CHAPTER-III
MIGRATION NARRATIVES AND NATURE OF STRATIFICATION

Every culture and every society has a history of its own. It is beyond doubt that the place we live in and the way we live may not be the way we used to live in the past. To know a society it is a pre-requisite to understand its past because whatever had happened in the past or what and which situations the society might have gone through is responsible for molding the society in its present state. So in this context the history cannot be neglected, as it is a universal fact that no society is static rather they are dynamic. Historical memory is seen as primarily linked to concerns of the “here and now” and leads to the question of self-definition and identity (Gaenszle, 2003/2004:8). The past only matters as long as it is made use of – otherwise it is forgotten (ibid). Imaginings of the past thus have to be examined as part of a social arena in which meanings are continuously under construction and at the same time may always be contested (ibid).

It may be such that by this history we could make conclusions and trace the origin and the nature of division that emerged within the society. For instance, the Indian Hindu society is structured on caste system which is concerned with the idea of pollution and purity, where the Brahmin is at the top most strata followed by Kshatriya then Vaishya and Shudra at the bottom. But this division is not in the form as we perceive today. K.L.Sharma (2007:160) in his book wrote

The origin of caste system dates back to the age of the RgVeda. There is a reference to the word varna (colour) in the RgVeda. The Arya is referred to as fair and Dasa as dark. However, there is no reference to Brahmin or Kshatriya. The people of the two varnas differed not only in their skin colour but also in their worship and speech. Thus, the difference were both racial and cultural. Brahmans, Rajanyas (Kshatriyas) and Vaishyas constituted the Arya varna,
whereas the non-Aryans made up the Dasa varna.

The Purusha-sukta, a part of the RgVeda, states the Brahmanas, Rajanyas and Shudras sprang up from the mouth, arms, thigh and feet of the Purusa (God). Later on these became castes. However, there is no reference to the classes becoming hereditary classes were merely functional. The priest and the warrior occupied positions above the Vaishyas and the Shudras, but they were neither hereditary position nor exclusive ones. There was interchange of duties and inter-class marriage prevailed. The ban on eating food cooked by Shudras did not exist. There was no trace of untouchability.

Later on, with the occupational attainment the classes were divided into various castes. The Brahmans became a distinct class and were highly respected because they performed religious duties. The Aryans who stood to fight and protect the conquered territories formed another group known as Kshatriyas. The remaining Aryans became a separate class and were named as Vaishyas. The non-Aryans became the fourth class and were known as Shudras. Later on further sub-divisions occurred and restrictions were imposed (Sharma, 2007:160-161). We can conclude here that in earlier days the concept of social stratification was different from the present situation. Hence it can be said that the society in the remote past may not have been stratified socially as later. Maybe, the concept of egalitarianism does fit the society of that time. But even in the so called egalitarian society the people within the society are not same. There will be difference among the individuals in age, gender, skill and intelligence.

It is interesting to note here that the tribal societies which are considered to be egalitarian in nature do not befit all the tribes. Stratification has been found in the tribal societies too. This social stratification has been found in the Sherdukpen society of Arunachal Pradesh which is Buddhist by religion. To know the roots of the stratification and its nature, the history of the society must be brought into consideration. The history of tribal society is mainly based on oral
traditions. However, we cannot rely on oral traditions as in the process of passing of oral history from one generation to another, it gets diluted and distorted to certain extent. So the exact prevailing condition of that period cannot be ascertained. But somehow these oral stories can give a glimpse of the history of the society.

Thus, the history of migration of Sherdukpen also holds multiple views

Folk tale No. 1

Sherdukpen consider themselves to be the descendant of the king of Tibet Sangtsen/Sangchen Gombo. The tales of Tibet trace the origin of the king of Tibet in India. It is said that a deformed kid was born in a kingdom in India. When he was a child, his feet were webbed like swan, his eyebrows were green. The father, ashamed of the child’s deformity, put him in a basket and floated him in the river Ganga. Some fishermen found him and brought him up. When he grew, he saw himself having swan like feet and green eyebrows. Embarrassed, he ran away to Tibet. When he reached Tibet he met some villagers. There they asked him, where he came from. Unable to understand and to speak their language, he just pointed towards the mountains beyond which he had come climbing. The villagers took it the other way and thought that he had descended from heaven. They took him to the village and made him their king. After 33 generations king Sangchen Gombo became the famous king of Tibet. Sangchen Gombo had five wives; one from the Tang dynasty of China, her name was Wangchen, another one from Nepal of mala dynasty named Bhriguti Devi and three local princesses. He was influenced by his Buddhist Chinese wife and Nepali princess so he brought Buddhism in Tibet. One of the descendants of the king of Tibet called Lasa Changma

1 This tale is collected from N.T.Khrime ex MLAof Rupa; age 68
was exiled to Bhutan. There he established a new kingdom but didn’t like it much. So in search of better place he proceeded south-east and reached Nafra. Lasa Changma descendant, son or grandson named Gyapton/Japtang, locally called Asu Japtang (Asu means grandfather) became king of Nafra area. Later on he had a fight with the natives of Nafra, the Mijis. Then he moved out of Nafra and established a kingdom at Rupa. At Rupa, Asu Japtang killed the local king named Tsewang Ganggan Thong. Then he built a fort at Rupa called Tukpen Lomekhar (tuk=clash, pen=thrown; lo=south, me=rear; rear side of the south; khar=stone house). Since he was very strong he was known as Sarbapu (sar=east bapu=king) by the people of Tawang and Bhutan. From this above paragraph we can say that Japtang was born and brought up at Nafra.

