EXPLORING CHILD REARING PRACTICES AMONG LEPCHA TRIBE OF SOUTH SIKKIM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THEIR PERSONALITY

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ABSTRACT
Socialization is the lifelong process of interaction through which we acquire our self identity. The socialization process is confined not merely to the children, but it affects every individual’s life from birth till death. The introversion personality trait of Lepcha tribe has been known to everyone since the beginning. The child rearing practices have been the major source of influence behind their unique personality of sober and shy nature. A study on culture and customs of Lepcha tribe has been of an immense importance to the social scientist in general and sociologists. This study is an effort to describe the influence of child rearing practices of Lepcha tribe of Sikkim on the personality of the people of this community.

Keywords: Lepcha; Socialization; Sikkim; Personality; Tribe

INTRODUCTION
Man is not born social. The child learns the social ways and becomes a social being through the process of socialization. According to W. F. Ogburn, ‘socialization is the process by which the individual learns to conform to the norms of group’.

This study especially deals with the socialization pattern among Lepcha community of Sikkim, while stressing on its primary socializing agent, family. The Lepchas are known to be the earliest ethnic group to have settled in Sikkim. They are called peace loving simple people. They are calm and timid in behavior. These people prefer to live an isolated life protected by the forests and the mountains. Their societies are based on the basis of sharing and equality.

One of the interesting behavioral traits of these people is their fear of nature. For instance children are not allowed to laugh during lightning storms. Likewise there are several other features which interprets that the child socialization process among this community was quite different from other communities.

By the age of three children learn to yield to the older people. They are taught to be kind and adopt passive and impersonal manner. Children in Lepcha community are raised in ways that adult do not treat them harshly, but neither do they dote on them. They are not playful with their children. They punish their children severely for their mistakes such as, stealing, lying, quarreling, acting in an insulting manner, ruining someone’s property, etc.

Generally children fear their parents. Whatesoever, the adults take the education and socialization of their children seriously. Children are trained to respect their grandparents sleeping places. Other than that they learn by copying the behavior of others. They are respectful of older peoples. There is a belief in Lepcha community that children are born either with good heart or with a bad heart, and those afflicted with bad heart must be corrected before its too late.
OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the child socialization practices in Lepcha community of south Sikkim and its influence on their personality.
2. To understand the role of parents in building child’s personality.
3. To understand the reason behind the introversion personality traits of Lepcha children.
4. To explore the initiatives of Lepcha associations to bring forward the community.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Lepchas are gentle and generous people and are extremely shy in their dealings with strangers. This very characteristic trait of the community is troubling them to come forward and work hand in hand with other communities for the welfare of all in this complex changing society of Sikkim. It has been observed that the youths of this community are not being able to compete with other community youth, whether it is in academic field or in the race of getting a job. This problem has been realized by the same community people who are fortunately little forward than rest of the community members. These few forward members of the community had put forward their petition to the union government to recognize them as primitive tribe and provide them reservation in higher education and in government jobs. Despite of all these reservations we can see unemployment crisis in this community. This community has already been declared as a vanishing tribe by well-known author A.R Fonning in his book “lepcha my vanishing tribe”. Apparently every community has been affected by modernization and they have adapted to the modern culture but the effect of modernization cannot be seen in Lepcha community. They still take into account the traditional child rearing process which gives satisfaction to the parents but the youths are suffering a great loss in this competitive age. Due to their introversion personality trait, less participation of this community youth can be seen in social activities. Number of candidates of Lepcha community appearing in competitive exams are also seen less in Sikkim. Despite of government and lepcha community associations repeated effort the youths of tribe is still backward. Hence the root of the problem lies in their timid personality acquired during the process of socialization. Although human personality is the result of our genes but the socialization process can mould it in a particular direction which is advantageous. Generally it is known that Lepcha have peaceful and harmonious relation with other communities of Sikkim. Actual process of socialization in their family system is not known so far. Children of this community have lower self-esteem and possesses shy and timid behavioral trait. It is evident that it’s quite tough for them to compete with other communities’ children, when there are reservations for them in almost every field in our state.

A number of studies have been carried out by scholars on this community, but none of them has explored about its socialization process to its root which I feel possesses a great importance in understanding the community as a whole. Since Lepcha are simple people residing in assimilation with different Communities of Sikkim. Hence it becomes necessary for them to cope with Globalization. It seems like the personality they have acquired through their unique socialization process is not sufficient for this tribe to come out to the field with other communities. Thus, it has become a vital challenge for this community to move on with other communities while preserving their cultural values. Its rich and unique culture has always attracted the scholars towards their community. Hence it’s quite interesting for me to learn and understand their culture and come out with the best solution for their challenge. It ushers us to the root i.e. the process of their upbringings from where this community acquire their unique personality.

Socialization is a learning process which starts after birth. We learn to communicate through our language and basic things about our culture and customs and our personality starts taking shape yet we continue to be socializing throughout our life. Thus, socialization is an unending process; it helps us to adjust in any kind of environment. So there is an emerging need for support to this community, particularly the youths for the existence of this community.
OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Fonning (1987:198, 236), “…the head of the family, i.e., the father is supreme in the family. The words spoken by him is unquestioned. All the property, movable and immovable, belong to him. He may, during his lifetime dispose of some parts or keep the whole property as he may consider best. When he dies, normally the eldest son takes charge of the family properties. Including cattle and other assets, rights, duties and everything... children who are adopted are placed in the same category as a man’s own son”. He further states that, “on closer scrutiny I find that most of the childish ideas that have come down the generations to us have a deeper meaning and significance... when the elderly among us enjoy our tribal drink, chee prepared out of brewed millet, the inevitable accompaniment, the “chee-sep”, comes in. This chee-sep is mostly prepared out of meat. Now sometimes this is prepared with the brain of some animal; and when this happens the older folk tell the youngsters, you must not eat this; you will start growing grey hair before your time and turn idiot”. There are so many other restrictions for children in this community which has an advantageous meaning behind it. For instance, lads of ten or twelve years of age are restricted from eating eggs, as claimed by the older people, this would give them a vertigo and thus makes them useless to do a human jobs, such as climbing trees, working on roofs, etc. Another restriction was that, youngsters were not allowed to play with mee (fire) or they may wet their beds. The parents’ intention here is to prevent the youngsters from accidents by putting fear in the child’s mind.

