

Changpas – The Transhumants of Ladakh

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ABSTRACT The Buddhist Changpas are a tribe of tent (*Rebo*) – dwelling pastoral transhumant of Ladakh who form an ethnic entity. Their way of life shows a capacity to adapt themselves to rugged cold desert environment. Animal husbandry is a way of life, and Changpas' whole existence revolve around the migration of their flocks in search of pastures. The vast area supports a large population of yak, sheep, goats and horse. The Changpas main economic strategies are of conserving abundance into storable form that can be utilized throughout the year. Changpas follow the traditional system of grazing wherein the headman - the Goba decides areas for animal grazing. Changpas who traverse the difficult terrain all the year long have social and functional groups to provide social security to all its members. The scattered and constantly shifting tent camps of Changpas still conforms to old age system of community organization. Traditionally, the Changpas were able to manage their affairs without outside intervention. Their own societal controls like polyandry and cutting of excess animals, helped in Tura by their customary rights and equity in resources allocation has helped them. Political events beyond their control have led to the transformation of their traditional economic system, forcing them to reorient it. Despite their remoteness and inaccessibility, over the past 30 to 50 years impact on the life of these people. Changpas are vulnerable to these pressures since their life-styles are linked to surrounding ecosystem. Changpas transhumants are in a state of transition. Despite the intrusion of the forces of change, they are still able to maintain their ethnic identity and way of life.