But the same person on another interview taken by me gave a different picture as follow-

"Japtang migrated alone from Tibet. Japtang was born at Lhasa, King Sangchen Gombo’s son. The elder son of the king was Khiburathe, Japtang’s elder brother. He was actually the son of King’s minister. The minister seduced the queen on her journey from Assam to Tibet. Japtang was the real son of the king. He had a mark of moon crest on his forehead. When both of them grew into adults, Japtang killed Khiburathe and ran away from there and reached Ligam. From Ligam he kept migrating and reached Rahung, stayed at Binthonglo from Binthonglo again he migrated and stayed at Chakhe. Then he migrated to Phlong. In Phlong Tsewang Ganggan was the king. At first the Megejis also migrated from Lhasa and stayed there supporting Tsewang Ganggan. Actually Megejis were the civilians of the king Tsewang Ganggan. Japtang, by killing Tsewang Ganggan took over the power and ruled Rupa. He was

\[2\] N.T.Khrime ex MLA age 68
killed with the help of Tsewang Ganggan Thong’s subject the Megeji. While migrating, Sinchaji and Dingla accompanied Japtang as guard. Megejis are the native settlers of Rupa, others have migrated from Butkhoina, the present Jerigaon”.

Folktale No.23

It is said that Asu Japtang’s father was the king of Lhasa and and that his mother was the daughter of king of Assam. The Lhasa king had sent his Chao to fetch the Assam king’s daughter. On the way the princess was seduced by the Chao and she conceived. The Chao’s name was Khepu Berichan. The Chao was very clever, so he told the princess not to face the king but to bend her head while speaking to him. The king however doubted while putting the ring in her finger as he saw her face. Despite his doubts he married her and the queen delivered a boy who originally was actually the Chao’s son. His name was Khiburathe (Khi=dog rathe=shape). Later he bore a second son whose name was Japtang. But in all gathering and function the elder son take part being the next probable successor. When Japtang grew up he came to know about the fact and realized that his elder brother was not the king’s son in reality.

Whenever the elder brother attended a public gathering he would hide his face as he had a dog like feature. When Japtang realized it, it hit his ego and by his power he let the wind blow and lifted the veil of Khiburathe in public gathering. When the public saw his unveiled face, Khiburathe ran away from there in shame. When the mother came to know about this she scolded Japtang for his unruly act towards his elder brother. So he ran away from Tibet and came to present Rupa.

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3 This tale is collected from Rupa gaon bura S.Khrime, Age 65

4 Here the respondent S.Khrime was using the Chao term for the minister of the king.
He ran away alone and settled down at Binthonglo. Later he was accompanied by two people Hudu and Chaki. Regarding these two persons, it is not clear whether they came along with Japtang from Tibet as some say they came along with king from there while some say they joined him when he (Japtang) reached present Rupa. When Japtang was staying at Binthonglo he went hunting one day and reached Chinggi at Kalaktang. There he took shelter in a house of a woman who lived with her only daughter. There was no one except for the lady and her daughter. That village was terrified by a demon snake that used to eat human beings. The snake was called Midelabdar de (de=demon). The day Japtang reached the village he was provided food and shelter. At night Japtang overheard that one of them had to go as food for that demon (snake). So Japtang insisted on going himself in their stead and when he got there he killed the demon snake. So in Kalaktang there is a shrine (mane) whose length is equivalent to the length of that snake. After killing the snake Japtang asked for the hand of the daughter in marriage which was accepted by the mother. They bore a son who was named the title of Thongdok and who later settled at Khlen. So the generation from that Thongdok is called Khlen Thong.

Japtang leaving the wife and son again went for hunting and shot a pig somewhere in Kalaktang. That slightly injured pig escaped. Japtang followed the blood drops and at last reached Assam and saw the pig hiding below the rice store as a result of which an argument arose. Asu Japtang claimed that the pig had been shot by him so it belonged to him. But the local person argued on how one could shoot the pig in the forests as it was not wild but a domesticated animal. As the argument stretched, they finally resolved by offering each other eatable items. The people of the plains offered Japtang some rice to eat and in return Japtang gave them chilly powder. Both relished each other’s items so much that it was decided that from that day onwards one would provide paddy and the
other would provide chilly and other products. So in this way the trade relations with Assam started.

