimentary up till the middle of the 20th century. The season for such a state of affair appears to be that since the very beginning of the human civilisation in this region, the basic causes of the human crimes were absent. The people were poor and had few belongings to lose, steal or snatch. The society has been polyandrous and hence the
possibility of sex crimes was negligible. Captain Harcourt in this connection observed "It may be deemed that the people of the country are singularly free from the majority of the vices that are common elsewhere." Yet the society which has been organised must be having some methods of settling disputes amongst the people. The system of having five wise and elderly men i.e. Panchas was in existence all over India prior to the advent of modern western civilization and Anglo-Saxon legal system. The system of having the village Panchayat is still in vogue in the rural and backward areas. Thus there must have been panches to decide the petty quarrels amongst the people in Lahul Spiti region. Landlords and Rajas must have served court of appeal.

Dr. Van Dar Sleen who had spent four months in the Himalayas, observes about the crime and character of the people thus. 41

There are no cases of the theft of women, and, as every one knows, all is fair in love and war. The penalty for such misdemeanours is always decided by the votes of the neighbours, and is as a rule paid promptly.


41. Van Dar Sleen, Four Months Camping in the Himalayas, (1929), p. 44.
Lahul-Spiti which came under the British Government in 1846 appointed the Negi for the first time and gave him the judicial powers of Magistrate Class III which was finally replaced by the regular Naib Tehsildar. Prior to the appointment of a Naib-Tehsildar justice was not naturally administered according to the coded laws. Cases were often decided by prominent persons of the area under the guidance of the negi or nano. Trebeck visited Spiti in 1820. He described the crimes and the dispensation of justice as follows:

If a dispute arises between individuals, the parliament of Gatpos must settle it; if a robbery is committed, they must enquire into it, and if a theft he discovered, award his punishment.

It seems that there was a kind of democracy existing then and all the decisions were taken by elderly people of the village in a meeting. Though the British Government provided Nono few simple rules in 1872 and armed him with elaborate rules in Spiti Regulation

44. Foreign Political Department A, December 1872, Nos. 519-21.
in 1873, but the state of crimes perhaps never required to use them. The settlement Report of 1910-1913 provides the methods of dispensation of justice in Spiti in case of any crime in the following words:

The Gatpos are elected by the people and liable to dismissal without notice. Their principal duty is to act as jurors when the Nono tries offenders.

It is clear from the above discussion that there was not much crime till about the middle of the present century. Justice G.D. Khosla reported that during 1948 and 1949 Nono of Spiti had heard only eight cases of a petty nature and awarded petty fines. The Nono's court had no fixed location. He tried cases at the spot and dispensed a kind of rough and ready justice.

The system of administration of justice as discussed above continued till the formation of the separate district namely, Lahul-Spiti in 1960. Since

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45. Foreign Political Department A, March 1873, Nos. 139-42.

46. J. Coldstream, Settlement Report 1910-1913 of the Kulu Sub-Division, (1913), no. 5.

1960 the modern judicial system has been incorporated in the region. In matters of disputes of civil nature Deputy Commissioner of Lahul-Spiti was given the powers of subordinate judge of Class II. Under him divisional officers at Keylong and Kaza were given powers of Subordinate Judge Class III in 1960.

In spite of the introduction of the modern judicial system for the administration of justice in the Lahul-Spiti region, the people of the area have not taken it kindly. This fact is born out by the fact that small number of cases have been reported. In 1982 only eighty two incidence of crimes have been reported. 48 Disputes relating to marriage and divorce are rarely taken to the law courts. Such disputes are settled by the parties amicably through the intervention of village Panchayat at the most. This is due to the existence of peculiar historical and traditional ideas about justice and its administration. People still seem to rely on the solution of a compromise, affected through the village Panchayat or other notables, instead of getting matters and

disputes decided on strict legal principles. Reasons of such a state of affair is possibly due to the non-familiarity of the people with ideas, principles and methods of this rather alien and quite formal modern system of justice. It is desirable to have some formal conciliatory machinery at the local level, to settle disputes of personal nature, between the parties to their satisfaction. Such conciliatory council should have the local people of repute on its panel and the parties to the dispute may be free to choose one member each of its choice who in turn should appoint another member as the chief conciliator. Such a conciliatory council should have the backing of the government.

