

## Debate on Approaches to the Tribes substantiated with the Case of the Lepchas of Sikkim, India

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**ABSTRACT** In light of the approaches that have been propounded for the tribes of India, this paper discusses the case of the Lepchas of Sikkim. Sikkim grew into a plural society because of the migrations of the Tibetan Bhutias and the Nepalese. The British occupation of Sikkim promoted an influx of the Nepali labour force, and gradually these people outnumbered the indigenous population of the Lepchas. As a consequence, the Lepchas were pushed further interior, except those who because of hypergamy and other relations adjusted with the Bhutias. For protecting the interests of the Lepchas, the Maharajah of Sikkim converted one of his private estates into a Lepcha reserve. Though legal sanctions exist for any transaction of land in Dzongu, the Lepchas have not been able to achieve what they could have done otherwise. Ignorant of cash economy and having lavish expenditures on ritual occasions, the Lepchas are vulnerable to exploitation by the trading community of Marwaris. Cardamum is a cash crop, but because of the nexus of exploitation by the traders, they do not acquire the amount of cash due to them. Whatever is earned is spent on paying taxes and buying household goods. Though they have been able to retain their culture intact and have also exercised selectivity in choosing from the outsiders, their economic exploitation has continued. It is suggested that if their produce is properly marketed, removing all the exploiting elements, their condition could be ameliorated. The Lepcha Dzongu is discussed in the perspective of tribal situation in India and the approaches that have been offered for their development.

At present, academic as well as non-academic opinion about the approach to be adopted for the tribes of India, constituting around 7.8 percent of the total population (Vidyarthi, 1983), is in favour of integration. Oft-repeated is the statement that integration is the best policy, scoring overwhelmingly over the approaches of isolation and assimilation which generated a lot of enthusiasm in the history of Indian anthropology and tribal development, before the gauntlet was taken up against them by the espousers of integration. Sentimentally as it is, we firmly abide by the premises that constitute the integration approach, and these premises are borrowed and developed after the five fundamental principles enunciated in his foreword to the second edition of Verrier Elwin's *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1960) by the late Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru.

But what do we understand by the term 'inte-

gration'? Integration is a processual concept—when applied sociologically, it presumes that a community is relatively insulated before attempts are made to link it up, rather inextricably, with 'something else', some other entity. Linking up, attaching, uniting parts with the whole can be called the process of integration. Integration, therefore, is an external process, in the sense that a community (or a 'part') is *integrated* with 'something'—may be another community, society, nation-state—exterior to it. Here a distinction may be made between 'solidarity' and 'integration': solidarity is *within* the society, integration is *without* it, with exterior units.

What is that *exterior whole* with which the tribes of India are envisaged to be integrated? The question essentially is: what is the 'mainstream' of Indian society? Opinions as to what could be classed the mainstream do not have a unanimity. Notwithstanding the pan-Indic nature of caste system and Hinduism, it is difficult to

consider them as constituting the mainstream of Indian society to which diverse groups can be merged. Perhaps, a collectivity of modern institutions, such as democracy, decentralization, productive organization, the principles of technocracy and meritocracy, the ethos of individualism, constitute the mainstream. Or, perhaps the mainstream, instead of being a material entity is fundamentally an idea, emerging out of a submission to national unity, enshrined in one Constitution, one Parliament, and a sentimental identification with the geo-political territory of India. If we reconsider the question—with what entity should the tribes of India be integrated—the probable answers are: with modern democracy, productive organizations like factory and industry, the unity and identity of Indian society, in other words, with the sentiments of nationhood.

Although integration is the best approach for carving out a nation, the sentiments of nationhood and the sense of belongingness, it is in fact the 'middle road' between the policies of isolation and assimilation. Isolating the tribes—administratively in a 'reserve'—is unethical, and popularising the idea that they should merge with the wider world—or the 'mainstream'—abandoning their specific cultural designs is utopian, and it is equally unethical, smacking of a kind of ethnocentrism. Elwin (c.f. Rustomji, 1989: 241) writes that integration is the "middle path between doing too little and doing too much": isolation means leaving the people as they are, while assimilation involves an imposition of what we have on them, believing that what we have is morally, technically, and epistemologically superior to what they have.

At the theoretical level, there is no debate regarding the efficacy of integration, both for the development of tribal societies and instilling the *sentiments of nationhood*. The problems (and hurdles) emerge when the policy is put into action. Anthropologists have, time and again, said that the tribes of India are not homogenous—they are distinct in terms of the diversity they have, and this diversity has not disappeared by

their relative and differential participation in modern programmes of development; on the other hand, the roots of diversity have become strengthened as modernization has progressed in them. The chief source of ethnicity in a tribe lies in its differential modernization.

Moreover, the tribes have been inhabiting different habitats, which in fact yielded different styles of life, ecologically suitable ways of deriving a livelihood. The programmes of development, rather than creating a monolithic structure of extracting sustenance, should strengthen the local economy as it interacts with its given habitat, and this is what we understand by endogenous models of development. If the local habitat is undergoing grave threats of devastation, the need is to devise policies which recuperate the local eco-system thus achieving self-sufficiency for the people. And such a local development will mitigate the pressure on urban system and *en masse* migration from rural and tribal areas that is occurring for decades together.

For achieving an ideal model of local development—in other words, for firmly entrenching people to their habitat and for combating all those forces that uproot them—it is imperative that the local interests are safeguarded. For instance, the massive development projects oust the people from their land they had been tilling from times immemorial, and they are neither provided with adequate compensation to start afresh, nor are they properly resettled. The outsiders entering the tribal areas incessantly exploit them, alienating them from their resources. It has also been pointed out that there are conflicting relations between the migrants and the locals. The migrants, having higher entrepreneurship and need for achievement, compete with the locals for the same resources, employment and other opportunities, and in course of ~~time, they come to occupy higher pedestals. And~~ *time, they come to occupy higher pedestals. And* the tribals, being unskilled and culturally inadequate as far as adjustment to other developed sections of the society is concerned, once forced to migrate—a pattern of migration that could be called 'involuntary'—to towns and cities are



absorbed only in marginal sectors of economy. To safeguard the interests of the tribals, lest they suppress into the ranks of urban proletariat, they must be protected against any kind of exploitation and alienation of their resources.