After that *Asu Japtang* returned to his area leaving his wife and son at Chinggi. There he was accepted as a king by the Akas and Mijis where he married a *stongma* lady. The Akas and Mijis frequently came to pay their tax at his place. *Asu Japtang* had instructed the wife not to speak when these people were around. But unfortunately that day when the wife went upstairs to the store, to collect some rice beer, her cloth got stuck and she shouted and from her accent everyone made out that *Japtang* had married a *stongma* woman. They decided not to allow *Japtang* to stay there any longer and also to kill him. As they were coming to kill him, *Asu Japtang* left his *stongma* wife and escaped with the help of *Hudu* or *Chaki* who misled the the Akas and Mijis by wearing the *Japtang* robe. *Japtang* wearing *Hudu* or *Chaki* dress went the other direction. The Akas and Mijis followed the disguised person and killed him. *Japtang* after fleeing finally managed to reach Rupa.

Folk tale No. 3

"While migrating, *Japtang* came from Tibet via Bhutan and stopped at Nafra. There he married two women, one of Rahung and another of Salari. During those days Nafra was ruled by chiefs. *Japtang* did not have good terms with the Nafra chiefs. He was chased away from Nafra. So he came and settled at Salari. The place where he settled is called *Japtang Dungcha* (*Dung* =house, *cha* =land) the ruins of which exists even now. There he stayed for some time. When the people of Jerigaon

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5 Stongma refer to the backward and low status lady. Here they refer to Sulung tribe lady. The marriage that took place with stongma lady was told by the wife of the *gaon* bura as the *gaon* bura himself said he had not heard or had any idea that Japtang married a stongma lady.

6 This tale is collected from R. D. Thongchi age 37 of Jigaon
came to know about his presence they came in search of him. So during the day time Japtang would go and hide in a nearby cave on the other side of a stream and would come back at night. When the people came to know about his escape they found him and chased him away, from Salari. So from Salari he went to Rahung and stayed there”. According to the informant it is from Rahung that two versions arise. “Our (Sherdukpen) version is that from Rahung he came to Rupa. But from the Tawang monastery records it is found that from Rahung he went to Mandala Phudung from where he went to Domkho. There he met a religious leader called Lama Tanpo Drema who was preaching out there. Along with him there was a person called Trangpodar7. So the Japtang got introduced with them and then three of them started preaching together. So it is believed that the propagation of Buddhism in the in the region started from Domkho, and it is also believed that Japtang brought the fellowship of Buddhism in Sherdukpen’s.

“There is a shrine (mane) out there which is about 150 metres in length”. The informant said that “on enquiring on who had constructed this double storeyed shrine one of the monks had said that long time ago lama Tanpo Drema, Trangpodar and Japtang were spreading Buddhism out there, wherefrom they started for Assam. But on leaving for Assam they were accompanied by many people. So to keep the record of the number of followers it is said that each person placed a stone which later converted into a huge shrine. When Japtang and the group reached Assam, the relation between the Sherdukpen and Kachari started on religious terms. While coming back Japtang had an affair with one of the princess from there. This led to the beginning of trade relations. From

7 Trangpodar is a clan name settled at Domkho.
Domkho, Japtang and the Lama came to Rupa through Gacham. So after coming from Gacham side to Rupa the story of Megeji and Megeji king started. There was a king here named Tsewang Ganggan Thong who was killed by Japtang and he established his rule. But there is no substantial proof that Thondok, Thongchi, Th pongon and Khrime are the sons of Japtang. When he came from Tibet he was not married. He married two women at Nafra and when he ran away from Nafra he left alone leaving the wives behind. Again he got married with an Assamese lady. Even from there he came alone leaving the wife out there so of what is said of Japtang had three sons is a bit controversial”.

“But if one visits Dibbin at Nafra circle, one can see the characteristics of the people who resemble the Thondok of the sherdupken community, their body built and way of talking, bit dominating, likewise. It is said in Nafra that in earlier days Dibbin was the centre of power and the warrior clans stayed there. When Japtang came to Nafra (being a prince he had the administrative strategy) he collected people along with him. Maybe he collected some warriors from Dibbin that’s why he could stay for a longer period at Nafra. If he had not done so he would not have been able to stay even for a day at Nafra, as they already had their own administrative system. So obviously he took some warriors along with him from Dibbin. And if these warriors came with him upto Rupa then Thondok can be traced out from there. As in Kingdom by virtue the king used to offer position and give a title as Borbarua the commander, Kalita the inspector. Now these are mere titles. At that time these were the positions or ranks held by an individuals. From the rank of a soldier you were upgraded to inspector and so on. Maybe this way Thondok has a meaning and the Thondok

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8 Gacham is a place name nearby Rupa along its valley while coming from Morsing going through Mukhuting and Membachur.
position was given which is used as a surname in the present generation".

