

## SUMMARY

### The discovery of documents

In the summer of 1965 the author participated in a German research project devoted to the anthropological study of the Sherpa, a Himalayan population of Eastern Nepal. The author's primary task was to collect detailed data for a demography of this people. In the course of their research, several members of the team and the author discovered certain significant documents. These documents, found in private houses, in temples and in Buddhist monasteries of the Nyingmapa sect, were of mixed character: Some, written in Tibetan, interwove old Tibetan or Sherpa mythological concepts with real genealogical enumerations of Sherpa ancestors and historical (or semi-historical) accounts of events extending over four to five centuries.

With the exception of one, the *Clear and Mirrorlike Description of the Genesis of Heaven and Earth*, which is a version of a widespread cosmogony in Buddhist countries, these Tibetan language documents can on the whole be classified as original Sherpa texts. It is difficult to estimate their age. The most important of them, the *Ruyi* or *The Report on the Bones* (bones meaning patrilineal clans), is probably four hundred years old.

Other documents were written in Nepali and date back to the late 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries. These are of purely historic content and throw light on the relations of the Sherpa with the authorities of the then newly established state of the Gurkha rulers of Nepal. These relations were based on mutual respect and a tolerant laissez-faire policy on the part of the government.

### Reconstruction of the Sherpa clan-history and colonization

The discovery of the above mentioned documents rendered it possible for the first time to formulate a number of historic hypotheses concerning the original homeland of the Sherpa people, their migrations and final settlement in Solu-Khumbu and the expansion of their clans. These hypotheses are also supported by oral traditions of the Sherpa and by the application of statistical data, collected during the expedition. The more or less conjectural history of the Sherpa may be summarized as follows:

The Sherpa, now forming a distinct ethnic group among the hilltribes of the Himalayas with a population of more than 13000 individuals in their main dwelling area of Solu-Khumbu, were not always inhabitants of Eastern Nepal. Their ancestors came to their present home in the region of Mt. Everest from a district called Salmo Gang in the Eastern Tibetan province of Kham. This migration of more than 1250 miles took place at the turn of the 15th to the 16th century, as indicated by a Tibetan historiographic date: One of the emigrants was a pupil of Tertön Ratna Lingpa, a famous religious scholar, who lived from 1401 to 1477 A. D.

The reasons for this exodus can only be guessed. One of the texts discovered states that the emigration took place at a time of political tension between Kham and powerful neighbors in the North, the Mongols. These had in fact undertaken several military expeditions from the Kokonor to the South. It is therefore possible that the Sherpa's ancestors left their homes under outside pressure or at least in consequence of the general unrest created by

the Mongol invasions. The same motive also caused the ancestors of the royal house of Sikkim to leave Kham at nearly the same time.

It must be pointed out however that the exodus of the Sherpa's ancestors was not a mass migration involving a whole tribe. On the contrary, only a small group consisting of four proto-clans left Kham, and this explains, why only the descendants of these proto-clans (Serwa, Minyagpa, Thimmi and Chakpa) are nowadays considered as pure Sherpa.

According to the documents the first immigrants did not proceed immediately to Solu-Khumbu, but — after their long march — they settled for a few decades in the Tinkye area south of the Tsomo Tretung-Lake (see map), a region west of Central-Tibet. But they abandoned their new homes again, this time disturbed by the rumours of the arrival of mighty invaders from the West. The *Ruyi* calls these invaders Döhor Durkhi.

If this invasion from the West is of historical relevance at all it must be identical with the campaign of Sultan Sa'id Khan of Kashgar and his general, Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat, against Tibet (1531 to 1533 A. D.). These two Moh mmedan religious fanatics first marched against Ladakh and Kashmir. Later the general extended the campaign almost as far east as Lhasa and was stopped only by an outbreak of disease. Haidar Dughlat's aim, the destruction of the city temple of Lhasa and the subjection of the "Tibetan idolators", was therefore not wholly executed. His march, however, may have caused the Sherpa's ancestors to take refuge in the remote Himalayan mountains.

At any rate, the Sherpa proto-clans left the Tinkye area, crossed a high pass called Nangpa La (5716 m) and finally settled down in Solu-Khumbu. At the time of their arrival these regions of Eastern Nepal must have been totally uninhabited. Only the southernmost parts of Solu may have been occupied by earlier settlers, the Rai. But there are no reports or other evidence of a major struggle during the following 2½ centuries. Thus the Sherpa could spread over Solu-Khumbu, unhindered by any outside power or local opponents. The story of the colonization of Solu-Khumbu is the story of the different proto-clans, their expansion and subsequent fission and the rise of independant sub-clans. A general pattern applying to all proto-clans can be observed:

1. Each of the different clans selects a clearly defined locality for settlement and demarcates the boundaries of its clan-property.
2. The number of a clan's members increases and the small settlements develop into the first discernable clan-villages, the centers of clan-activities.
3. From the first clan-villages new satellite settlements are founded within the confines of a clan's area.
4. The new settlements also grow and become independant clan-villages.
5. The dislocalisation produces an increasing disintegration of the original homogeneous proto-clans.
6. The final result of disintegration is the split of the proto-clans into several sub-clans, which adopt new clan-names.

Thus, the Minyagpa proto-clan of the Sherpa ancestors split in the course of its expansion into eight sub-clans (Gardza, Trakto, Gole, Shire, Binasa, Pankarma, Yülgongma and Kapa). All of these still exist. From the Thimmi proto-clan originated five surviving sub-clans (Salaka, Khambadze, Paldorje, Gobarma and Lakshindo).