PART II: THE LAND
CHAPTER SIX

THE LAND, ITS WORKERS, HARVESTS AND RITUALS

The agricultural base of Tingchim village has been through a series of important and rapid changes since the 1930s. From being a subsistence economy based on slash and burn cultivation of cereals, hunting-gathering and the keeping of cattle, Tingchim’s agricultural economy is now based on the cultivation of irrigated rice terraces and the cardamom cash-crop. This change would not have been possible without the help of Limbu settlers who came to the area in 1938, and without the arrival of Indian merchants at the end of the nineteenth century. In this chapter, I introduce these changes and discuss how villagers and their rituals of the land were affected by the new settlers. It will be seen that land rituals and their inherent shamanic worldview seem to have maintained their importance and even gained a new dimension when faced with an increasing number of threatening outsiders.

Harvest rituals are performed biannually by every single Tingchim household. The pawo, the bongthing and the lama successively hold their own part of the ritual, addressing their respective set of supernatural beings in order to secure the blessings of abundant harvests. Their successive performance towards a unique ritual goal couldn’t better express how they are perceived as being complementary rather than in competition with one another. This complementarity expressed during the harvest rituals becomes evident when the ritual specialists are successively consulted in moments of crisis or as we will see in later chapters, even pool their ritual skills together if the condition of the patient becomes particularly serious.

1. THE LAND AND ITS WORKERS

When the ancestors of the present Tingchim villagers first settled in the area in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the village houses were located in a place called Tingjen located higher up the mountain, and later on, a few households started settling lower down in the close-by area of Be. The economy was then based on the keeping of cattle in the forest and higher pastures, on hunting, trapping and the gathering