The vulnerability of tribals to exploitation rests on the richness of their areas. Chomangpur plateau, for example, was the cynosure of all eyes, because of its minerals and other resources. Migrations in human history have always been motivated by the search for fertile grounds, rich resources. But in certain cases, the ecological factors have impeded large scale migration and the entry of new exploiters from other areas. If the difficulties that accrue from the ecological landscapes are further protected by an administrative action that looks after the interests of the people, protecting them against all exploiters, the local people may be bestowed with a chance to develop on their own, exercising surveillance on their resources, and building up and enriching their own style of life, and therefore, we could achieve what Nehru said, "People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them". A case taken up for illustrating the interaction between ecological factors and administrative protection is of the Apa Tanis of Arunachal Pradesh, and we intend to discuss another case of the Lepchas of Sikkim (Bhasin, 1989). But before these cases are discussed, let us briefly take up the concept of tribe where isolation was the central idea, and then examine the British policy towards the tribals, in the backdrop of which Elwin wrote about installing a 'tribal reserve' for the Baigas of Madhya Pradesh, a policy that came to be termed as 'isolationism', and was believed to apply to all those tribes that were the victims of exploitation.

### THE CONCEPT OF TRIBE

In anthropological literature, a tribe was conceptualized as a relatively isolated or semi-isolated community, having its own cultural system, being defined by self-sufficiency, polit-

ical autonomy, a well-demarcated territory, a common dialect, folklore and deities, and a sense of belongingness to the same group, or what is called *esprit de corps*. The geographic and cultural isolation of a tribe thus defined, had implications for methodology (see Beteille, 1986: 297-318; 1987: 60-77). A tribe could be studied in itself without necessarily referring to other external social units. If a tribe was 'whole society', the peasants constituted 'part-society' with 'part-culture' (Kroeber, 1948; Geertz, 1961; Shanin, ed. 1971). Such a neat formulation of 'tribe' as juxtaposed to 'peasant' was again an ideal representation, far from both historical and contemporary reality.

A large number of examples were offered to show that a tribe *de facto* was never completely isolated. It entered into a set of relationships with its neighbouring communities, tribal as well as non-tribal. The relationship in some cases was of intense hostility punctuated with cases of periodic raids (as was the case with the tribes inhabiting the Naga Hills, see Hutton, 1969; von Furer-Haimendorf, 1976). Or, some economic exchanges obtained between independent tribes, a classical example of which was described by David Mandelbaum (1955, 1972) from the tribes of Nilgiri Hills. Notwithstanding these relations between independent tribes, each one of them was a cultural whole, if not a cultural isolate. And, moreover, the inter-tribal relations did not contribute to vast magnitudes of acculturative changes. In spite of sharing the same geographic and ecological zone, each tribe maintained its own identity and cultural patterns.

Besides the inter-tribal relations, the tribal settlements close to caste Hindu villages had been having exchange relations on the pattern of *jajmani* with other patron and occupational castes. As a result, some of the tribal communities came to call themselves *Adivasi jati*. Once they entered into service relations with other *jatis*, they also started incorporating certain Hindu deities and the elements of Hindu cosmology—the Hinduization of the tribes can be traced from such interactions (Dumont, 1962; Sinha, 1965; Bose,

1971, 1972; Dube, ed. 1977; Bhowmick, 1980; Chaudhuri, ed. 1982).

Similarly, the tribes coming in contact with Tibetan migrants incorporated certain elements of the Tibetan life and religion. Gradually, the Little Tradition of the tribals became a part of the Great Tradition of the Hindus. But such an absorption of the tribes in the caste system, as Bose (1941: 188-194) has described it, did not signal the beginning of their vast-scale change, which actually began with their contact with the wider world—the world that had already undergone qualitative changes because of the colonial rule.

### THE BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS THE TRIBALS

The British policy towards the tribals had two major elements. Firstly, it favoured isolation of the tribal areas from the mainstream; thus were given the concepts of 'excluded' and/or 'partially excluded areas' (Vidyarthi, ed. 1968). The British tribal policy was political and colonial, and the British feared that if these tribals—the bow-and-arrow-armed tribals were often labelled as militant, unruly and jungle—were to have contact with the mainstream, the freedom struggle movement might gain further strength. For this reason, it seemed logical to isolate the tribals, administratively and politically.

Secondly, at the level of reform, the British Administration was interested in 'civilizing' these people. In an ethno-centric assessment, the tribals were viewed at par with the stage of bestiality. The classical theory of evolution, which had gripped academic attention in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unhesitatingly treated the 'contemporary primitives' as remnants or survivals of the early stages of humanity, savagery and barbarism: in the words of Sir E.B. Tylor (quoted in Goode, 1970:3), these people inhabiting the hilly or forested terrain with sparse population and difficult communication were 'social fossils', a study of whom would illuminate the pre-historic phases of human existence. It is

therefore not surprising that tribal society was compared to 'children's play' (Diamond, 1968: 96-147). The intellectual climate about the historical and evolutionary place of these 'primitives' considerably influenced the political action. Missionaries were sent to some of these difficult areas. Animism, as the tribal religion was often characterized, was replaced by one or the other denomination of Christianity. Schools were started, and obviously English was opted as the main language of instruction. Along with came the Western medical system which slowly started exorcising traditional practices of cure. Styles of life and ways of behaviour began changing. And they became very conspicuous in dress patterns, especially of men.

The Westernization of tribals began. Here, two things are worth mentioning. Not all tribes were subjected to the efforts of modernization. There were many which continued to survive in their traditional modes till India's Independence. In other words, the administrative decision to admit missionaries in some areas and to open schools there, was conditioned by strategic factors. Chotanagpur plateau and the North-Eastern India were the main candidates for the mission activity. In these cases as well as in others, Christianity was the sole vehicle of modernization. The neo-converts not only became a part of the Great Tradition of Christianity, but were also linked to the Great Tradition of the Western Culture. English language, Western dress, mannerism and medicines, being ineluctable components of the ruler's culture, flourished as far superior and 'advanced' to the local. The fate of traditional material culture and styles of living was decided: they were to be 'preserved' as museum specimens.

And this declaration—the tribal culture must be museumified lest it disappeared with the onslaught of modernization—promoted the classical ethnographic studies. The attempt was to record as carefully as possible the tradition, or better the dying tradition of the people. And such a view that primitiveness of the tribes should be fully recorded, even if the anthropologists have

to venture travelling into farther and still farther areas, before it became extinct, is proudly held, perhaps because the stereotype of anthropology as the study of primitive culture still looms large (see Levi-Strauss, 1984: 12-13).

These ethnographic studies served another purpose. They provided the administrators with the cultural background of the people they were going to rule. Detailed accounts of the local customary rules and laws were written so that the administration of people and adjudication of their personal conflicts could be done very much in terms of their laws and rules of conflict settlement. With this attempts were made to synthesise the customary and the modern laws. In all of them, the focus was on modernization of the tribals.

