A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF A TAI KHAMPTI VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

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Introduction

This was a sociological study of a Tai Khampti village in Arunachal Pradesh. It is the first micro-level village study conducted in a Tai Khampti village of Arunachal Pradesh. The saying that India lives in its villages is as close to reality now as it was in the pre-Independence period. Over five decades of economic planning after Independence has passed and yet the majority of the country’s population continues to live in rural areas. Agriculture and its allied activities still provide employment and income to a substantial segment of the population of the rural work force. There have been many changes taking place in them over the last hundred years and they continue to occupy a place of importance in contemporary India (Beteille 2006: 79). Atal has said that Indian villages are grappling with the struggle of change and it is time again to ‘return to the villages and draw the contours of change in them afresh’ (Atal 2006: 117). Far-reaching changes of socio-economic importance are being ushered in by the villages themselves which are facilitated by conscious state attempts on the one hand and innovating leadership on the other so that the people are motivated to pursue their own goals and build on politically, educationally and economically sound and productive system (Saksena 1978: 17). Oommen has stated that the functioning of such dynamics cannot be fully understood correctly unless the social structure of village society are taken into account in its changing perspective (Oommen 1984: x). In this light an enquiry into what has been happening in the rural areas assumes significance.

Among the first and most influential scholar to write on the interaction between tradition and modernity was M.N Srinivas (1966). For Srinivas change assumes two major forms: first, through the concept of Sanskritisation was the various forms of
mobility within the caste system, and second through the concept of Westernisation the process of change on a wider scale. He pointed the Western contact through the British rule was the main exogenous source which brought changes in the social structure. The basic direction of this contact was towards modernization, but in the process a variety of traditional institutions also got reinforcement (1972: 202).

Another important approach to the study of social change was that of the concepts of Little and Great traditions which was used by Robert Redfield in his studies of the Mexican communities (Singh1988:13). Redfield’s conceptual framework was used by Milton Singer and McKim Marriott to study the process of social change in India. Of relevance here are Marriot’s contribution of the concepts of parochialisation and universalisation through which he attempted an understanding of the way in which ties which relate the village to the outside world are also responsible for bringing the outside world to the village. The latter is a process through which ‘little’ tradition through its elements such as customs, deities and rites moves upward to enter the ‘great’ tradition and in this process acquire a more universal status. Parochialisation on the other hand refers to the opposite process where elements from the ‘great’ tradition become confined to particular local ‘little’ tradition (Marriott 1955: 197-200).

After a critical examination of the above mentioned concepts Dube went further to offer a six- fold classification of traditions in India. He enumerated them as the emergent national tradition, the classical tradition, the western tradition, the local tradition, the regional tradition, and the local sub cultural traditions of social groups (Dube 1965: 424).
Notable among the various attempts to synthesize the divergent perspectives on the study of social change in India is Yogendra Singh’s *Modernisation of Indian Tradition*. Through his theoretical approach he attempted to overcome what he referred to as the ‘partial focus on social processes’ and the limitations of the analytical categories that were used in the previous studies of change in India, which he argued are the reason why they have been rendered inadequate and narrow (1988:1). The approach that Singh advocated is generally understood as structural-historical. The process of change and transformation in this approach is analyzed in a historical setting often under the ideological canopy of modernization. Tradition is created as historical and cultural legacy of beliefs, values, and customs which are accretive and adaptive in nature (*ibid.*:213-215). Tradition in his view is not the polar opposite of modernity; it is in fact something that is dynamic in nature and constantly being upgraded (*ibid.*: 187). Singh maintains that the forces of modernisation are carried forward by traditional structures through a process of selective adaptive changes rather than through structural breakdown (*ibid.*: x). In order to accommodate the requirements of modernisation societies underwent selective adaptive changes (*ibid.*: 78).