Marriage Customs:

We have discussed geography, history, social, economic and religious aspects of the 'Bhot' community of Lahul region. These factors play important role in determining the customs and traditions of a community. There can be no denial of the fact that when a racial group of people moves from one place to another it carries with it its deep rooted beliefs, customs and traditions. With the passage of time these beliefs,
customs and traditions loose their hold possibly because of geographical conditions of the new area of inhabitation and the influence of surrounding people with whom such a group come in contact during this period. But some racial traits continue, though in a distorted form, for many centuries to come. These basic traits which a racial group retains distinguish it from the other people in the area. Thus in order to understand the customs of a particular tribal community of a particular region one has to study the customs of that community in its main land. So to study the customs of marriage and divorce among 'Bhot' of Lahul, we have to study the marriage customs of Tibetans with whom the 'Bhot' community is associated.

**Tibetan Marriage Customs:**

A brief account of marriage customs among Tibetan Mountain nomad, who form a major part of the Tibetan Population, is given by Thubten Jigme Norbu, the brother of Dalai Lama and abbot of one of the Tibet's greatest monasteries, that of Kumbum. When boys and girls are around eighteen or nineteen they start looking toward

marriage. The parents of a boy will look around for a suitable girl, and the father will tell his friends and relatives. The boy too will be searching for a girl when a likely girl is found, if the parents of the two young people know each other they will meet without formality. If they do not know each other, then the boys parents have to send a friend with the traditional scarf given in all formal greetings, and a gift of butter, cheese and meat. The friend will say why he has come, and if the girl's parents are agreeable then the young couple start visiting each other and exchanging gifts. Gifts are also exchanged between the parents. Friends join hands to make the wedding a splendid one, by giving cloth or food. First of all boys's parents visit the girl's parents with gifts, then the girl's parents make a return visit with gifts that must be slightly less valuable. These exchanges must go back and forth seven times and often it takes two years.

Once that is done, the parents from both families consult on astrologer to fix an auspicious day for the wedding. They will almost certainly have consulted him in the first place to make sure that the young couple are suited to each other, but it is most important that the wedding be on the right day.
On the wedding day—or before if the girl's camp is a long way off—the groom's family sends out seven or eight people on horseback, with a special horse for the bride. When the party arrives, the bride's family and friends come out and shout at them and insulting them. The man from the groom's camp reply in the same way. After this mock exercise the groom's party enters the house. They are served with food and wine etc. All the time people are joking and insulting each other. The groom's party stay for a day or two depending upon the distance between the houses of the parties to the marriage. In the end grooms party leaves with the bride on her new horse. Her parents do not go with her, but just her brothers, sisters and friends. But when the bride finally arrives, and is met by her mother-in-law with a gift of bucket of milk, even though she may have been longing for this day to be with her lover as husband and wife, she has to start crying and pretending that she wants to go back to her own home. She refuses to take the bucket of milk, but finally one of her sisters takes it, and the bride dips her finger in the milk and flicks a drop into the sky. After this every one goes inside, where a great feast has been prepared, and that is the end of the wedding.
From the above description it is clear that marriage for a tibetan is not of any religious importance. The occasion is enjoyed by making fun and eating, drinking and dancing. Preferably the marriage is an elaborate cultural and community occasion.  

If the girl's parents have no sons, then it might well happen that the boy goes to live with his wife, and takes membership in her family, so that her family line will not die out. This may also happen if the boy's parents cannot afford the expenses of a large wedding. Thus the institution of Ghar-Jawain is recognised in the Tibetan society. The boy in such a case sever his relations in his own family and becomes the son of the bride's family.