Extension of the British rule to tribal areas, facilitating the entry of missionaries, and the officials and the technocrats that would plan the future of the community, initiating several development plans, also brought in its fold other unscrupulous element—the landlords—who unleashed the terror of violence and usurpation, depriving people of their resources, and reducing them to the state of serfdom. It was in this context of saving the people from the exploitative interests of the outsiders, that Elwin (1939) outlined the premisses of a 'tribal reserve'. The genesis of tribal problems—the problems being multifaceted and multifarious—was sought to lie in the contact situation, and hence the instantaneous remedy was to save them from all these harmful contacts. In all these anthropological monographs, the important idea was that the people, when not in any asymmetrical contact situation with the outsiders, were in a harmonious state, synergistic with their habitat, and all this harmony was razed to ground when the tribal areas were opened up—the nostalgic idea of 'golden age of savagery' inhered all these accounts.

#### ELWIN'S STATEMENT ON TRIBAL RESERVE

Elwin did an extensive piece of field work with

the Baigas of Madhya Pradesh. Since for him, anthropology was in essence philanthropy, it meant his 'whole life'. As he wrote (1964:141):

From the very beginning I was attracted by the practical application of anthropology... there is nothing whatever hostile to scientific inquiry in having an intense and affectionate interest in the people one studies, in desiring their progress and welfare and in regarding them as human beings rather than as laboratory specimens.

Though on an earlier occasion, at the formative stage of his career, he wrote that scientists—and doing anthropology was doing science—should not concern themselves with 'moral or political questions' (1939: 511), he still felt that it was the duty of the anthropologists to earnestly discuss the tribal problems, draw feasible and operational policies, and work toward assuring the future of the tribal societies.

Building up on the works of J.H. Hutton's Census Report of 1931 and S.C. Roy's study of the Birhor and Korwa of Chotanagpur, Elwin cautioned the anthropological world about the "overhasty and unregulated process of 'uplift' and civilization has brought upon peoples" (1939: 511). It was not only that the Christian missionaries and landlords subjected the people to an almost unknown state of exploitation, the local leaders, hastily endeavouring to 'reform' the people—making them puritan Hindus—so that their status could be raised, also launched some social movements sanctioning them in one way or the other. For example, Elwin gave a detailed account of a Raj Gond reformer who made an expedition into Mandla, promulgating the new Gond religion, asking the people to stop singing of traditional songs like *dadaria*, abstaining from eating meat and drinking liquor, strictly observing the rules of commensality and untouchability, etc. An interesting thing was that this reformer claimed that the government authority was behind him, and anyone defying the orders would be punished (1939: 513-514). Whether it was the mission, or the landlords, or the self-styled reformers, they were all exploiting the tra-



ditional wealth of the people—in a typical ethnocentric sense, the outsider's order was being imposed on the people. De-population of a tribe was another consequence of the contact situation.

When Elwin was with the Baigas, they had not experienced the extremes of contact situation. 'Physical apathy' and 'physical decline' were soon awaiting them. And the people needed to be rescued out of such disasters; Elwin suggested (1939: 515):

The first necessity is the establishment of a sort of National Park, in which not only the Baiga, but the thousands of simple Gonds in their neighbourhood might take refuge... This special area should be under the direct control of a Tribes Commissioner.... it is obvious that some expert should stand between them and the Legislature.

How should the area be administered? Elwin's suggestions were all endogenous: the tribal *panchayats* should be activated and they should adjudicate all cases; the tribal leaders should not be taken as government agents; missionaries should not be admitted to tribal areas; non-tribals entering the tribal areas should be required to take out licences, and only those who promise to behave properly with the tribes should be allowed; and itinerants wandering through tribal areas and exploiting the people should be immediately removed.

In addition to all these, the tribes should be linked with the markets, so that their produce could be sold. When cash economy becomes the core of a developed society, the tribals, who hitherto have relied on barter, are constrained to learn handling of cash, and once their produce is marketed properly with check on any sort of exploitation, the people would gradually imbibe nuances of the cash nexuses. Regarding education Elwin writes that it, rather than being of literary type, should be suitable for the tribals: "Education based on spinning, wood-carving or the growing of vegetables and fruit trees would be of real value" (1939: 516).

As each tribe has specific problems, the plans of development for each one of them should be different. In each of these plans, the traditional

rights of the people need to be restored. The Baigas, for example, have important relations with their forests. Since they were the first settlers in this area, they claim that the forests belong to them. It was rather impossible for them to adopt to plough cultivation—ploughing in their cultural idiom amounted to 'tearing off mother earth's breasts'; and, as was expected, when *bewar* (shifting cultivation) was legally banned, the Baigas found it difficult to switch over to any other mode of production. Elwin wrote (1939: 516):

The forest was their home, they were the true *pashupati*—the masters of the wild beasts, they were the natural lords of the forest—and now their once proud-quivered loins must tremble at the lash of every little whipper-snapper of a forest-guard!

What should be done for protecting the traditional rights of the Baigas? In their own area, they should be allowed an animal hunt: "The killing of hares should in any case be permitted, and it should not be illegal to carry bows and arrows" (1939: 517). Fishing should be freely permitted to them. With regard to shifting-cultivation, Elwin (1939: 520) argued for a more liberal policy. All these traditional rights, interwoven with social and cultural life of the people, could be restored if the 'dictatorship of the officials' ended, if the outsiders were thoroughly screened before being permitted to embark on tribal areas, and if the rights and duties of all the non-aboriginals in tribal areas were properly defined with any infringement severely punished. There existed a yawning gap between the values tied to the same pursuit in different cultures: hunting, for example, yielded subsistence of the tribals, but for the non-aboriginals, it was a kind of sport. Once the non-tribal outsiders were free to enter and maraud the tribal areas, they left no stone unturned in exploiting the local people, stripping them of their resources, and trampling mercilessly on the local habitat. Elwin narrated an incident: "When I have tried to introduce fruit trees into the villages, I have usually been met with the objection, 'What is the use of our grow-

ing fruit trees? the officials will take the fruit away from us" (1939: 517). The only way through which the exploitation of the people could be stopped was the creation of a National Park, where the tribals could have their life styles intact, away from the perpetual fear of the greedy outsiders and oppressors.

No official should ever be stationed in a Baiga village. A forester should visit the tract from time to time to teach the Baiga... better methods of ~~honey-cutting~~... and to supervise the allocation of the fields, though these should first be chosen by the village elders and only afterwards approved by him (Elwin, 1939: 519).