The continuity of cultural and social identity is best exemplified by the Indian village where despite the external changes impinged on its internal arrangements it has continued to endure as a territorial unit and it continues to be an important point of reference for individual identification. The vast literature on the Indian village gives credence to this assertion and ‘the Indian village as a micro-structure has thus not only been recognised but has gradually become a vital aspect of national development planning and politico consciousness’ (*ibid.*: 184). In light of this we may say that the Indian village is a sub system within a greater system and serves as the focal point of
individual identification within a greater field. The villages of India were never isolates nor were they static. Although changes from various sources were introduced incorporated and diffused into the traditional social structure, such changes did not diminish the importance and necessity of villages for the people. The simple reason being that from the village stemmed the roots of one’s cultural background and most importantly ones identity.

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In the study of the social dynamics of a Tai Khampti village the patterns of Yogendra Singh’s structural- historical approach was followed. In order to understand the processes and the structure of a Tai Khampti village an exploration of the Tai Khampti social structure as reflected in all the social institutions was made. Social dynamics refers to the study of society in terms of interrelated social processes and
social change. It is the way in which people behave and react to each other in order to achieve an end and the changes in the established pattern of social relationships.

**The problem:** Arunachal Pradesh may be termed as a tribal state having 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub tribes with each tribe having their own territory, language and customs. The state has a total population of 1,383,727, out of which the rural population is 1,066,358, that is 77.06 percent of the total population is rural. The majority of the people in the state of Arunachal Pradesh still live in some 5,258 villages (Census 2011). The structure and typologies of villages also differ widely based on each particular tribe. The population of the villages range from less than ten households to more than a few hundreds. There is no uniformity among the different tribes, hence large variations in villages of the different tribes may be found.

As the 24th state of the Indian Union, Arunachal Pradesh was granted statehood on 20th February 1987. This state was virtually left untouched by the British administration and was also one of the last recipients of the social reformers and other movements operating in India during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the past the tribes of the state were referred to as ‘uncouth’, ‘barbaric’ and ‘wild’ by scholars. Such terms refer to a stage in their history when they were technologically, materially and socially much simpler. However with the attainment of statehood the people have been introduced to a vast number of heterogenetic forces of change. Since then changes through agencies such as developmental plans, new political institutions and education have been introduced into the state with the view of integrating the people into the national identity.

Keeping the historical, cultural and economic context of the state of Arunachal Pradesh in mind it has been noted that the vast and rapid changes that are taking place
at present in the villages of Arunachal Pradesh, lend a note of urgency to village studies. The importance of village studies has been stressed as a continuing source of importance for the deeper and wider understanding of society, economy and polity in contemporary India. It the light of this context it has been felt necessary to take a detailed study of the traditional and contemporary aspects of a village in Arunachal Pradesh and the transformations that were claimed to be taking place. Keeping in mind the above discussion an empirical study of Lathao village situated in the Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh was carried out in order to understand its structure. The study was designed as a descriptive and an exploratory one. The central theme of the study was to project the changes and transformations that were occurring among the Tai Khampti at the level of the village. In order to uncover these facts the focus was on the village as a unit and a case study where the system of institutions and the functional interdependence between different aspects of life which gives rise to the multifaceted interrelationship among the institutions- kinship and marriage, religious, political and economic- were analysed.

Objectives of the study: We have the following broad objectives, namely: -

1. To examine the structural arrangements of the village in terms of the organised pattern of inter-related rights and obligations of persons and groups as reflected in the following institutions- kinship, religious, political and economic institutions of the village.

2. To examine the structural response of the village to external factors like introduction of market system, state policy of development and power structure.

3. To understand the process of continuity and change as reflected in the social institutions.
**Area of study:** The study was conducted in Lathao village located in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh. Lathao was chosen for the simple reason that no such studies have been carried out in this village. It is known for being one of the earliest settlements of the Tai Khampti and in terms of population and area is the second largest village in Namsai District. One of the unique characteristics of this village was that it was one of the 8 villages out of a total of 67 identified Khampti villages in the area where the traditional political institution of the *Chow pha* (chief) was still present and being practiced.