"For Thongon, one can still see that even now in Lower Jung they are official mediators. If there is any dispute at Nafra the mediator will be from Lower Jung. They were experts in conversation. They were expert in handling the situations, and to dispose the cases of worst matter. Thongon, did the same in Rupa. Because of their oratory skills and ability to resolve situation, they were sent to dispose the matters. So when Japtang came, he had the warriors and wanted an interlocutor. When he stayed at Nafra and wanted to dominate he wanted such a person who could convince people and so he found one from the Lower Jung among the mediators for the nearby villages. These mediators were diplomatic people. So, Thongons belong to Lower Jung. Even now one can find a staying place of Japtang at lower Jung. So when these people came with Japtang upto Rupa they were given the title Thongon".

"For Mijiji, one can see that they are found in hilly areas of Mukhuting, Membachur. If one sees the topography they are very close to Mandala-Phudung and Morsing. They have marital relationship with Mandala Phudung and Morsing. They have relatives at both places also, so it might have happened that they came from Mandala-Phudung and Morsing and settled at Mukhuting, Membachur. Later they were accepted and given the title like the Musaksing people who are runaway people of Bhutan and settled out here".

"Megejis were already here. Dinglas as you can see in the Khiksaba festival, wear a cap. That cap is possessed by the Dinglas only. And this came with us from Jergaon. In Jergaon you will see that the head priest wear that kind of cap, even in Rahung. When Japtang came he saw that he already had the warrior and a diplomatic interlocutor. Now what he needed was a priest. So he took along the priest from there who came with him upto Rupa who is said to be a Dingla. When the Rangradus
clan of Jerigaon come to Rupa they write Dingla. Dingla and Rangradus are brothers. By profession they are priests”.

“In this way, if we see then Thongdoks are the warrior clan who came along with Japtang from Dibbin. Thongons came from Lower Jung and are the mediators. Dingla who are the priests came from Rahung and Jerigaon. In case of Khrimes Japtang had an immediate cousin Khrimes Leiki Wanchu but it is bit difficult to trace their origin. However it is said Khrimes were the descendant of that immediate cousin Khrimes Leiki Wangchu. So it is undisputed that they are of the lineage of Khrimes Leiki Wangchu. Megejis were already there at Rupa. Thongchi came from Domkho. So there is no proof that they are immediate son of Japtang. For Khleng Thong it is said that Japtang had duflo (bastard) who was adopted by the Rupa people and settled there”.

So it may be an undisputed story regarding the Khleng Thong. And if we look through this perspective the Thongdok, Thongon, Thongchi and Dingla came from outside along with Japtang as a retinue and later Yanlog came to society. Khrimes were the descendant of the cousin who came and stayed with Japtang.

Regarding the Yanlog class in due course of time by participating in various activities and giving their service to the society they were merged into the Chaos class. So today, the Yanlog class no longer exists in the society.

Folk tale No. 49

In this story by Urgen Jatso, the descendant was traced from the Tibet King Sangchen Gombo. Here it is mentioned that among the later generations of the of Sangchen Gombo, a king name Krisong Deochan

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9 This folk tale is taken from Urgen Jatso book. Urgen Jatso is a monk from Kalaktang in whose name the book ‘History of Shertukpen Monpa’ was published in the year 2003. It is said that he narrated the story while a teacher translated it in enlish.
bore three sons named Mune Chenpo, Murup Chenpo and Muti Chenpo. Muti Chenpo, the last son of Krisong Deochan had three son named Lhase Changma, Lang Darma and Khirepa Chen. Then Lhase Chagma had two sons one Khrimelsing Wangchuk and Chebu Thonglokchen. Khrimelsing Wangchu was taken to Lhao where he became the king and settled at Lhao Khampa. Thus the Khampa Lineage came into existence. Chebu Thonglokchen had three sons named Thrijenpal, Gongerjel and Pelkedar. Gongerjel had four wives namely Peldrenke, Dorjompa, Athungki and Yang Pema. From Peldrenke, he had two sons namely Thonglok pel and Chongongjel. Other three wives were driven out by Peldrenke. But the king retained them as main servant. They also became pregnant and in due course of time conceived sons. Dorjompa hid her son inside a big pot away from the harmful hand of Peldrenke. Athungki hid her son in a basket. Yang Pema hid her son in bunker who later was known as Gebdechen or Gyapten or Gyaptong. With the assistance of a minister the three women showed their children to the king. The king became happy and assigned all the three a clan each- son of Dorjompa with Yede clan, son of Athungki with Tungde clan and son of Yang Pema with Wangma clan.