In light of the details that constitute Elwin's plan for the Baigas, he never suggested that the tribes should be 'isolated'; meaning thereby that they are eternally 'cut off' from the wider world, although Elwin's contemporaries and social workers interpreted the idea of National Park as amounting to some kind of an 'anthropological zoo', and thus his own brand of philanthropology came to be labelled as 'isolationism'. The issue which concerned him was that the tribal culture should not be plundered by the outsiders; the tribals should not be the losers in contact situations, and they must be saved from all exploiting and oppressing elements. He explained:

The idea of a 'National Park' does not mean the same thing as an 'Anthropological Zoo'. Many people in India suffer from the curious and rather puerile belief that the anthropologist wishes to keep primitive people 'as they were' as materials for his research. But this is not so: the scientist is not interested in any particular grade of civilization: he is concerned with things as they are: the semi-civilized Gond is just as interesting and important as the wilder Baiga. But the anthropologist who has come to know and love the people he has studied will naturally desire the best for them, and his views on that may well clash with those of the politician who merely desires to exploit them in the interests of his own party. The anthropologist will not be untrue to science if he urges that everything possible should be done for a tribe's progress and advantage provided that the quality of tribal life is not impaired, that tribal culture is not destroyed, and that tribal freedom is restored or maintained (1939: 515).

He also offered an alternative to the creation of a National Park; it was, "handing over to the Baiga part of the great tracts of forest that can never be exploited commercially" (1939: 519). The traditional rights of the people should be respected and restored, and that could only be possible when entry of the outsiders is checked. In this document on the Baigas, Elwin was more concerned with the creation of a National Park so that the interests of the people could be safeguarded; the other issue of how they are to be integrated with the 'mainstream' of Indian society was taken up by him—in a detailed fashion—in *A Philosophy for NEFA*.

In the contemporary world of what Geertz (1988) would call 'mixed-up differences', it is criminal to suggest that the tribals should be forcibly isolated from the wider world, left to themselves. Firstly, isolation is morally improper; and secondly, it is not feasible to operationalise it. But, at the same time, the interests of the people should be safeguarded—they must be saved from all kinds of exploiters, and for achieving this, it becomes imperative to impose some minimum restrictions on the entry of outsiders in tribal areas, their right to own the property there, or to start a business. For developing local entrepreneurship, opportunities must multiply for the indigenous people, with attempts to check the usurpation of any of these opportunities by the outsiders.

Let us now briefly discuss the case of the Apa Tanis and other North-Eastern tribals.

#### APA TANIS AND OTHER TRIBES OF THE NORTH-EAST

Apa Tanis, numbering about 15,000, live in the highlands of the Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. For a very long-time, they maintained a self-contained social order which was uninfluenced by outside power. Though they had developed an efficient system of rice cultivation, they did not have the knowledge of plough and wheel, and their cattle were not used for traction, carriage or milking. They used to produce

a surplus of grain for bartering with neighbouring tribes: their economy was non-monetized. Besides knowing their own dialect and also of some of their neighbours, they did not know the language, especially Assamese, that could help them in communicating with the wider world.

In view of the Apa Tanis' geographical and cultural isolation, it may be assumed that they would have had greater obstacles in the path of their development and modernization compared to other tribes of Central India, like the Gonds (von Furer-Haimendorf, 1948), who have been in touch with advanced societies. But this has not been so. Apa Tanis have made tremendous progress in all the realms of their society. Despite the literacy rate of 14.04 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh (Census 1981), they have done very well in seeking modern education. By the beginning of 1980, there were forty-five Apa Tanis with university degree, while many of them were studying in the universities of Gauhati, Dibrugarh, Shillong and even Delhi. Most of these university graduates had entered government employment, out of which in 1978 there were no less than fifteen serving in gazetted and 342 in non-gazetted posts. von Furer-Haimendorf (1947, 1980), who had been studying these people from 1944, in his field work in early 1980s found some fully qualified doctors and a pilot officer in the Indian Air Force amongst them. The gains of this development are cumulative—over generations even more Apa Tanis will take advantages of modern education, entering bureaucratic jobs. With these changes, however, the Apa Tanis have been able to keep their cultural identity intact. There are almost negligible changes in their religious and ritual life: von Furer-Haimendorf (1982: 299) says that in traditional ritual practices, 'even the most educated participate with undiminished dedication'. Similarly, their marriage rules and family life have undergone fewer changes.

For von Furer-Haimendorf, this has been a case of rapid modernization in material, technological and social life, without the loss of a distinct ethnic identity. In their modernization,

geographical isolation protected by the governmental measures of not allowing the outsiders to take advantages of the local resources and opportunities, has been the crucial factor. von Furer-Haimendorf writes,

One of the causes of the rapid economic and educational development of the Apa Tanis is their freedom from oppression by more advanced communities (1982 : 295).

Further, he says,

The explanation for the success of the relatively inexperienced Apa Tanis lies in the fact that government had barred outside merchants from engaging in trade in the hills. While in other parts of India Marwaris, Komtis, and members of other trading castes have infiltrated into most tribal areas and prevented the emergence of any indigenous merchant class, the Apa Tanis were saved from such competition and hence could establish their own business enterprises without being overshadowed from the start by more skilled and more aggressive traders and moneylenders (1982 : 294).

The North-East India, beyond the present-day Assam, was always protected from the entry of the outsiders by the Inner Line Policy. Even today, Indians from other states have to seek Inner Line Permit to enter certain states of the North-East, like Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The outsiders are not permitted to establish their own business enterprises. In the model of indigenous development, only the locals are eligible for obtaining contracts of developmental works and business. Thus, this area was saved from the uneven, even devastating, influences of cultural contact as in Central India where the outsiders played havoc with the local resources. They usurped the land of the tribals, the proud owners who were then reduced to the state of serfdom (von Furer-Haimendorf, 1983).

In addition to the Inner Line Policy, Christian missions played a responsible role in modernizing the people especially in Naga and Mizo hills, Khasi and Jaintia hills, and North-Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), now known as Arunachal Pradesh. Modern educational institutions were introduced. English became the language of instruction. Western dress and culture came

along with it. But these missions did not uproot the people from their traditional moorings (P. Singh, 1977; Chandrika Singh, 1981). The local tribal languages were not replaced by English. They were treated with respect. Each tribal group came to have its own script with Roman alphabets used with accent marks to devise it. For facilitating the exogenous religion to reach the grass-root levels, religious scriptures and other holy books regulating the daily life of the people were translated (and subsequently published) in local languages. Dictionaries of the local languages were compiled. Gradually, the local people were trained to take up the role of religious functionaries. With this, the effects of change started appearing in all aspects of the society.