Family quarrels are unusual and in the case of a village feud, people avoid each other. The woman who expects a child must not eat the flesh of any animal whose throat has been cut, from the fifth month. If she does, the child will be born with the red mark round its neck and he will die. An animal must not either be eaten that has been killed in her presence. Should the woman by any mistake have eaten of an animal that was killed in this manner, the bones are kept until the child is born and are then rubbed on his throat. Distorted plantains that are twisted or out of shape must not be eaten by the woman or else it is believed that the child’s fingers and toes will resemble them. Should the basket she carries fall off her back when containing food, she may not eat any of the contents. She is also expected to lead a homely life and not go out at night lest the child die (C. DE B. S, 2001: 462). This community starts taking care of the child before the child is born and great cares are taken after birth. According to Gorer, the Lepchas have a low estimate of other communities who have the habit of begging. The children are taught not to beg even if they are starving. Gorer further observes that the Lepchas are unselfish and there is a lack of aggression in the community. Fred Pinn in his book, “Road to destiny, 1986”, has also pointed out about the lack of aggression among Lepchas. He has said that the Nepalese were an aggressive people. Whereas Lepchas were and still are of gentle disposition and Buddhist of a sort. Hence, much of the research literature appears to be focused on culture, custom and socialization process of Lepcha community and less attention have been paid to the influence of socialization process on this community.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. What are the essential values and norms that parents feel necessary to give to their children?
2. How do the parents express their love towards their children?
3. How do they interpret other communities to their children?
4. Do men and women equally take the responsibility of child socialization?
5. What are the influences of child socialization process on individuals’ personality?
6. At what age children are given the responsibility to take important decision of family?
7. Whether the child rearing practice has changed with the course of time or not?

METHODOLOGY

Since the study dealt with the socialization process of lepcha community of Sikkim and it aimed at exploring the role of parents in socialization process and its influence on their personality and the efforts and the initiatives of community association and Sikkim government. Keeping in view the
nature, objectives and hypothesis of the study the design of the study was descriptive.  

The study was conducted in Wok Omchu of south district of Sikkim where there is a good accumulation of lepcha population. The universe population is in thousands and scattered all over Sikkim. So due to lack of resources the sampling method has been adopted. 

**SAMPLING**

Keeping the various constraints in mind, “Subjective Sampling” was used in the study. The total number of Lepcha community population in south district above the age of 20 till 60 years is 4000 approximately and from this universe/population total samples of 60 respondents had been collected for the study.

**TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR DATA COLLECTION**

Structured interview schedule was used for data collection which was a set of pre-determined question in connection with the problem study. The precaution was taken to include both closed and open-ended questions, while framing the schedule of the study. The sample had covered the respondent belonging to the age group of 20-60 year. Data were collected from both male and female.

**SCHEDULE**

The interview schedule was divided into three sections; each of these had its own importance in the study. Section I contained the introductory part of the study. This provides basic information about the respondents. Section II includes the family background to get the thorough knowledge about the family of respondent. Section III included the open ended questions for the respondent which consist of questions regarding their socialization process and their views on its influence on their personality.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

There were sixty respondents above the age of 20-60 years. There were 10 respondents from Lepcha community associations (RMRT and SLYA) which included the executive members. The present study had identified the impact of Lepcha socialization process on the personality of individual. 

Socialization process or child rearing practices had a great influence on its community members. On the basis of my observation most of the Lepcha families are guided by superstitions while training their little ones. When child is ill they first take her/him to religious head and if it doesn’t work then only they take them to hospital. From the very beginning they are taught to respect nature. On asking about instances, they provide the example that they are taught to chant some hymns during thunder and lightning, they are refrain from laughing during the storms; else it will strike you, they are taught to avoid some rare species of bird; as they believe that it may cause harm if you do not respect that particular creation of god. 

A large proportion of respondent in present study had shown that being a member of Lepcha community they should not involve in fighting or violence because standing against other people is a sign of bad conduct. These habits are causing them to step back in every competition. They have another belief that wanting more is greed and are taught to share their belongings and sacrifice for friends. These all practices of socialization of the community authenticates that they are molded in such a way that it becomes quite hard for them to face the challenges as an adult. The younger generation was least committed to traditional elements of values and practices. They seemed to be modern and developed, but at the same time they revealed their primary trait of introversion on which they also agreed and they strongly emphasizes an in-depth study on this particular issue.

During the interview with some of the community association members, they believe that this kind of behavioral trait is a boon to this community by “idbu rum”, their god of nature and are proud of being kind and sober. While at the same time some learned members feels that is something in their child rearing process which is responsible for their introversion nature. Thus the association had organized few workshops on personality development and they often organize programs to uplift the youth of
this community. Now days, formal education had undermined the importance of traditional practices of child socialization and with the constant hard word of associations have started showing some positive results.

CONCLUSION

In this study the influence of child socialization process on the personality of lepcha community were found and with the passage of time the changes in this community is slower than other community. It has been found that with the help of formal education and effort of the associations, it is possible to bring changes in their child rearing processes with which in future this community may come forward for the existence. The outcomes of overall study were innovative and this also contributed significantly to the process of socialization in various fields of the larger society.

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