Gebdechen moved further north-east and settled near present Nafr and Salari and selected four body guards for his safety at Khoina namely Chage, Huju, Mije and Yayee. At Khoina, a rich wise man named Lhabe had two sons. One day they were caught stealing fish from the channel prepared by Gebdechen and were beaten severely and thrown into the river. Lhabe thought Gyapten and his body guards were murderers but had no proof. He therefore announced that whosoever found out the truth would be rewarded with a precious stone (nayu) and Mithun (Bos frontalis). The wife of Gebdechen became greedy and told

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10 Gyaptang is refer as Japtang in other story mentioned.
the facts to Lhabi. This created a lot of problems for Gebdechen. However, he along with his sons went to Jirigaon, took shelter in a cave at a small hill called Buthalong. Gebdechen used to play on his flute to show his presence but Lhabi could not locate him. Ultimately, the follower of Lhabi performed Yakcham to lure the wife of Gebdechen from hiding. She was caught and murdered. Gebdechen and his sons then moved on to Khoitam Salari and constructed wangmakhar (Wangma=clan, Khar=stone house) now known as Japtong Dungcha. Gebdechen had two sons Gunglajel and Peladar. Peladar along with his load carrier went to Lhase Changma. Gebdechen had already kept a girl of low birth secretly as domestic servant. The people came to know about this and reported the whereabouts of Gebdechen to Lhabi. He was driven away. He later settled at Rahung Namphing Jung. Lhabi’s men drove him from there to Chok. Apa Gyapten now dressed like Monpa started tilling land like farmer when Lhabi’s men reached there. He assured Lhabi’s men that he would bring Apa Gyapten and demanded an Ox. Then he changed his dress and fled away with his supporters. Lhabi’s men caught a man with rich gold ornaments. In the meantime Apa Gyaptang showed his real identity and fled away and settled at a cowshed. He came across an old lady and gave her a precious stone (nayu) to keep him secretly by wiping his footsteps. On arrival of Lhabi’s men she denied the arrival of even a dog. Apa Gyapten and his son remained there for three days. The old lady advised them to visit Domkho-Morshing area to meet Trangpo Darge and Lama Tranpe Dreme. He related his journey from Buthalong and intended to join them due to lopa\textsuperscript{11} majority. The lama told about the past and hoped for a better future. Gebdechen or Apa Gyapten was gifted with the power to kill the demons. Lama Tranpe Dreme asked him to kill the demons through his

\textsuperscript{11} Lopa is denote to the Akas and Mijis
An agreement was made wherein Gebdechen was to be the bodyguard, Trangpo Darge the householder and Lama Trenpe Dreme the priest. From here they went east to a place called Liding Palingsengpa (sanctuary of devils). They reached Khalaktang where they met a girl named Yunten Rema, who was the manifestation of Goddess Tara. She prepared food for them. They were informed that in the land of Tsing Dangkhar, there was a devil called Midhe Labdhar, who ate human flesh and drank human blood and that as a tax it was the duty of the human beings to go to him. The next day would be the girl’s turn. Apa Gyapten and his companions went after the devil, which fled to higher altitudes known as Rajalok. In the course of the fight the monster went to Sinkong and downwards on the river path. The chase continued through Saksingma, Adola, Wangmatong, Brongsingma, Bapyongri, Kurtabilam, Rangchilu, Bachilu and ended at Bumthang cave. There Apa Gyapten captured the monster. There they hunted a dove and found paddy inside the intestine of the dove. The devil plead for mercy and said that the lands such as Salidugar (present Chariduar in Assam) and Kherabara was under his possession and that if Meme Gyapten left him he would give the land to meme Gyapten and the others. However, they continued their journey with the devil in their captivity and halted at a place called Ngam-tsabhur (bright with sunshine). Here Lama Trenpa Dreme was warned by God that if the devil was not killed he might bring harm to them. Apa Gyapten then killed the devil and his head and limbs were left at Phiratse and offered to Ama Jomo. After that they went to Morshing-Domkho area and built the Taglung, and came across Domkho Melong Khar, Sher Bumtangkhar and Tukpan Lukpaikhar where they constructed the Lomeod Fort.

The three finally decided to settle down. An agreement was reached upon wherein upper and lower Rongnang (Jakarapara, Assam) was given
to Trangpo Darge and Apa Gyapten was given the Sherdukpen area upto Chariduar in Assam. As Gyapten had got rid of all the demons in this region, he is therefore also known as Shar Bapu Thongla Thongsten. Apa Gyapten then settled at Tukpan Lukpaikhar and accepted his brother’s proposal for separation.

By the story of Urgen Jatso a chart can be drawn as

**Chart No.III.1**

![Chart](image)

In the meantime Apa Gyapten sired a son out of wedlock whom the village folks considered as ill omen. Therefore, this son was made to leave
Tukpan Lukpaikhar, but was allowed to settled at Khleng where he established his principality, and there after called Khleng Thong.

Gongerjel, who had given a clan name to his son as Yede, Tungde and Wangma were renamed again by their grandfather Thonglokchen as Thongchen (Thongdok), Thomber (Thongon) and Thongchuk (Thongchi). However, Wangma Gunglajel wanted to retain his identity, so his descendents are known as Wangma. And the Khrimes are descendants of Khrimelsing Wangchu.

Folktale No. 5\textsuperscript{12}

The king Gaporading Dorjee lived in Debolojari with his queen by whom he had a son. But he heard that the Ahom King of Assam had a very beautiful daughter and his desire was kindled for her. He sent his minister with a strong force to Sibsagar to ask for her in marriage. But the Ahom king refused to send his daughter to an unknown, distant land, and it took the minister twelve years to persuade him to let the girl go.