**Methodology:** The data presented in the study are primary data collected from the village. Both primary and secondary data were collected to achieve the results of the study. The primary data was collected from the members of the village, knowledgeable individuals outside the village and state government officials. The data was collected using the instruments of schedule, interview guide and non-participant observation. The focus of data collection was both qualitative and quantitative. Secondary data was collected from books, articles, journals, census reports, literature in the Khampti script – the *Lik Thamasat* (Khampti book of law) and *Jatieu Tai Khampti* was translated by the researcher with the help of the village priest and the village chief.

In order to collect the primary data the heads of all households in the village comprising a total of 163 respondents formed the sample size. To collect the data the following different schedules for different purpose of the same objective was prepared, namely-

(a) Schedule for the residents of Lathao village

(b) Schedule for the members of the Gram Panchayat members of the village.

(c) Schedule for the *Chow pha* (village chief)
(d) Schedule for the Gaon Bura (village elder)

Additionally primary data was also collected from various categories of persons both within and outside the village. For this purpose living persons and their interactions and activities in the present social system, those who have seen and experienced the various stages that their society has passed through during their life time and were reputed to be knowledgeable about the past were selected. The in-depth interview technique was used profusely in both its forms - structured and unstructured.

Information on the history of the village was provided by the village chief, the clans who accompanied the village chief during migration from the village of origin and elderly citizens of the village. Information regarding kinship and marriage was gathered from elderly citizens of the village, the chow pachaw (marriage emissary) from Sengsap village and observation marriage ceremonies in the village. For the information on the political aspects of the village in particular and the Khampti in general the village chief, chiefs of other Khampti villages, elderly citizens of the village, the Gaon Bura, knowledgeable elderly people outside the village, members of the Tai Khampti Singpho Council and few Government officials was obtained. The village priest, village monks and elderly citizens of the village were interviewed to gather information on religion practiced by the Khampti in general and the village members in particular. The village members provided the findings on the economy of the village. Observations of the year round activities in the religious, agricultural and political sphere of the village was conducted. People’s participation in festivals, in work, and social gatherings were observed. Both the participant and non-participant observation method greatly supplemented the in-depth interviews conducted with the above-mentioned cross section of people that aided in corroborating the information provided by them.
The body of the thesis were divided into the chapters as described below:

**Chapter 1- Introduction**: The first chapter introduced the concept of village. It also provides the review of literature, the objectives of the study and the methodology employed in the collection of data.

**Chapter 2- The Setting**: This chapter contains a detailed description of the socio-demographic characteristics of the village, the topography, migration, origin of the village, village organization and its relation with other villages and towns.

**Chapter 3- Kinship**: This chapter discussed the descent system and the domestic family unit, the different types of marriages practiced by the villagers and a description of kinship terminology and relations among different kin categories.

**Chapter 4- Religion**: This chapter provides an analysis of the canonical Theravada Buddhism and the traditional indigenous beliefs and practices that the villagers profess.

**Chapter 5- Political Institutions**: This chapter is concerned with the traditional political institution of the village during the present times and its linkages with the modern day political institutions of the Panchayat Raj institution, the Gaon Bura and state electoral politics.

**Chapter 6- Economy**: The chapter discusses the economic organization of the village- the nature, methods and process of production.

**Chapter 7- Conclusion**: The chapter summarizes the preceding chapters as well as identifies the major findings of the study.

Presented below were the main findings of the chapters described above:

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**The field Setting**

**Formation of Lathao village**: The Khampti word for village was *maan*. Khampti villages have an indigenous administration and a self-sustaining economy. A *maan*
was more than just a place of habitation for them, it forms the basis for their economy, polity and their culture. Under their customary law, those clans that scouted, led and sponsored the establishment of a village were regarded as the leader and ‘owner’ of a particular *maan*. After having founded the village they established their system of governance in which the *Chow pha* (chief) was the highest power-wielding authority. The founder of the village became the absolute owner of the village lands. All the natural resources that fall within the boundary of the village were controlled and regulated by the *Chow pha* (village chief) or the *chow maan* (nominated/elected headman). The allocation of land to individual families was in their discretion. The customary way of asking grant of land from the *Chow pha* of a village was by performing the ritual of placing a *paan mokya* (token of flowers) before him and submitting a humble prayer of request for settlement. This ritualistic gesture was the customary way of seeking citizenship to a particular *maan*.