**Tibetan Polyandry:**

Tibetan Society probably exhibits a greater variety of types of marriage than any other society. These are the plural marriages, revealing various types of polyandry and polygyny. Though majority of the population contracts monogamous marriages, plural marriages

51. Ibid., p. 134.
are widespread and are fairly recognised. Economic factor appears to be the main reason for this practice. There are about six types of plural marriages prevalent in the Tibetan society. They are:

1. Fraternal Polyandry  Co-brothers sharing a wife
2. Sororal Polygamy   The sharing of a husband by sisters or other kinswoman
3. Unrelated males in polyandry Unrelated males share a wife
4. Unrelated female in Polygyny Unrelated females share a husband.
5. Father and son sharing a wife
6. Mother and daughter sharing a husband

Polyandry of fraternal type is widespread. However cases of other types of plural marriages also do exist.

54. Ibid., pp. 144-156.
Fraternal polyandry is the most common type of plural marriage in the Tibetan society. Two or more than two brothers share a wife. A second wife is not normally permitted. If any brother insists on having his own spouse he is required to leave the household altogether. In some cases a younger brother is permitted to have a separate wife and a marriage is arranged for him by the elders. This normally happens when the youngest brother is so young at the time of the marriage of the elder brothers as to have marital intercourse with her. When such a brother comes of age he needs a partner of his age. In such circumstances separate wife is arranged for him.

'Bhots' of Lahul are of Tibetan origin. This fact is supported by the customs of marriage and divorce prevailing among the 'Bhot' people. We will see in the following pages that their marriage customs are akin to their tibetan counterpart in Tibet. However, there are certain variations, which in fact, are due to the changed geophysical position of 'Bhot' community and their inter-mixing with the surrounding hindu population. The marriage customs of the 'Bhot' of Lahul region are almost the same as that in Tibet.

Normally marriage is preceded by betrothal. Negotiations are initiated by the father or on his
behalf by the maternal uncle of the boy. He is accompanied by some elderly person. They go to the girl's house with a bottle of wine and small quantity of butter. The proposal is disclosed to the girl's parents formally, though they are informally already aware. The parents of the girl consult the girl also and accordingly the proposal is accepted or rejected. In the event of an affirmative reply, the wine which has been brought by the boy's father or maternal uncle is distributed among the members of the family. This indicates that the betrothal is confirmed. This ceremony is repeated again after some time. This is done most probably, to get acquainted with the girl's family. Then the day of wedding is fixed with the consultation of the Lama. On the fixed day the boy's family with friends and relatives go in a procession to fetch the bride. The groom does not accompany the party.\(^{55}\) The party is generally accompanied by a Lama. The boy's family takes with them wine, meat etc. for the girl's family. On reaching the girl's house, they are received by the girl's parents and other relatives. Wine, meat etc. are given to the members of the girl's family for consumption. The

members of the boy's side are served with food and wine. All the persons enjoy the feast. The occasion is marked by singing, dancing and drinking wine. Then in the evening or next morning, depending upon the distance between the two villages, the boy's family returns to its village with the bride. When marriage party and the bride reaches the groom's house, the Lama performs a ceremony just outside the house to scared away any evil spirit. After this ceremony the marriage party and the bride enters the house. They are served with food and wine. All persons make marry, this completes the marriage ceremony.

The parents of the girl give her some dowry according to their status and economic condition. The dowry consists of clothes, utensils and other household goods and some jwellary and cash. These things, constitute her istridhana. This is called 'Zori. She also receives gotan from her husband. The gotan is recoverable by him. Thakur and some times the Kanets also, give some piece of land to be enjoyed by her during her life time. 56

In fact for these people the size of dowry is not of much importance. But they look to the bride, who should be smart and healthy, so that she may be able to do all the work. This is important since except ploughing the field, every other work is done by the women.