We saw in the case of the Apa Tanis that in spite of development and modernization, they have been able to retain their distinct cultural identity. And such is the situation with other tribes of the North-East. The Nagas, for example, are one of the most modernized tribes of India. But this exterior facade of modern values, dress and mannerism has not mitigated their sentiments of belonging to the same society, the Nagas (von Furer-Haimendorf, 1976; Horam, 1977; Sema, 1986). In these cases, one may notice a continuity in change—their modernization has not diluted the traditional bonds of social cohesion.

Geographical isolation of a tribe, coupled with an administration that saves the people from being exploited by the outsiders, has been the crucial factor in the North-East. To sum up, let us quote the following words of von Furer-Haimendorf (1982: 297-298):

Opponents of any special privileges for tribals, particularly of the exclusion of non-tribal settlers from tribal areas, often put forward the argument that tribals will advance only if they freely mix with other sections of the population. The experience in Arunachal Pradesh demonstrates that this argument is fallacious, for it is precisely the special protection afforded to the tribesmen by the Inner Line policy which has enabled the Apa Tanis to achieve within one generation an advancement sur-

passing any achieved by those Indian tribals whose ancestral homeland has been infiltrated by members of the so-called progressive communities. Events such as the massive alienation of tribal land in Andhra Pradesh are unthinkable in any part of Arunachal Pradesh, where the indigenous inhabitants are politically sufficiently conscious and powerful to safeguard their rights and to resist any exploitation by outsiders.

A case comparable to that of the Apa Tanis is of the Lepchas of Sikkim, although the latter have not been able to achieve a comparable level of progress. But both these cases support the idea that if administration allows fuller independence to the people, devising appropriate, ecologically suitable policies for their upliftment, and guards them against exploitation by the non-tribal outsiders, the people will have chances to develop fully, and on their own.

#### THE LEPCHAS OF SIKKIM: A CASE OF DZONGU

Sikkim is a small mountainous state in the Eastern Himalayas (Fig 1). Having an area of 7,299 square kilometres, it has undergone vast magnitude of changes in its social structure, economic and political life, and cultural values during the last hundred years or so. Streams of migration from different directions resulted in an ethnic conglomerate, although each migrant group was able to retain its identity. The contiguity of Sikkim with Tibet has been another source of change, religious and cultural. Being a protectorate of India until 26 April 1975, it has been politically and economically influenced by India; later, it was annexed as the twenty-second state of India.

Before its annexation to the Indian Union, Sikkim was an independent kingdom ruled by a hereditary king, the *Maharajah*. He was assisted by large landowners, the *Kazis*, in the administration of the state. The *Kazis* were hereditary ministers. During the British rule, the *Maharajah* enjoyed the support of the British political officers, along with that of the hereditary *Kazis*. Being a Buddhist, the *Maharajah* patronized





Buddhism, and under his supervision monasteries were set up and the Lamas encouraged. No Christian missionaries existed in the state at that time. The Europeans could not enter Sikkim without a legal permit. Because of its strategic position between Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan, the state was virtually closed to the outsiders.

The Lepchas are considered the original inhabitants of the state. They call themselves Rong, which means 'ravine folk'. The other term used for them is 'mutanchi', which is referred to them as the Lepchas.

The distinction between what people call themselves and what they are called by the outsiders deserves a brief discussion here, and it has been noticed that the nomenclature assigned by the outsiders comes to have a wider currency. Take up the case of the Nagas. The term Naga is not indigenous to the people inhabiting the Naga Hills. These people called themselves by the terms which identified their tribe, and each such division conformed to the definition of a 'tribe' in terms of a common dialect, the sense of we-ness, and sharing of more or less the same styles of life and cultural milieus. Newer tribal groups emerged because of a fusion of the already existing community names, for example, the Chakhaseng. In the course of time, a conglomeration of these communities—Ao, Zeliang, Sema, Rengma, Angami, Tankhul, Marram, etc.—came to be labelled as the Nagas by the outsiders. Hutton (1969:5) writes:

The word "Naga" has been given all sorts of derivations; the most probable explanation of it is that it is merely a European lengthening of the Assamese "naga" (pronounced "noga")? =naked- Sanskrit *nagaz*. All along the foot of the hills an Assamese may be still heard daily addressing himself to the scantily attired hill man with "Oh, Naga". Lieut.-Colonel Waddell explains "Naga" as meaning "hill man", deriving it from the Hindustani *nag* = a mountain. Mr. Peel derives it from *not* a word used by some Eastern Naga tribe for "people"..... but I suspect that the alleged word *not* is merely the familiar *log* = "people" of Hindustani.

Invariably, the names given by the outsiders have ethnocentric reverberations. The outsiders

looked down upon the people, and this is clearly reflected in the terms they chose for other communities. With an influx of the migrants in tribal areas these terms become popular, and overtime, they virtually replace the native designations: thus, Mutanchi or Rong have been relegated to the background; the original inhabitants of Sikkim have come to be known as the Lepchas. The term Lepcha has a Nepalese origin, meaning 'vile speakers', literally 'speakers of an unintelligible language (*Lap* = speech; *cha* = unintelligible)'. According to another version, they are known after a Nepali fish, which is believed to be submissive in nature. As the Rong, hitherto unexposed to the outside world, were submissive and docile, the metaphor of the 'docile fish' was extended to them. The initial term *Lapcha* was subsequently modified in the Anglic pronunciation and writing as *Lepcha*.

The Lepchas have been greatly influenced by forces emanating from different directions. Before these forces started acting on them, and before different streams of migration encroached upon their territory, the Lepchas managed the environment with their own technology they had devised over a period of time. The land was available in plenty; there was neither competition for scarce resources, land being an outstanding example, and nor was there any demographic pressure on them. The forests were rich. The people led a nomadic existence, subsisting mainly on food-collection, fishing and hunting. They also practiced shifting cultivation with simple, and what could be called 'primitive' technology. At the level of cosmology, the people were animists, believed in polytheism and the spirits of land, water and trees, and other natural entities of their surroundings. The role of environment in shaping their culture and society was great, and their insulation from the wider world was accentuated because of the natural geographical barriers.