**Socio- Demographic profile of the village:** The village had a population of a total of 856 persons with an almost equal number of male and females. Out of the total number of people living in the village 426 are males accounting for 50.93 percent of the total population while 420 are females accounting for 49.05 percent of the total population. In Lathao all the households belong to the Schedule Tribe population. All the households in the village belonged to the Buddhist faith. Lathao was a multi tribe and multi clan village as there are two tribes permanently residing there- the Khampti and the Khamyang. The minority Khamyang population comprises 11 out of a total of 163 households in the village. Altogether there were 22 Khampti clans and 3 Khamyang clans in the village.
Marriage, Family and Kinship

The principle of descent among the Khampti: Descent among the Khampti is patrilineal or agnatic in nature and it is continued unilineally through the male descendants. The Khampti term for descent group is ‘phan’ which is also a generic term for every type of descent group that constitutes the Khampti society. In this study we identified that the Khampti used the term phan to denote two main descent groups. The first referred to the three-fold hierarchical class structure into which the society was stratified comprising of- i) phan chow or the royal clans, ii) the pu-ya pak loung- the commoner clans and lastly, iii) the phan kha or the slave clans. Phan Chow were the nobility. There were three clans among the Khampti of Arunachal Pradesh recognized as the phan chow- Namchoom, Lungking, and Chowtang. The pak loung enjoy the middle level status. Traditionally the ordinary farmers formed this class. At the lowest level were the Phan on (small people) or the phan kha (slave clans)- people who performed occupations which were improper according to the strict Buddhist code such as fishermen, butchers, pig keepers etc. formed this group.

Moving on to the second conception of the word phan- it denotes clan. The clan among the Khampti did not function as units that emerged as corporate groups and they had no political, economic or ritual functions at the level of the clan collectively. It was the lineage which was the most important social group that had a definite genealogical span and also functioned as a corporate group since it manifested itself as a unit of action unlike a clan.

Family Institution: The ties of patrifiliation formed the basic principle of recruitment into a family unit. The father was the head of the household and he was referred to as chow hern. The women within the domestic family unit had a low status. Traditionally the joint family (hern lai) was the norm among the Khampti. In Lathao,
33.55 percent of the total households in the village were joint families. A higher frequency was observed in the incidence of nuclear families (hern leu) where 66.44 percent of the total population were composed of nuclear families. We found that as long as the family formed a common unit of production and consumption they continued to form a single domestic family unit.

**Property, Inheritance and Succession:** The most valuable form of immovable property was identified to be the land tilled by their forefathers and from which the domestic family has been “eating” for generations. It was the father who had the sole authority to decide the division of property among his sons. There was no cognatic reckoning of inheritance as land is never passed on to women. As reflected in the village a daughter or a wife’s right to inherit the father’s or husband’s property lay entirely at the discretion of the father or husband.

**The Marriage system:** Tribal endogamy and clan exogamy were the two basic principles in establishing marital ties in Khampti society. There were three main types of marriage followed by the villagers- i) au loang an (formal marriage) ii) au pai ma (elopement) and au seau an (marriage by capture). The outstanding number of respondents, 69.07 percent of the total population admitted that the form of marriage they had followed was ‘au pai ma’. The most common reason stated for preference of elopement was that it was economically a more viable option for them as the formal type of marriage involved a lot of expenses.

**Hukaa (Bride price):** In Lathao the institution of marriage was found to be still associated with bride price. The study observed that those who belonged to the lower income groups usually eschewed the payment of bride price. The respondents were quick to point out that bride price was usually paid just nominally in order to fulfill the customary requirements.
Marital union in the younger generation appears to have become more of a personal affair as the villagers select their spouses and their mutual choice was then communicated to their parents. Unlike in the past, the marriageable age especially for the girls was greatly extended since girls now attend school and many even continue further education to get a job. The age at which girls get married also coincidentally gets extended due to this reason.