Polyandry Among Bhots:

Polyandry is generally recognised in the Lahul region. Among the 'Bhot' community, however, it is of fraternal type. The eldest brother gets married and the younger ones take the same wife as they grow up. Generally the parents of the girl satisfy themselves at the time of betrothal negotiations that the boy's parents will not bring any other wife for their younger sons. The field survey reveals the fact that this practice of polyandry is losing its ground among the younger generation. But the practice is so deep rooted that the younger generation cannot oppose it openly. Wherever a younger brother thinks of having his own wife, he has to forfeit his right in the family property. A very interesting instance of polyandry has been recorded by Mr. Gill in his book.57 The instance shows

that at times the younger brother of a polyandrous union may be so young in age from that of his eldest brother who had married that the youngest may be suckled by his brother's wife. Later on when he grew up, he takes her as his wife. It is submitted that this may be an isolated case where the youngest brother was not allowed to marry. Normally, in such circumstances the youngest brother is allowed to have a separate wife.

Polyandry is a rigid social custom. The people have practised it since time immemorial and find it normal to share a wife. When asked to defend this repulsive custom they say that their holdings are too small to divide, and that experience shows them that it is impossible for two sisters-in-laws, with separate husbands and families, to live together, whereas two or more brothers with a common wife can agree. Whatever may have been the historical reasons for this custom, economic condition of the people has some raison d'être. There is very little agricultural land in the region. Only one crop is grown in the year

due to the severe climate and pausity of rain. A large population cannot be supported. Polyandry has acted as a suitable social method of population control. Moreover, 'Polyandry' keeps the whole family intact. The question of division or separation between the brothers does not arise as they share the common wife. The people cannot afford the fragmentation of their small holdings.

With the improvement in the economic conditions, of the people because of the changed circumstances, the young generation tend to feel ashamed of their social set up. Many of them want to have a wife to themselves. This often leads to conflict in the family with the older generation insisting on the old customs. This is, however, is a perfectly natural situation. The olders will always stand up for the old customs. The young will always break them. In Lahul region polyandry is the honourable, sacrosanct custom sanctioned by long usage.

From the above discussion it is clear that the marriage customs of 'Bhot' of Lahul to a greater extent are the same as that of mountain nomad of Tibet. Thus

for the Bhots of Lahul region marriage is an occasion for making fun and re-joining. No religious sanctity is attached to the marriage tie. Of course among the 'Bhot', lama plays an important role in the marriage. It is he who fixes the date of marriage. He performs the ceremony to ward off the evil spirits at the time of marriage. As a rule his presence is not mandatory but generally the people consults him and no function is complete without his presence.

Dowry constitutes an important part in the marriage ceremony. Though the size of Dowry is immaterial, the bride is the absolute owner of it. It is her Ishtridhan. Husband or any other person has no right over it. After the death of the wife husband is entitled to the Ishtridhan as legal heir to the deceased wife. If the marriage is dissolved by divorce, she takes her Ishtridhan with her.

Marriage by Elopement; Baglog

An other form of marriage known as Baglog i.e. marriage by elopement is also prevalent in the Bhot community of Lahul region. Baglog form of marriage is generally contracted by Kanets i.e. middle class or low class people who are economically not well off. In this form normally there used to be a secret understanding between the boy and the girl to marry each
other. Courtship between the two continues for sometime and then the boy presents a silver or gold ornament to the girl. This is known as nya i.e. to lie. This implies that the boy is ready to get the girl as his wife. On some fixed day the girl manages to slip out of her home on one or the other pretext. The boy waits her with his friends and then takes her forcibly with the help of his friends to his house. The girl creates a hue and cry, but just to make a show that she is being eloped by the boy. The news of the elopement of the girl reaches to her parents also. After few days from the happening of this event, a relative is sent by the boy's father to the girl's parents for settling the matter. The relative begs the pardon on behalf of the boy's father over the sad event. He tries to pursue the girl's parents that they should not mind it and they should give their consent for the marriage. In the beginning the girl's parents show some reluctance but later on they give their consent. They go to the boy's house and see the girl and ask her whether she is happy or not. On being satisfied that their daughter has no complaint. They bless the couple.

