Socio-economic Status of Bhutia Tribe in Sikkim

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Abstract

Sikkim became the Associate State of Indian Union with the Constitutional Amendment Act passed on 4th September 1974 by Parliament of India made the Sikkim and the Associate State of Indian Union. In Sikkim there are three ethnic groups of people namely Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese. Communities, Cultures, religious and customs of different hues intermingle freely here in Sikkim to constitute a homogenous blend. Establishment of English Medium schools, and Professional institutions along with Pharmaceutical companies, development of transport and communication facilities, the people of Sikkim in general, Bhutia in particular have gone a radical changes in every sphere of their life. The present study will highlight the present status of Bhutia tribe in Sikkim.

Keywords: Sikkim; Bhutia; Lepcha; Nepali; Limboo

Introduction

The term “Sikkim” was derived from the word ‘Sukhim’, was corrupted from the Limboo language and in the English Version “Sikkim” which means the “New House or Palace”, the Lepchas called “Nye-mal-el” meaning “Heaven” and the Bhutia people called “Denzong” which means “Valley of Rice”. Before the Sikkim emerged in Indian Union it was a small kingdom which was ruled by the “Chogyal” the word derived from tibetain language meaning “Religious King” “Dharmraja”, the title of the Chogyal was “Namgyal dynasty”.

The modern history begins with the conscreation of the Phuntshok Namgyal, who was the first ruler of Namgyal Dynasty in Sikkim in the year 1641. Before he ruled, the different parts of Sikkim were ruled by Lepcha, Limboo and Manger Chiefs. The person name called Guru Tashi, who belongs to the Minyak dynasty of Tibet and he had a divine vision that he must go to the southern part and find out his fortune in “Denzong” in the half of the 13th century. Accordingly, he had proceed towards the southern part with his family included five son. On the way, they met the Sakya king who was engaged in the construction of big monestary. And thousand of workers were building but the main pillar could not erect the proper position and they tried many times but it was not succeeded. Suddenly, the eldest son of Guru Tashi came forward and the main pillars were erect in the proper position of monastery by single handlely and surprisingly. And the Sakya King was very happy and pleased with the courage and strength shown by son of Guru Tashi and later the eldest son of Guru Tashi name came to be known as “Khye-Bum Sa” meaning “the superior of ten thousand heroes”. The Sakya King therefore out of gratitude offered his daughter in marriage with Khye-Bum-Sa. And Guru Tashi, Khye-Bum-Sa and his family moved towards the north west of Khambagong called Pa-Shi.
Sikkim becomes the Associate State of Indian Union with the Constitutional Amendment Act passed on 4th September 1974 by parliament of India made the Sikkim and the Associate State of Indian Union. Sikkim, which is one of the youngest and the second smallest state of Indian Union next to Goa and it becomes full-fledged state of Indian Union on 16 May 1975 with the Constitutional Amendment Act 36 and 37 and also became the 22nd Indian State.

In 8th May 1998, Sikkim was made a full-fledged member of the North-Eastern Council- “A mining Planning Commission” for the region during the meeting of the Chief Ministers of north eastern states held under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee. In the month of November 2002 Sikkim was also recognized as the 8th sister of North East Council along with Arunchal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. It is small in size but very beautiful and it is essentially mountainous with no flat piece of land. The total area of Sikkim is 7096 Sq Km, barely 144 km long and 64 km wide. Sikkim is situated in the North Eastern Himalayas of India, spread below the Mount Kanchandzonga, the third highest peak in the world. Sikkim shares the borders with Nepal in the West, Bhutan in the East, Tibet in the North and also share the border of neighbouring state West Bengal in the South.

Sikkim lies between 27 5’ and 28 10’ North latitudes and 88 4’ and 88 58’ East longitudes. According to 1981 census report of India the total population of Sikkim was 313685 and according to 1991 census report of India the total population of Sikkim was 406457. According to the census of India in 2001 the total number of population is 5,40,93 in Sikkim. The latest census carried out in 2011 should spread some cheer among those who were dissatisfied with Sikkim’s population results in 2001. As per 2011 census, population of Sikkim is on a path of stabilization now. As per the results of 2011 census the population of Sikkim is 607,688 (6.1 Lakhs). With this Sikkim is least populated state in India.

**Demographic Composition**

In Sikkim there are three ethnic groups of people namely Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese. Communities, Cultures, religious and customs of different hues intermingle freely here in Sikkim to constitute a homogenous blend. Hindu coexists with Buddhist monastery and there are even a few church, muslim mosque and sikh gurudwars. The pre dominant communities are the Lepcha, Nepalese and the Bhutia.

**Bhutia Composition**

The principal concentration of Bhutias is found all districts of Sikkim. Bhutia, who are all Buddhist and quite distinct from the other communities like Lepcha and Nepalese. They converted the indigenous Lepcha people to their religious faith, established matrimonial relations with them and thereby paved the way for cultural and social assimilation of the two races. This gave rise to a new race. The Bhutia word is derived from Nepalese language which means ‘original habitat of Tibet’ since 13th Century. The Bhutia community is one of the Scheduled tribes category in Indian Constitution. Bhutias, they called themselves “Lhopo” or “Lhorees” which means “The dwellers of the southward” and one of the earliest inhabitant of “The Greater Sikkim”. They originally migrated from different places of Tibet.

The Bhutias aristocrats are called Kazis after similar land lord titles in neighbouring regions, especially in modern day Bangladesh. And some of Bhutias depends on agriculture, dairy farming and pastoralism.