**Religious institution**

**The Khampti cosmology and belief systems:** We found that the village had a uniform Buddhist population where they practiced the Theravada school of Buddhism. The Khampti cosmology and belief system incorporates within it a whole world of spirits and gods. They believe that the universe was divided into three types of beings- *phan kon* (humans), *phan phi* (spirits), *phan sang* (the world of gods). As a part of the Theravada Buddhist cosmology they believe that there were *sam sipet phum* or 31 planes/levels in which these different categories of beings live; hence the Khampti say *Moung phi hok khong* which means that there were six levels of the spirit world, *moung sang sau khong* which means that the world of gods has 20 planes, *mong kang phum lerng* or one world of humans and lastly *apaya see chan* or four types of hells. An individual’s present state was dependent on their *kamma*. In their religious practice thus the main goal was the achievement of a higher state of being in their next birth and all their actions in the religious domain were oriented towards this primary goal- “*so that they go to a good place*”.

The Tai Khampti of Arunachal Pradesh also had a belief in the existence of a whole plethora of gods and deities brought over from Brahmanism and forms a part of the Theravada Buddhist cosmology. According to them there were *sam sean chow* - over three thousand different types of gods. They believed that these gods lived above the
human world. Hierarchically they were above human beings but still subordinate to *Phra pen chow* (the enlightened one).

Standing apart from the aspects of Theravada Buddhism, the thought and practices of the villagers was heavily conditioned by an indigenous religious culture which involves the acknowledgement of *Phi* or spirits of all kinds both benevolent and malevolent.

The villagers followed a syncretic form of religion where Theravada Buddhism and the extra-Buddhist beliefs co-existed mutually. Theravada Buddhism stood at the apex of this complex system of different traditions and beliefs and forms a central aspect of Tai Khampti social values. They were regarded as separate domains where the *phi* were treated as entities that had an indisputable power which had to be acknowledged but which were nonetheless subordinate and ancillary to the predominant Buddhist beliefs.

**Village monastic order:** In Lathao the monastery had three *chowsras*, eight *chowsangs* and eleven boys who have not yet taken to the robes. There was one senior monk who performed the role of head monk. There was a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between the village monastic order and the villagers. While the village looked after the basic needs and necessities of the monks the monks in turn performed the function of blessing the village which was needed by the people who believed that this would earn them merit which was required for the after-life.

**Political Institutions**

**The Structure and function of the Traditional Political Institutions:** The traditional political system of the village was chiefly centered on the *Chow pha* (chief) where the politico-legal authority was completely vested in his hands. The
study identified two groups of people in the village who acted as counselors of the *Chow pha*. The first group comprised of the influential, ‘respectable’ clans in the village whose chief function was to act as an advisory body to the *Chow pha*. The second group comprised of the *kon thau* (village elders) who formed the *chow tra* (judges bench) whenever they are called upon by the chief to help adjudicate cases that came to his notice.

**The Gaon Bura institution:** In Lathao, from the days when the British first introduced the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945, the title of *Gaon Bura* (GB) was solely maintained by the male members of the Mannaw clan and has been passed down from generation to generation within members of the same family. The main functions of the GB was the settlement of cases of civil and criminal nature according to their respective tribal customs and established usages and were responsible for the maintenance of law and order in their respective village jurisdiction. There was no specific term of office prescribed for the position of the GB. He may opt for a voluntary retirement or he may choose to serve till his demise. The *Gaon Bura* in Lathao was nominated by the chief which was supported by the male members of the village.

**Panchayat Raj in Lathao:** The traditional political set up with the traditional elite occupying the dominant positions was also reflected in the Panchayat bodies of the village for a long period of time. All this began to change gradually as during the present time factions have emerged comprising two groups of elites with the ruling patrilineage on one side and their opponents on the other. In the Panchayat Raj elections of 2013, the younger brother of the *chow pha* of the village stood for elections to the Zila Parishad but failed to win the seat. This caused for the first time since the inception of the Panchayat Raj in the village a shift in power base. Another
significant development was the inclusion of the Adivasi community into the village Panchayat bodies. The Khamyang members of the village who otherwise have no say in the traditional political sphere have a fair representation in the village Gram Panchayat. Another change was the participation and role of the women-folk. Out of 29 seats in the Gram Panchayat there was only one seat which was a reserved category for women yet there were more female than male members at the level of the Gram Panchayat.