At last they started on their journey home and came to the Brahmaputra and crossed the far side. There sin entered the Minister's mind and he seduced the princess. When they arrived at Debolojari, the king of Lhasa was delighted with his bride and married her with great ceremony. But very soon he noticed that his wife was pregnant and he asked his minister how this could be. The Minister replied, 'How can I tell? I lived twelve years in exile and brought her to you with great pain and difficulty. The child must be yours. But when the child was born, although he had the body of a human being, he had the face of a dog and

\textsuperscript{12} This folktale is taken from Verrier Elwin's book 'The Myth of the North-East India', 1958
the horns of goat. When the king saw the child he had him taken to the forest and was left to die there.

But as he loved his young wife he forgave her and in due time had two other son from her. The elder was named Jabdung Nawang Namja and the younger Gyaptang Bura. When the boys grew up, the king gave his kingdom to the son of his elder wife. He gave Bhutan to the prince Jabdung Nawang Namja and the country round Rupa and Shergaon to Gyaptang-Bura, who was the first Sherdukpen king.

When Gyaptang Bura came to Rupa, the Ahom king heard of it at Sibsagar and invited his grandson to come and see him. He gave him all the land which lies between the Donsiri and Gabru rivers as they flow into the Brahmaputra and told him to collect tax from people living there.

Gyaptang Bura was told by his father, the king of Lhasa that his people should not pay taxes to the Tibetans or carry loads for them. But he should be aware of the Hrussos, for they were demons at that time, and should give them cows and other tribute to satisfy them.

When Gyaptang Bura came from Lhasa to Rupa, he brought with him great train of porters and servants. The King’s descendants are now called Thongs and the descendants of the porters are called Chaos.

Yanlog

However, there was another class in Sherdukpen society the ‘Yanlog’. This class of people had migrated from nearby Bhutan in later period and came to settle along the Sherdukpen areas. Yanlogs were the newly migrated groups accepted in the Sherdukpen society but not main Chaos. However later on they were merged into the Chaos class. So the new comers were identified as Yanlogs who were not given all the rights specially the political rights. Chaos elders could participate in important
political meetings always but Yanlogs were not allowed to attend the meeting.\textsuperscript{13}

Yanlog was a statutory provision in which non-Sherdukpens could include themselves initially and later in the main clan of Sherdukpen by committing themselves in the work of community for fixed period followed by a ceremony.\textsuperscript{14} It can be considered as a transitional phase where they were neither considered as an outsider nor a full fledged native. It is a doorway for a person to become a part or a member of the society.

Regarding them it is said that actually they were runaway people of Bhutan who came to Sherdukpen area and asked for shelter from Asu Japtang. About six families from Bhutan came and stayed while the Bhutan king came in search of them. Then the Rupa village paid six or nine mithuns (Bos frontalis) to the Bhutan king.\textsuperscript{15} The payment was made with a plea stating "as we do not have smiths and have to go to Doimara every year to procure metallic tools. And as these people know the art of smithery we want to keep them with us". So a settlement place was given to them i.e. Musaksing and are called Musaksingpa.

Yanlogs practiced black smithery and provided utensils and agricultural tools to the society. Yanlogs were the reserve people of the council. Yanlogs were people who did not belong to any Chkok (group) and had not been adjusted to any clan of the society. They were used for petty work or extra work of the society or as servant. For instance after going for winter camps and suppose a ritual had to be performed, it was difficult to engage the chkok (group) in those kinds of works as it was a

\textsuperscript{13} N.T.Khrime, S.P.Khrime, P.D.Megeji and D.K.Dingla of Rupa

\textsuperscript{14} R.N.Thongchi Age 29 Teacher of Jigaon

\textsuperscript{15} Informant Y.D. Thonddok Age 74
big group. So from Yanlogs a person was engaged to collect the drum, the idol, religious text etc. for the ritual. The Yanlogs included, people from outside like Bhutanese, Nepali, Adivasi, etc. Later they were put under different Chkok\(^{16}\) and at last incorporate into different clans.

There is a general acceptance regarding the 'Thong' that the word Thong means king. But regarding the Chaos there is inconsistency as people have their own views on this. For some Chaos are subjects. Others interpret them to be the Mantri or body guard while some opine that they were the servants who came along with Asu Japtang. One of the respondents belonging to Khrime clan said "The Chaos are not servants. Servants are normally taken from the Yanlogs. They are subjects. They are important citizens. The food habits among the Thongs and the Chaos are same unlike the Yanlogs. Both the Thongs and the Chaos do not take the meat of the domestic animals except for that of Sheep and Yak which are not reared by them. In contrast to this the Yanlogs consume the meat of domesticated animals. Inter marriage between Thongs and Chaos is somehow acceptable but marriage with the Yanlog was not allowed. Nobody married them, now of course liberalized".