The Rongs were organized by a local man named Turve, who eventually came to bear the title of Panu or King. In a fierce encounter with the Kirats—the forbearers of the modern Rais and Limbus of Eastern Nepal—Turve Panu was

killed. He was followed by three kings. But the Rong kingdom came to an end after the death of Tubu Athak Panu, who was the last king. Later, local chiefs were elected, who also performed the duties of religious priests. In the case of the Panus, the domains of secular and religious authority were kept separate, but in local chiefs, they were combined. These chiefs did not have power over the entire Rong society; they also did not have a strong organization and cultural tradition behind them, and hence were not adequately prepared to deal with the streams of contact from outside.

In the seventeenth century—around 1641 A.D.—the Rongs came in contact with the Tibetans (Bhutias). The latter came first as monks and traders, and soon they were able to exercise dominance over the local populace, who, being shy and peace-loving, yielded to the outsiders' interests without entering into any sort of aggression. A Tibetan monastery was established in their area, with the animistic Rongs gradually being converted to a Lamaistic form of Buddhism. As the Tibetan migration increased in large number, inter-marriage of the Bhutias with the Rongs took place, and this resulted into the formation of the Sikkimese Bhutias. Ideas so far unknown to the Rongs started gaining ground with Bhutia migration—the Rongs were Tibetized and the process could be called Tibetization of the Rongs. There is an asymmetrical relationship between the groups that come in direct, first-hand contact. The group which holds superior technology, has the persuasive power of cosmological system, commands instruments to unleash violence, or owns precious resources, is invariably in a position to exercise its will on its 'weak' counterparts; the local group changes according to the interests of their masters. Thus, in the Rong-Bhutia interaction, the Rongs were Tibetized, but the Bhutias were not Rongicized—and such an interaction was asymmetrical.

The immigrant Bhutias established a bureaucratic kingdom with the help of local chiefs. Phuntsog Namgyal was crowned as Chogyal (Dharam Raja) in 1642. He organized the first

centralized administration and set up a twelve member council of ministers (Lepcha chiefs of the leading Lepcha families), and he became its head. He ruled over a wide spread area, much larger than the contemporary boundary of Sikkim. His empire was spread in the North to Thang-la, beyond Pahari in Tibet, in the East near the borders of Bihar and Bengal, and in the West upto the banks of Tamar region in Nepal. The alliance of the Rongs and the Bhutias continued: for administrative purposes, Sikkim was divided into twelve districts (*dzongs*), with each district having a Rong governor (*dzongpon*) and a council of twelve ministers. For revenue collection, Sikkim was divided into 104 estates; of these 15 estates formed the private estate of the *Maharajah*, and another five estates were used for upkeep of the five big monasteries of Sikkim.

With the advent of the Bhutias, Sikkim came to have a federal government. Everything—material resources, particularly—was in absolute control of the King. And in this sense, political administration in Sikkim resembled that of the tribes living on the Assamese and Burmese frontiers. The King permitted his subjects to keep with them as much as they required, but it did not mean that the people owned the resources, they acquired all that by way of loan.

With the Bhutia rule emerged a new administrative class, the *Kazis*. They were barons with fifty to a hundred villages and a large tract of forest under their control. The extent and territory of each *Kazi* differed, and they were named after the location they ruled. The *Kazis* collected the taxes, and deposited a fixed sum calculated at a certain rate per acre to the King—the rate varied according to the condition of the estate. The *Kazi* would lease land to the people on written terms and conditions. Though he had no proprietary right in the land, he had a kind of hereditary title to his office. But this title could be confiscated: the land could always be transferred from one *Kazi* to another. *Kazis* were the power behind the Bhutia rulers, thus constituting the bureaucratic class, and by virtue of their position, they enjoyed social and economic dominance.

The Rongs bore the brunt of such an inequality. They neither had social nor economic power to assert their dominance. The freedom they enjoyed in the pre-Bhutia period was severely curtailed. The autochthones were reduced to a state of serfdom; their own *panu*-system was a thing of the past. Under the dominance of the Bhutias, they remained the poorest as well as the most neglected people. However, hypergamy was one of the social facts that elevated the status of some of the Rongs. Those who inter-married with the Bhutia elite came to have a higher status. Within the egalitarian Rongs, cleavages were produced because of hypergamy—the hypergamous Rongs were superior to those who were still endogamous. Such an inequality was expressed in terms of the control of resources.

The politics of Sikkim started changing with the Bhutanese attack. Phuntsog Namgyal's (the first Chogyal who was crowned in 1642) son, Tensung Namgyal, moved his capital to Rabdentse. The Bhutanese attacked Sikkim and were successful in their invasion. They captured the Rabdentse palace and held it for eight years. After the sixth Dalai Lama died around 1707, Chakdor Namgyal returned to Sikkim, accompanied by a Tibetan Lama, Jigme Pal. As a consequence, the Bhutanese forces withdrew and evacuated Sikkim West of Tista, but still held their position at Fort Dumsong. This was a permanent loss to Sikkim, which it could never regain. In the middle and the later part of the eighteenth century, Sikkim was again invaded by the Bhutanese with the alliance of Mangar, and later by Gorkhas who occupied Elan and Topzong.

A vast scale of changes started manifesting itself when Sikkim came in contact with the British. The British policy was colonial: the administration was chiefly interested in opening up the country, and where possible, in laying down railway tracks, thus facilitating movement from one geographical zone to the other, as this was imperative for the hegemonistic desire the colonial regime had. At the same time, it was necessary for giving a unified character to the country. Coming to a history of the Sikkimese

contacts with the British, Sikkim was involved in the Anglo-Nepali war of 1814-1815 and allied with the British in this dispute. In the treaty of Titalia in 1817, the boundary between Sikkim and Nepal was demarcated along the Mahanadi and Michi rivers and Singtelala mountain ranges. As Rabdentse was close to Nepalese frontiers, recurring wars created a feeling of insecurity, and thus Raja Isangphud decided to shift his capital to Tamlang in North Sikkim. Conflicts between Sikkim and Nepal broke out again. In 1834-35, British assistance was sought to prevent an incursion into Sikkim Terai. In lieu of this assistance, the British government annexed Darjeeling district which at that time formed a part of Sikkim; Darjeeling was a possible 'health resort' and for this, yearly compensation was provided to the Raja. But peace remained in a state of animated suspension: following several incidents of kidnapping British subjects, the British administration sent a military force to Sikkim, and under this threat, the ruler of Sikkim fled to Tibet. In the traditional system, his son inherited the throne, accepting the British terms.