**Modern Electoral Process and Party Politics:** The introduction of party based politics has created schisms in the village and it became especially compounded in Lathao caused by the fact that the *Chow pha* of the village too had stood for elections in the last three terms. The influence of the ruling patrilineage over the village in the modern day democratic political institution was on the wane as during the time of the General elections of 2014 we found the village sharply divided into two groups where one group voted against the *Chow pha* of the village.

**Economy**

Agriculture was the primary occupation of the members of the village. The study classified the occupational status of the heads of the households into the following categories- (1) Cultivators (2) Businessmen (3) Service (government) and (4) Service (private). In Lathao, 82.2% of the total population were cultivators; out of this figure, 76.07% were solely cultivators while 17.17% were part time cultivators. By solely cultivators we mean those individuals whose primary and sole source of livelihood was through cultivation of land. Part time cultivators were those individuals who possessed supplementary sources of livelihood. 7.97 percent were engaged in government service and 2.45 percent were employed in private service.
The land holding system: *Langnin* (land) was the greatest asset and major resource for the villagers. Once land has been allotted to a particular individual, he is allowed to cultivate it perpetually without any kind of hindrance from the village chief. Anything that is cultivated on the land belongs to the household and they utilize it independently.

Productive Activities: Cultivation of the *na* (rice fields) formed the chief productive activity of the villagers. For the purpose of the study and based on their relations to the processes of production in the *na*, we grouped the villagers into the following categories- (1) farmer, (2) rentier, (3) part farmer and part rentier. Farmers (42.94 percent) were landowners who directly participated in the cultivation process of their rice fields either by contributing their own labor in the process or indirectly through the supervision of hired labor. Rentiers (36.80) were landowners who have leased out their land wholly and simply collect rent at the end of the cultivation season. The majority of the lessee in this relation were formed of non- Khampti agricultural labourers belonging to the Adivasi and Nepali community. Part farmers and part rentier (15.33 percent) leased out parts of their land while other parts were cultivated through their own labor. 4.90 percent did not own land for rice cultivation.

Tea cultivation: Following the criterion outlined by the Tea Board of India, the tea planters in the village by definition fall under the category of ‘small tea growers’. Out of the total population in the village, there were 31 small tea growers identified (19.01 percent of the total population of the village). The small tea growers in the village were exclusively engaged in the production of green leaf which are sold to intermediaries at the prevailing market price.

Timber logging: The study identified that a villager may participate in this trade in either of the three following capacities:- 1) owner of saw mill, 2) log seller 3)
22.08 percent of the total population of the village were engaged in the timber logging business. Among them there were 9 (5.52 percent) of them who owned saw mills. 8 (4.90 percent) heads of households worked in the saw mills for daily wages. 14.11 percent were engaged in this profession as log sellers.

Summary and Findings: In this work a sociological study of Lathao, a Tai Khampti village in the Namsai District of Arunachal Pradesh was undertaken. The study found that the time of arrival into the village and the economic level of a household had direct implications as far as the social and political positioning in the village was concerned.

Descent among the Khampti was found to be patrilineal or agnatic in nature and it was continued unilineally through the male descendants. We found that as long as the family formed a common unit of production and consumption they continued to form a single domestic family unit. The division of na (rice fields) by the father was identified as the primary reason for the fission of the domestic family unit. In Lathao, we observed that both movable and immovable property was exclusively inherited in the male line. We found that there were no changes with respect to the villager’s opinion on the rights of women to property and inheritance. We found that there were many changes that have been accommodated in the institution of marriage. As far as choice of marriage partners was concerned there was considerable freedom granted as many of the villagers were of the opinion that this should depend entirely on the preferences of the individual. The favorable age of marriage has also been altered with the respondents citing that with the introduction of education system even the girls in the younger generation pursue an education and many of them even go on to seek jobs hence their marital age has been extended. During the present day many rituals in the marriage ceremonies of the arranged type have been accommodated to
keep up with the changing times and lifestyles of the present generation. In Lathao the institution of marriage was found to be still associated with bride price but simply as a kind of fulfillment of the marriage rituals along traditional lines. We observed that the institution of kinship, family and marriage to be relatively stable and the traditional socio-cultural life of the villagers continue to be determined to a great extent by their inter-personal relationships based on kinship relations.