Khleng Thong

Japtang taking his troop (Sinchaji was the warrior, Megeji and Dingla were the priests) reached Chinggi village of Kalaktang circle. In that village there was a big snake that used to eat the humans. When Asu Japtang reached there, there were only two survivors, an old lady and her daughter. The lady and the daughter decided to have whatever delicious food available as one of them was to die that night. By the

\(^{16}\) Chkok is a division of people in a group within the society. This is done so especially for distribution of work in social function.
moment they finished preparing their food, _Asu Japtang_ and his troop reached there and they were hungry. _Asu Japtang_ asked the lady of what she was doing. The lady replied, “As one of us is going to die tonight so whatever delicious food is left with us we were preparing and will die after having it. And if possible all of you must leave this place as there is a very big snake that comes and hunts us every night”. On this _Asu Japtang_ replied, “Do not worry, you do one thing, cook food for all my people and we shall kill that snake”. The lady agreed and cooked food for all of them. After having meal at night the priests, _Megeji_ and _Dingla_, performed some rituals and the warrior _Sinchaji_ was ready for the snake to come. The lady said, “you will know when the snake comes as it usually comes whistling.” As said the snake came whistling and _Asu Japtang_ and the warrior killed the snake. After killing the snake _Asu Japtang_ stayed in that village for couple of days and in the intervening period the daughter conceived. As _Asu Japtang_ was always on move, he moved on. By the time he reached Rupa the lady at Chinggi delivered a baby boy. The boy grew up to excel in everything. But the other boys used to rag him saying that he was a bastard (_duflo_). One day when he had grown into a fine young man he pointed an arrow on his mothers head and asked her to tell him who his father was or else that he would kill her. Then his mother told him about his father and told him to go eastward. The son enquired on how he would recognize his father. The mother replied that his father had a moon crest sign on his forehead. The son set for his journey and reached Rupa. There he met his father and revealed his relation and pleaded to be provided with some property there as at Chinggi no one liked him. As _Japtang_ had already distributed his property among his other sons he sent him to _Khlen_ (on the way to foothill road) which the son accepted. There he married a _Megeji_ girl. That’s why _Megeji_ and _Khlen Thong_ used to marry earlier.

Before the onset of winter camps at Doimara, the council first sent
three people to take a look of the way. The Khleng Thong killed two people and let the one go back and said “until and unless you don’t provide better land for me the situation will remain the same”. This happened every time. Then the Thoji Blu (tukpen council) decided that it could not be tolerated anymore and so it would be better to kill Khleng Thong. So the Thoji Blu along with Junyu Blu (youth council) went there. There was a young boy, may be of Rahung, in that group. The troop stopped at Bompu and made preparations to kill Khleng Thong. They poisoned their arrowheads and by twilight set off to find Khleng Thong towards Khleng. The Rahung boy said, “I will also go to kill Khleng Thong.” He was poisoning his arrows with the leftover poison. But the young group told him to stay there and take care of their goods. After they left he sat under a big tree. He saw something coming down from that tree. He took his bow and arrow which he had rubbed with poison and shot at that person. The group on reaching the Khleng saw that Khleng Thong was not there. They returned to Bompu and were having a discussion. The Rahung boy interrupted and said “A person was coming down the tree having huge thighs so I shot him with my arrow and he ran away.” No one paid any attention to him but kept talking among themselves. Suddenly one old man asked everyone to keep quiet and to listen to what the Rahung boy kept saying. Every one stopped talking and turned to him and he said “A man having huge thighs came down from the big tree and I shot him with my arrow.” After that they started enquiring about the time when he had shot him. On gathering the information the group started again for ambushing Khleng Thong. As Khleng Thong was strong he reached a place called Choduchok and was sitting on the banks of a stream. He pulled out the arrow and was cutting off the wounded flesh. By that time the group also reached there and they killed him.

But by that time Khleng Thong’s Megeji wife was pregnant. So the
brother of the Megeji wife said in the council (*Blu*) that if a girl was born then they would keep her as a servant for household chores. And if a boy was born they would keep him to look after the animals. In this way, the mother with the unborn child was saved. Later a boy was delivered and from this boy the *Khleang Thong* regenerated.

**Stratification:**

As mentioned in all books Sherdukpen are divided into two main classes *'Thong'* and *'Chao'* (Elwin, 1958:133; Sharma, 1960:49; Dey, 2004:49; Gazetteer of India: Arunachal Pradesh, 1996:84; Encyclopedia of North-East India Vil-I, 2001:134). The *Thongs* are the king class while *Chaos* were their servants. This division also came with the view that Japtang (Gyaptang) the forefather of *Thongs*, who was the son of the king of Tibet, on his migration, was accompanied by some potters and servants. And these potters and servants were considered as *Chaos* in the Sherdukpen societies. But in due course of time few families came from Bhutan, who were given settlement areas and were put in another class called the *Yanlogs*. But in the present society there are no more *Yanlogs* as they had been conferred with different surnames and incorporated within the *Chaos* long time back.