In 1886, the British wanted to renew their trade interest with Tibet. They dispatched the Colman Macaulay mission to investigate the possibility of a trade route through Sikkim. The Tibetans were not pleased with the mission proceeding to Tibet. Issuing a warning to Sikkim, the Tibetans invaded the country, established a fort at Liagtu near the border. Hostility between Sikkim and Tibet settled down with the signing of the Anglo-Chinese convention at Calcutta in March 1890. With this Sikkim became an acknowledged protectorate of British India. Claude White became the *de facto* ruler, and the *Maharajah* was virtually under his supervision.

With British contact came a new type of administration, revenue system, forest reservation rules and development of the area by improving upon its communication network. Labour was needed for construction of roads and extension of agriculture, and thus was encouraged the Nepali immigration. As the number of the Nepalis swelled, the ethnic composition of



Sikkim started changing. By 1891, the Nepalese had multiplied to 51 per cent of the total population, reducing the Lepchas and Bhutias to 19 and 16 per cent respectively. Nepali labour immigration escalated with the development of tea estates in Darjeeling. By 1947, the Nepalese constituted 75 per cent of the total population, reducing the Lepchas to 14 and Bhutias to 11 per cent respectively, and Sikkim became a plural society. In their own state, the Lepchas were reduced to a minority.

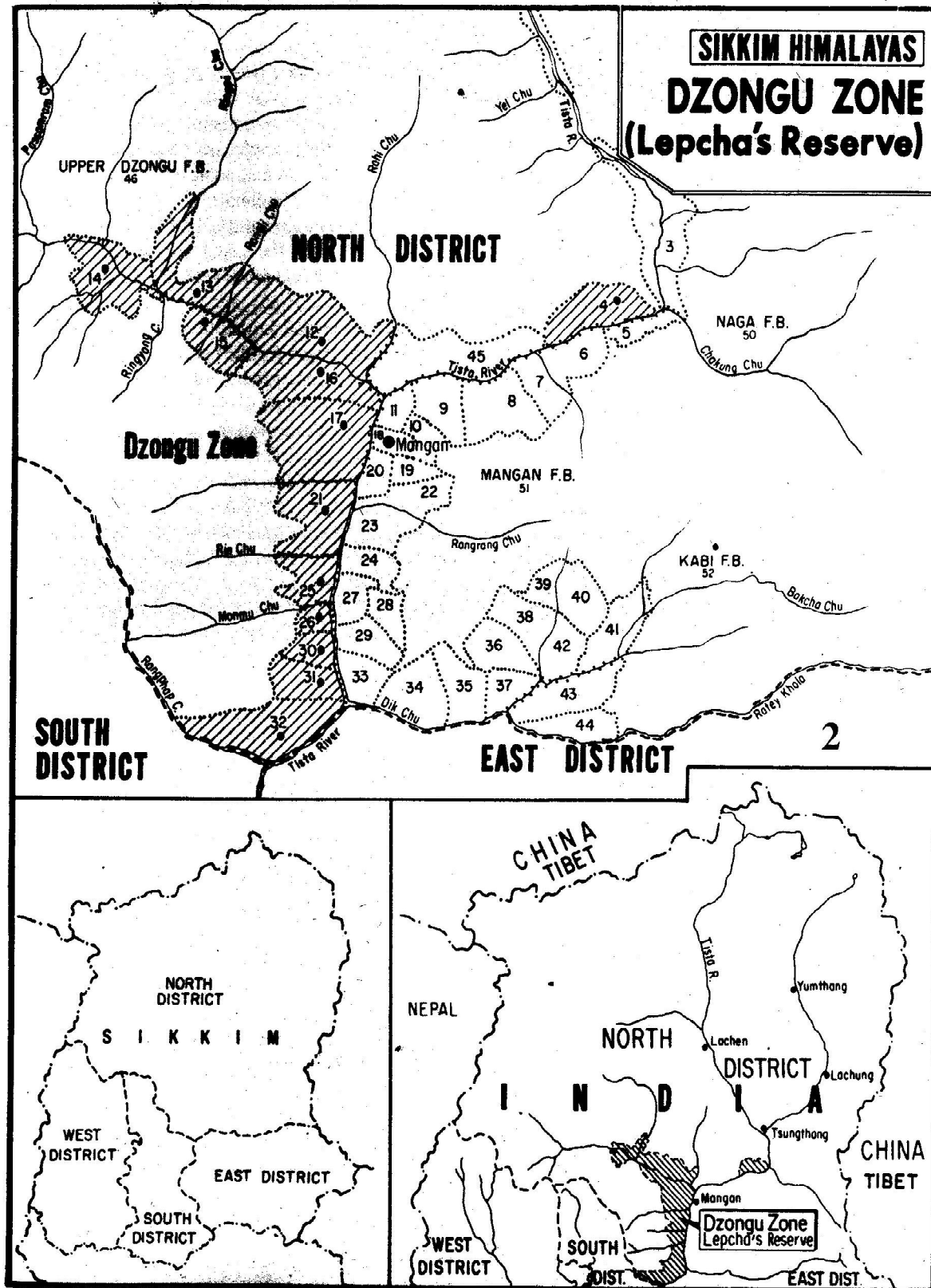
The ruling Bhutias, however, continued to enjoy better economic conditions and maintained *status quo*. They were the bureaucratic class with the Lepchas working as their appendages. The Nepalese had a high degree of entrepreneurship: they brought with them an improved agricultural technology and settled cultivation, cardamum cultivation began with them, and so was the introduction of money economy. Though they had numerical strength, they could not acquire the political power.

The immigration of Nepalese was encouraged by the British to counteract Lepcha and Bhutia power in Sikkim. Nepalese came as road labourers, and gradually their number multiplied. The Bhutias had political power, while the Nepalese did well in economic terms. Because of powerful neighbours—Bhutias and Nepalese—the Lepchas became almost invisible. As the powerful alien communities make inroads on the local people, the latter are pushed further interior; similarly, the Lepchas were forced to take shelter in deep forests, although some of them existed as small unobtrusive groups among more advanced people. With the advent of the British, some Lepchas in the West and south were converted to Christianity, while the others had already been converted to Lamaist-Buddhism by the Tibetans. The Christian Lepchas are mostly found in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, but a few are scattered in west and south Sikkim. The Christian Lepchas marry among themselves. As a result of differential acculturation, the Lepchas can be broadly divided into those who have advanced by living with the Bhutias and the Nep-

alese, and those who were pushed inside deep forest as encroachment increased on their land, and these people have been able to retain their pristine customs and practices.