We found that in Lathao, the *chong* (monastery) was a central component of the village. We found that it was the male members of the village under the leadership of the *Chow pha* who made decisions regarding matters such as organisation of feasts and festivals as this did not fall within the purview of the monks. The role of women in such decision making process was not present in Lathao as they were usually made to follow what the men had decided. We found that there was a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between the village monastic order and the villagers. While the village look after the basic needs and necessities of the monks the monks in turn perform the function of blessing the village which is needed by the people who believe that this will earn them merit which is required for the after-life. We found that the village had two realms in the religious sphere- the first was the canonical Buddhist beliefs and the second was the extra Buddhist beliefs and practices. Through the case of Lathao village we found that Theravada Buddhism and other aspects of Tai Khampti culture together come to form a comprehensive expression of Tai Khampti identity. We could say that since Theravada Buddhism has such a defining role to play in the creation of a Tai Khampti identity any sort of evolution of temple life would definitely effect the larger lay Tai Khampti village population in general.

We found that the polity of Lathao village was based on the traditional political institution of the *Chow pha* who formed the highest authority of the village. There
were some changes in the structural aspect of the institution. During the present time the traditional functions that are dispensed by the *Chow pha* have been divided and distributed among two brothers of the ruling patrilineage. We found that new dimensions to the traditional power base of the village polity was created through the introduction of modern day political institutions such as the *Gaon Bura* and much later the Panchayat Raj bodies. While the ascriptive quality were the most important criterions for the traditional political institutions the new political structures provide greater scope for manipulation and personal initiative. Through the Panchayat Raj bodies even those clans in the village previously having no claim as such to any sort of power now find themselves in a position where they can both challenge the dominance of the traditional power base as well as assume for themselves those positions of power not available to them in the traditional political institutions. Electoral politics has served to heighten divisions in the village society based along party lines. We found that while in the traditional political institutions the participation in the village polity was determined by clan and lineage affiliation and was highly gender biased, in the modern day political institutions there was considerably more equitable representation of all sections of the village population including women.

The economy of the village could be classified as agrarian as all the households in the village were engaged in agricultural activities. The technologies used for cultivation is quite simple and is dependent on manual labour to a great extent. Cooperative based work was absent among the villagers as individualism is becoming more pronounced. As the villagers were more and more reliant on the hiring of paid wage labourers to carry out their productive activities the sense of community participation in economic activities has been eroded. We found that the village already structured along class
lines and individualism was gaining ground as the competition for economic gains was leading to a type of society based on fiscal factors. While the primary activities of the villagers centered around their rice fields there have been other agro-based economic activities that a section of the village population practice. Activities such as the cultivation of tea and timber logging by a section of the village population has directly brought them into contact with wider economic structures and market forces. These new economic activities have resulted in some changed circumstances where the villagers have close and constant interactions with people outside the village belonging to different cultures. However despite these changes being introduced the land holding system in the village remained the same as they were guided by traditional and customary norms upheld by the Chow pha. The study found that there was an increasing tendency of the villagers to lease out land and not directly participate in the cultivation process. We found that most of the young people are pursuing education as a result of which they are increasingly cut off from agricultural activities. It was also noted that most of the parents do not want their children to become cultivators and have ambitions for their children to be educated and have the ultimate goal of finding a salaried job.

In conclusion we may say that Lathao village the forces of change that have been brought in through agencies such as government intervention, new economic opportunities, and by the people themselves who are changing their lifestyle through education, mobility and exposure to outside influences. The village may be transforming under the accelerated rate of development and the process of change but the pattern of change that the village is going through is adaptive in nature where most of the traditional institutions are retained.
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