Basically, the Sherdukpen society is divided into two main classes *'Thong'* and *'Chao'*. The *Thongs* are divided into three clans *Thondok*, *Thongo* (use to write *Thongon*) and *Khrima*. According to the tale, Japtang had three sons to whom he gave the names of three clans. It was done so by Japtang to keep the sanctity of the *Thongs* by inter-marrying within these three clans if they did not get any bride from outside society belonging to king's clan. As cited by N.T. Khrima “the rulers have to be of pure royal blood and could not mix up with the locals. The *Thongs* had to marry from the king's family itself. But in cases where one could not get such partner then to keep the class clean *Japtang* classified his three
sons into three different clans—Thondok, Thongo and Khrime. So these three sons became the progenitors of the three clans and till today there is an inter-marriage between the three. 

These clans were further divided into sub-clans. Thondok had three sons so he made—Thondok bukhao (bukhao came from two words abu=brother and akhao=elder), Thondok chung (chung is from achung=middle), then Karma (karma itself mean youngest in Tibetan language). But besides it, there are Yangfan and Khlen Thong (Khlen Thong is not a title but is the king of a place called Khlen and they write Thondok) who also came under the Thondoks. Then in Thongo (written Thongon), the Thongo had two sons—Thongo and Thonchi. Khrime had three sons eldest Khrime, Mosobi and youngest Wangja (see chart no. III.IV).

The Chao class comprises of five clans Sinchaji, Megeji, Dingla, Manoj and Mijiji. Megejis are again divided into three—elder (Akhao), the middle (Achung) and the younger (Achan). The Yanlogs were the later migrants comprising of Ibi, Dunkhar, Serthipa and Kengkhar. But these surnames are not present as they have been merged into the main clans of the society (see chart no. III.IV).

17 It is to be noted that in writing of the title only Thondok, Yangfan and Karma is used. The Thondok bukhao, Thondok chung, Karma, Yangfan and the khlen thong are the subdivision of Thondok.
All the sub-divisions that have been founded in \textit{Thongs} as well as in \textit{Chaos} (in \textit{Megeji}) do not represent or show any hierarchy within themselves. It is to be noted here that the sub-divided clans cannot intermarry. This was done so, for better management of the involvement during the \textit{khiksaba} festival due to increase of population within the clan.

On the basis of hierarchy the \textit{Thong} was considered at the topmost level, \textit{Yanlog} at the lowest and \textit{Chao} at middle. Both \textit{Thongs} and \textit{Chaos} considered \textit{Yanlogs} as of low status and did not inter dine with them in the past. However, both \textit{Thongs} and \textit{Chaos} dined together. Beside these, all the classes were endogamous.

Here the class is hereditary. The class system is not an open one but closed not in strict sense. People born to their respective classes are bound to it. It means a particular class is determined by birth not by selection. Hence, it is an ascribed rule as in caste system. Though, changes have been seen as the \textit{Yanlogs} have been converted to \textit{Chaos} by giving or letting them to enter into the clan of the \textit{Chaos}. This decision was taken as the \textit{Yanlogs} had been staying within the society since long time back and were using the resources of the society like land and forest. They were helping the society by providing their labour whenever and wherever necessary.

Each \textit{Chao} clan is associated with each \textit{Thong} clans. The \textit{Megeji} clan is attached with \textit{Thondok}, \textit{Mijiji} with \textit{Thongon} and \textit{Manoji} with \textit{Thongchi} and \textit{Sinchaji} and \textit{Dingla} are attached with \textit{Khreme} in general (see chart no. III.IV). They consider themselves as brother clans in relation. It can be considered as phratry clan. Hence, intermarriage within the associated clans is a taboo. Though each \textit{Chao} clan is associated with each \textit{Thong} clan it is to be noted that the family of the \textit{Chao} clan attached with the family of the \textit{Thong} Clan follows in same manner from generations to generations. In one way we can say that the
lineage of the Chao family will be attached with that particular Thong lineage with whom that Chao clan is attached.

In the chart no.III.III, according to R.R.P.Sharma’s book ‘The Sherdukpen’ there is a reference of Rangla (Rongla), Romu and Komu in the Chao class and Barsan Nai Athok for Yanlog which was not found during the field work. Regarding the Ronglas, it is said that the people of this clan got extinct due to non bearing of male child in that clan. There is another assumption that they migrated to Dirang and Namsu. In relation to Romu and Komu also it is said that they went back to Namsu, as they were the people originally hailing from Namsu while another assumption is that they have been included into the other clans of the society. Whatever may be the reason these clans are not counted in the Sherdukpen social organization now. And regarding Barsan Nai Athok no one has any idea of this clan. Rather there were three other clans belonging to the Yanlog class which I came across during the field work enquiry i.e. Ibi, Serthipa and Dungkhar (see chart no.III.IV).
Source: R.R.P. Sharma book 'The Sherdukpen'
SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF SHERDUKHEN SOCIETY

Class

Clans

Sub-division Karma

Yangtan

Thongdok

Karma Lama Mosobi

Wangja

Thongpa

Kangkar Dungkar Ibi

Sertipopa

Source: Field work