At times it also happen that the parents, of the girls do not give their consent and breaks all relations with the girl. In such a case the girl
continues to live in the house of the boy as his wife. She may have children. After 2-3 years she visits her parents along with the child or children. On seeing her daughter with the child all ill will goes away and they accept the fate of their daughter.

In Bogloq form of marriage no feast is served to any body nor any dowry is given. It is a simple affair between the boy and to girl and is less expensive. Because of its simplicity and less expensive more and more people are adopting this method of contracting the marriage.

Prohibited Relationship:

Among the Bhot community child marriages are not prevalent. Marriagable age for the boy and girl is between 15 to 25 years. Caste system is not followed by the Buddhist.60 As such there is supposed to be no caste among the Bhot people of Lahul region. Because of hindu influence throughout the centuries a class distinction among them has developed i.e. high class, middle class and menial or low class. Each class contains

many clans and gotras, and marriage within the clan is forbidden. Though there is no bar for a middle class people to sit and eat with the people of menial class, marriage between them cannot take place. A person can marry only within his own class but of course not within the clan or gotra. A marriage with father's sister's daughter and mother's brother's daughter is not prohibited but marriage to wife's mother, wife's sister's daughter and wife's father's sister is not permitted. The field study reveals few instances of inter-class marriage and inter-community marriages. With the spread of education and intermixing with the people of main land a tendency is found among the young generation towards inter class marriage. Conservative people react unfavourably to the interclass marriages but can do nothing except give vent to their feelings in grumbling.

Legal Position of Bhot Marriage:

The secular character of a Bhot marriage is well demonstrated by the fact that no religious ceremonies are necessary to validate the marriage. In looking at the history of human marriage in other parts of the world we are faced with the remarkable
fact that religious rites have not formed in the past an essential condition of a valid marriage. Celebration of marriage with the help of a priest or in the church has been a very late development in human society.  

The two forms of marriage, as discussed above, which are prevalent among the Bhot show that no fixed ceremony is necessary for the validation of the marriage. Both the forms of marriage are equally legitimate, and there can be no question of one being more or less legitimate than the other. The most general social object of marriage rites is to give publicity to the union. This object is achieved in the Bhot marriage by way of the feast of wine and meat to the friends and the relatives. Thus what is required for a Bhot marriage to be a valid marriage is the consent of the parties to the marriage. The mere carrying off the girl from a field constitutes a valid marriage provided she has previously given the consent. The consent is expressed by her when she accepts the Nya.

63. Supra, Marriage by Elpement.
If the ingredient of consent is absent it will be a case of abduction and an offence under the Indian Penal Code. Further marriage between the persons who are within the prohibited relationship is also void.

Inter-class marriage or marriage outside the community is not void but is looked down upon. A person marrying outside his class is considered to have committed a social wrong. In such a case he does not suffer with any legal consequences. However, the child will be treated as belonging to the lower caste. In Lahul region the offsprings of a Swangla male and a Bhot female constitute a class by themselves and is called Garu. They do not form a distinct caste and tribe and are found generally in limited numbers in Patan valley where the two communities, Swangla and Bhot are found together. When a Garu boy marries with a Swangla girl and this goes on for 2-3 generations, his family will become pure Swangla. Similarly, if a Garu boy marries with a Bhot girl and so on for 2-3 generations, his family will become pure Bhot. In the social status for Garus are thought to be below their maternal community.