When Sikkim was an independent monarchy, among the Bhutias, the Lachungpas and Lachenpas had their own traditional legal system called “Dzumsa” which means the meeting place of the people. The Dzumsa is headed by the village headman known as the ‘Pipon’ & have been given full protection by the state government by deeming a status of panchayat ward and the Pipon, a status of panchayat head.
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The Bhutias are known by their place of habitation such as the Drukpas are people from Drukul of Bhutan, the chumbipas, people from the Chumbi valley, Dhophapas, inhabitants Dhoptha, a place in south Tibet, the Tromopas or Do-mu-pas, inhabitants of Do-mu.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is no empirical study on the socio-economic status of Bhutias in Sikkim till date. Few related studies are done which are discussed below.

According to Risley, the origin of the Bhutias are “the descendent of Khye_bum_sar are divided into six families but with Khye-bum-sar came other Tibetans or Kham_pas who founded the eight families.. or the tribe of ‘the eight respectable names’. In all there are thus fourteen original main faimiles of Tibetan origin in Sikkim”.

Besides the first fourteen, there are other families of Tibetan origin (Known as Rui-chhungg of little families) who migrated to sikkim at various times after the British took charge of Sikkim, The Bhutias ruled Sikkim for more than three hundred years ans as a result had supremacy over other inhabitants.

Regarding religion Risley, Buddhism is the state religion of Sikkim and professed by the majority of the people. The introduction of Buddhism into sikkim it is believed in Sikkim that Guru Rimpoche visited Sikkim during his travels in Tibet and its western border lands.

Bhasin in her book “ Ecology, culture and change” Tribals of Sikkim himalays” he has made a study on the long term change in the Bhutia economy, where by agriculture system, as agriculture is their primary occupation.

According to Hooker, “ Bhutia are emigrants from Tibet, having come with the first Rajah of Sikkim. These people are more turbulent and bolder than the Lepcha”.

Gurung and Lama in the book titled “Sikkim Study Series: culture, part-I’ have studied about the cultures of different communities residing in Sikkim including Bhutias. They have provided short descriptive cultural information about Bhutias of Sikkim. This study is not based on fieldwork. They have used secondary data for their study and have focused on all the aspects in a simple way but have not given any details on economy. Although they have made an attempt to give an ethnographic picture of Bhutias of Sikkim describing Settlement pattern, religion, language, food and dress etc. Hence present study will fulfill the gap left in case of economy as well as provide detailed information on the social as well as cultural life of the Bhutias.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of the study will be to provide a brief ethnography of the Bhutias of Sikkim. It covers different aspects like origin, religion, settlement pattern, family life, kinship system, marriage practices, festivals, life style ceremonies etc.

The objectives are as follows:-

1. To describe about the origin and history of the Bhutias.
2. To describe the art of writing, the alphabets and the scripts of the Bhutias.
3. To describe the family life, way of living, kinship, status of women, education and social organization. and;
4. To analyze various cultural aspect of the community.

METHODOLOGY

The study was undertaken in Sikkim and a self administered interview schedule was prepared by the researcher for the collection of data from the universe. A total no. of 200 respondents were interviewed for this study. The interview schedule was divided into different sections as per the objectives of the study.
RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

There are many things, which are still undocumented about the Bhutia. There is insufficient knowledge about the Bhutia language, race, religion, custom, tradition and economy. All the Bhutia people have tried to find out the better life style and earning and have started living in the place where there is diverse and mixed socio-cultural practices. The present study will explore and analyze different socio-economic and political aspects of the community which will be helpful for the policy makers and planners to in formulating policies a plan for the development of this community.

Socio-Economic Status of Bhutia Tribe in Sikkim

Bhutias are one of the traditional inhabitants of Sikkim. In the study it was found that though older people or family member they are well conversed with the Bhutia language and scripts, majority of the younger generation they do not know the scripts; though they speak in Bhutia languages in their houses but outside the house either they use Nepali language or Hindi language. This is only due to modern English medium educational system, where there is no scope for the students to learn Bhutia Scripts.

Secondly, it is found in the study that in majority of cases the head of the household takes the final decision in case of family matters. Both the boys and girls are sent for schooling without any gender biasness. In marriage ceremony, they follow the traditional way of selecting groom and bride and accept bride price / dowry as per the tradition and custom. Marriages are solemnized as per the customs and traditions. Marriage rituals are practiced from one day to three days depending upon the economic status of the family. All the Bhutias follow Buddhism as their religion.

Thirdly, Bhutia men and women enjoy equal status in the family as found in the study. Females are allowed to join in any gainfully employment opportunities available to them.

Fourthly, generally, the Bhutia People are rich and there property is not divided. At the present time they follow the small family norm ( nuclear family) though the aged people have large number of family members as found from the study.

Fifthly, the Bhutias normally reside in clusters. The housing pattern among the Bhutias has drastically changed since iron-rod, stone-chips and cement culture included inside Sikkim after black-paved serpentine road construction started. Most of the houses of the Bhutias are two stoned rectangular structures. These houses are constructed on taller-stone foundations and they are often supported by poles made up of tree trunks. The ground floor of each house is partially enclosed when domestic animals are especially cattle are kept. Houses made of wood and bamboo splits plastered with mud. The roof is thatched with reed. straw and bamboo and the walls of these houses are often made up of clay materials. The technique of building houses by the Nepalese is different front that of the Bhutias.

CONCLUSION

Due to rapid development in last two-three decades, Sikkim has been transferred into a more developed state after its merger with India in 1975. Establishment of English Medium schools, Colleges, Technical and Professional institutions along with industries particularly Pharmaceutical companies, development of road transport facilities, the people of Sikkim in general, Bhutia in particular have gone a radical changes in every sphere of their life.

REFERENCES


