

LEPCHA OR RÓNG.

The Lepchas are considered as the oldest inhabitants of Sikkim. They are also found in Western Bhutan, Eastern Nepal, and in Darjeeling. They call themselves Róng and are known to the Tibetans as Rong-pa or Mún-pa. Lepcha is a nickname given to them by the Nepalese. According to the Sikkim Gazetteer the local pronunciation of the word is Lapcha or Lapche. Dr. Waddell thinks that it is composed of *lap*, speech, and *cha*, vile, and that it consequently means 'vile speakers.'

Róng has an indigenous literature, and the Sikkim Rājā Chakdor Namgye (born 1686) designed an alphabet for the use of his subjects. Róng literature comprises Buddhistic and other religious books, law books, etc. Very little has as yet been made known about it. Parts of the Scriptures have also been translated into the language.

According to information collected during the preparatory operations of this Survey the numbers of speakers of Róng in Sikkim and Darjeeling were, roughly estimated, as follows :—

Sikkim	25,000
Darjeeling	9,894
	TOTAL . 34,894

At the last Census of 1901, the language entries under the head of Róng were as follows :—

BENGAL PRESIDENCY—

Sikkim	7,945
Darjeeling	11,252
Jalpaiguri	74
Monghyr	1
Bhagalpur	1
Sontal Parganas	1

Total Bengal Presidency 19,274

LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF INDIA

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