Position of Women and Divorce:

The position of women in a tribe affects its social organisation and its conception of marital rights and duties. The joint family system is predominant among the Bhot community, which is, primarily, a consequence of polyandry which still persists in this region. In the Polyandrous unions, the brothers live as co-husbands sharing one wife. The common wife also commands a responsible and respectable status in the family. The value of the wife lies principally in her services as a household drudge. She produces children, cooks food, cuts grass, gather wood, fetches water and do all the work in the field except actual ploughing. The marriage among Bhot is not a matter of affection or companionship. It has mere economic connection. Because of this factor she enjoys the place of honour and respect in the family and as such she has control over the entire house hold affairs.

In polyandrous union, a wife sharing several brothers has to exert great adroitness, diplomacy and self control to maintain the unity of the house. She has sexual as well as economic control to affect over each brother, who at different stages in his

development will have differing needs. As the younger brother matures, she initiates him sexually and then accommodates him with the others.

We have already seen that a Bhot marriage is remarkable in its simplicity. Consent of the parties or of their guardian followed by the entry of the bride in to the house of the man as wife, constitutes a valid marriage under the custom. No priest or public authority is needed to solemnize the marriage. The dissolution of the marriage is equally simple. On the bases of replies given to the questionnaire it appear that there are two critical periods in the development of a marriage during which divorce is most likely to occur. In each period the pattern of divorce is different. The first stage of instability occurs in the early years of marriage generally before children are born. The second, which usually attacks polyandric units, develops when the roles of brothers sharing a common wife change, with the senior enjoying less prestige and the junior assuming more importance and confidence in the household.

In the first kind immorality of the wife or change of religion by her entitles husband to seek divorce. While a wife on account of impotency, leprosy,
change of religion etc. are the grounds on which wife can claim divorce from the husband. Barrenness in itself is not a ground for divorce. Because other arrangements can be made. In such a situation normally another wife is brought into the house with the consent of the first wife. The divorce on the bases of one of the above grounds is sought at an early period after the marriage. After the laps of some time and with the arrival of children in the house marriage partners repose greater confidence in each other and chances of divorce reduce on such grounds.

Though with the laps of time a wife consolidates her position in the household, there may arise a situation where the elder brother may be forced to leave the house. Such a situation arises during a shift in economic and sexual roles among brothers in polyandry. At the point when the younger man starts taking more responsibility, the wife may favour him and in doing so may neglect the elder husband. In such a situation if he cannot adjust himself to his new status or the wife does not restore the balance, he may quit the household. In such circumstances when an elder brother leaves, the next brother assumes the leadership of the household
with the wife. In such situations generally the departing spouse is awarded a share of the land and other property.

Divorce by mutual consent of the parties to the marriage is also permitted by custom among the Bhot community. A husband cannot divorce the wife without assigning any reason. Field study reveals that mostly the parties sought divorce by mutual consent. Main reason for such divorces is the domestic quarrels between the husband and wife. In such circumstances the village elders try to reconcile the differences between the parties. But when the parties insist on divorce, the formalities are completed the matter ends up between them.

Ceremony of Divorce:

Like marriage, a very simple ceremony of divorce is prevalent among the Bhot of Lahul region. When the parties to the marriage agree to seek divorce finally, written documents are prepared by the village elders in which signatures of both parties are taken

66. Riwaj-i-Aam (Tribal Customs) of Kulu Sub-Division, Settlement 1945-51, (Ed.), 1954.

67. Ibid.
that they would not have any claim over each other. In the end a thread is tied to the small finger of both the parties which they break by pulling apart. This completes the formality and the marriage tie comes to an end.

In case wife takes the initiative she has to return the agreed expenses of the marriage which the husband has incurred at the time of marriage. But in case husband takes the initiative for divorce he is not entitled to get any thing by way of marriage expenses. After divorce parties are free to remarry.

