CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MORALITY OF WELL-BEING

It was the morning of Zha Nga, the last of the traditional 15-day Losar (New Year) celebration. For the first time in four days, I was able to sit in the courtyard to soak up the magnificent sunshine of early spring. Over the past few days, Langtang had been buffeted by a rather severe snowstorm, forcing villagers to stay indoors most of the time, huddling around the kitchen hearths for warmth and drinking countless cups of butter tea. The storm was brutal even by the standards of Langtang, whose reputation as a ‘very cold place’ had been constantly made known to me by kindly outsiders living further down the valley. The unrelenting snow and wind had inconvenienced villagers in their preparation for the big celebration that was to be held that night, when most villagers were expected to congregate at Hotel Snow View for food, drinks, songs and dance. Nima, my landlady, was one of those responsible for preparing the communal meal, and the bad weather of the past few days had significantly drained her seemingly boundless energy as she scuttled to and from various houses, making sure there would be enough alcohol to last the whole night, discussing the allocation of cooking tasks, procuring some of the ingredients and foodstuff needed for the important feast. So on this clear, sunny morning, it was not just me who relished the change in the weather. Having a much-needed break before the hectic night ahead, Dawa joined me in the courtyard and, together with Pasang the postman, we engaged in one of the villagers’ favourite past-times: gossip.

Naturally, our banter soon turned to the severe weather of the past few days. For me, the snow, cold and wind had been a further confirmation of Langtang’s reputation for harsh winters. But for the Langtangpa, as was soon to be revealed to me, the matter was not so simple: percolating rapidly through the village was the view that the real reason behind the snowstorm was one particular adulterous woman in the village. The woman in question, whom I shall call Mingma, had had an affair with a Sherpa trekking guide, and was pregnant with his child. Affairs between local women and Sherpa trekking guides are not unheard of. The problem with the present case was that Mingma was
already married and a mother of four children. While sexual relations between unmarried adults are generally accepted in Langtang, villagers do not look kindly on unfaithful spouses, more so if the affair results in pregnancy.

**DIPPA (SGRIB PA): EXPLAINING MISFORTUNE IN LANGTANG**

Both Nima and Pasang were adamant that the scandalous affair between Mingma and the Sherpa guide was the real cause of the severe weather. The whole incident had resulted in tensions and antagonisms between the various parties involved. Cuckolded, Mingma’s husband was understandably furious and was contemplating divorce, but at the same time he was worried about the effects such an act would have on the children. Mingma herself was thrown into uncertainty, undecided if she should leave her husband for the Sherpa. The latter, on his part, had not made his intentions known, for he was living alternately in Kathmandu and Solu-Khumbu, and only came to Langtang during the trekking seasons. The disruptions of previously cordial social relations meanwhile had extended to the relationships between various kindred and close friends, as each took sides either with Mingma or

![Figure 7.1: Langtang after a snowstorm](image)