In short we may say that a Bhot marriage is secular in nature and simple in form like a marriage among the mountain nomad of Tibet. Consent of the parties and the entry of the bride into the household as wife are the only requirements to constitute a valid marriage. Bhots are Buddhist by religion and as such no caste system exists among them in the rigid sense. But because of the hindu influence of the surrounding areas a class distinction do exist among them. Inter-class marriage is forbidden and is considered as a social wrong. Polyandry is the recognised institution along with monogamy. Wife enjoys a respectable position in a polyandrous household. Two forms of marriage are
recognised namely regular marriage and a short marriage i.e. Baglog. Forms of marriage, however, does not in any way affect the legal consequences. Like marriage divorce is also very simple. Immorality, change of religion, leprosy, impotancy etc. are the grounds on which one or the other party may dissolve the marriage by breaking off a woollen thread by pulling apart. When the divorce is sought by mutual consent of wife has to pay the agreed expenses of the marriage to the husband if she initiates the divorce, but the husband cannot claim anything if he has initiated the divorce.

Swangla Community:

The other major community inhabiting the Lahul region is 'Swangla'. They are confined mostly to the lower Lahul or Patan valley. It is not certain whether the Swanglas are the original inhabitants of Lahul, but the Lahul valley does happen to be called Swangal Desh by some e.g. the Manchadpas. But the popular legends regarding the origin of Swangla community suggest that their ancestors had migrated to the area from outside. According to these legendary

tales some Brahimin used to come to the confluence of the Chandra and the Bhaga rivers to perform the obsequies of their Yajmans as this place was considered sacred like Haridwar. It is said that once a father and his son came here to perform the death rites. The saying is that they used to fly in the air, as they had such super human powers. Once they felt hungry and they asked the people of this area for food and were offered meat. The father refused to take meat while the son took it. Thereafter, the father flew back but son lost his flying power by taking the meat. He remained here and married a local lady. His offsprings spread. Swanglas are those offsprings according to this legend. Whether this is true or not cannot be ascertained but the Swanglas call themselves Brahmins and themselves over and above the Thakur of the region in the social hierarchy. They are Hindu by religion but influenced by the Buddhism which is the predominant religion of the people in the upper region. They worship the Nag as well as the Ling.

Economically, their lot is not in any way different from the other people of the region. But they are slightly better off as they occupy the lower region where climate is comparatively better for a longer period. Agriculture is the main occupation of the
people. However, side by side they have been following diversified pursuits to make their both ends meet. The young generation seems to be inclined towards the government jobs with spread of education and the better opportunities of getting the job because of the government policies.

Among the Swanglas the gotra system does not exist though they are Hindu by religion. Probable cause for this appears to be their isolation from the mainstream of the Hindu way of life because of geographical conditions of the region. Marriage outside the community prohibited and looked down upon. However, there do exist some inter-community marriages. But the offspring of such marriages form a class by themselves known as Garu and are considered lower in the social set up. Marriages among cross-cousins and parallel cousins are prohibited.

Customs of marriage among Swanglas are practically the same as those among the Bhots. Shastric or Vedic ceremonies are not performed. Though the Swanglas consider themselves Brahmins, Shastric ceremonies are unknown to them. On the other hand their Hinduism is influenced by the Buddhism. This is because of the fact that they remained isolated from the main Hindu
stock for centuries together. On the contrary neighbouring Bhot community influenced them with whom the Swanglas have marital relations. Two forms of marriages like those of Bhot are: regular marriage and marriage by elopement. Field study reveals that the marriages, by elopement are comparatively less in number as are found among Bhots. Reason being the better economic conditions of the Swanglas.

Marriage ceremonies are practically the same as those of Bhot except that, among the Swanglas, when the bride reaches the house of the groom, the priest (known as Bhat) sacrifices a sheep or goat before the main gate, instead of the Buddhist ceremony performed by a lama to ward off the evil spirits.

In short we may say that the Swangla community though different in religion from the Bhot, professes the similar cultural traits. The simple reason appears to be the isolation of the Swangals from the main Hindu stream and their intermixing with the Bhot which in fact is forced upon them by the geophysical conditions of the region.