To protect the land and identity of the Lepchas, the *Maharajah* of Sikkim converted one of the private estates called Dzongu into a Lepcha reserve, where only the Lepchas could live, own land, with little interference from outside. This was an inaccessible tract of land with scanty population. The whole hill area was under forest and the population living there subsisted by collecting the natural forest produce like roots, tubers, leaves, grasses, fruits, herbs, etc. Food gathering was supplemented by slash-and-burn cultivation. The main aim of creating the Lepcha reserve was to preserve their social homogeneity. In the reserve, the Lepchas have developed agriculture from the 'primitive' stage of cultivation, replacing shifting cultivation by more efficient methods of terracing, ploughing and irrigating lands.

The Lepchas of Dzongu live in the Dzongu zone in North Central Sikkim, with a population of 4,332 in an area of 15,845.95 hectares (Fig.2). Though the Dzongu Lepchas were isolated, they visited the neighbouring markets, sold their produce to local merchants and brought utensils and other household things. Thus, on the one hand, the Dzongu Lepchas could retain their cultural identity—being in the reserve—on the other, they were able to have contacts with the outsiders—in this process, innovations were imported and adopted. Without the *Maharajah's* and British government's intervention, the Lepchas of Dzongu could have lost their identity like others in the state (Gorer, 1938:37). In other parts of the state, Lepchas have freely inter-married, they speak Nepali and follow Buddhism and Christianity. The high degree of Lepcha adaptability is well conveyed in a Sikkimese proverb: a Lepcha is like a brass pot which can be used in all households. Elements of change are entering this tract at a faster pace with the new Panchayat administration and socio-economic development programmes.



Earlier we mentioned about the two types of Lepchas, and for the sake of convenience, one may call them 'Dzongu Lepcha' and the 'acculturated-assimilated ones' that live outside the reserve. The former are looked down upon as 'wild', 'uncivilized' and 'very primitive' by other Lepchas and ethnic groups of the area. Here, the Lepchas are economically backward as compared to those in other parts. To curb the exploitation of Lepchas, this area was declared as the Lepcha reserve. Even now, no non-Lepcha can buy land and settle here permanently, though working permits are issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Mangan district. At the same time, the Lepchas cannot sell their land to outsiders without official permission, although much unauthorized leasing does take place.

The characteristics of the physical and biotic environment in Dzongu condition the way the Lepchas eke out a livelihood. The Dzongu forest is wet, mixed and of evergreen type, as a result of damp soil and excessive rainfall; and the vegetation provides the people with food plants, fuel, food and commercial plants. Living for millennia in these forests, the Lepchas are 'by tradition a forest people'. Historical sources and travel accounts point out that the Lepchas used to practice slash-and-burn cultivation, which was supplemented by food gathering, hunting and fishing. Gradually, the Lepchas developed a more intensive, sophisticated and productive agricultural system. As their interaction with the wider world increased, the Lepcha agricultural complex came to have a combination of different strains: the original Lepcha complex, influenced by the Tibetan and Nepali, which in turn is influenced by the Indian system.

Living in a hilly-forest terrain, and at a lower altitude compared to the Bhutias, the Lepchas have adapted well to agriculture. The areas where they lived were relatively isolated—primarily due to terrain, inaccessibility and lack of motivation for travels. Occasionally itinerants passed through the areas with little influence on local population. Living in nucleated residential settlements and dealing with harsh and difficult eco-

logical situations, the Lepchas have come to lay great emphasis on individual achievement and initiative. There are no restraints—human, cultural, or supernatural—which cannot be overcome. Lepcha individualism is rooted in group functioning: they emphasise communal or collective cooperation and achievement. This kind of 'communal individualism' is illustrated in *Lobo*-groups, groups of special friends *Ing-zong*, like that between the Lepchas and Tibetans or with Nepalese), and other work groups at different levels.

With the establishment of a Lepcha reserve, a settled life began for the people, and new sources of income emerged. Cultivation of wet rice and cardamum was introduced. Lepchas readily accepted this along with the set of Nepali rituals and labour for cardamum cultivation.

Cardamum is the cash crop in this region. Through its sale, cash has started pouring in the Dzongu economy, which is spent for paying land revenue and buying household goods like sugar, salt, vegetable oil, tea leaves, pots and pans, clothes, shoes, etc., all those items that the Lepchas do not manufacture themselves. Though it seems that the influx of cash through the sale of cardamum would enrich the Lepchas, it has not really happened. Unfortunately marketing facilities favouring the local people, which could avert any type of exploitation, have not come up. Contemporarily, the whole cardamum trade is in the control of the entrepreneurial class from the Northern and Western India, the Marwaris. They earn profit by advancing cash and household necessities to the neighbouring peasants against their cardamum produce. They impose a uniform price. At the beginning of each season, the Marwaris send their representatives to the debtors—the Lepchas, who take loans to meet their contingent expenditures—asking for immediate payment, failing which the people are threatened with court proceedings. In this background and also with the difficulties of getting ready cash, the Lepchas are compelled to sell their cardamum at lower rates.

Absence of proper marketing facilities estab-

lished in the people's interests further compounds the exploitation of the people. Inhabiting the people in a reserve and prohibiting the outsiders to acquire any of its pieces of land or any other property is simply not enough: the economic link of the people with the wider world should be carved out properly, and here the state intervention and of legislation are of utmost importance. By selling cardamum at a lower price, the Lepchas are only able to keep enough to pay off the taxes. When the cardamum is brought to the stores, the Marwaris claim that they have no money to pay, thus forcing the Lepchas to buy goods, clothes, pots and pans, which they might not be needing at that time. And if during the year, they need anything they get them on credit from the Marwaris; their indebtedness keeps on increasing. For any loans advanced, the interest rates are exorbitant—for one maund of rice or goods worth Rs. 10, the shopkeepers demand a maund of cardamum. If loans are not settled at harvest time, the arrears are carried forward to next year. It may be noted: the cash price of rice is Rs. 6 per kilo while that of cardamum is Rs. 16 per kilo. Besides the Lepcha case, the other example of the same kind of exploitation which comes to our mind is of the Baigas, where again the control of the foreign entrepreneurial class on the local market has deprived the people of profits and benefits. Dzongu is one of the largest cardamum producing areas, but its people are perpetually indebted.

Before cardamum cultivation began, this area had no shops. The Lepchas commuted long distances to acquire cloth and thread, salt, tea leaves and metal goods. Minor forest produce and surplus crops were bartered for salt at the Tibetan border. Trade was barter-oriented; their economy was multi-centric having different spheres of exchange. Concept of a standardized currency—the money—was not known to the people. The wealth of the Lepchas was the availability of labour force in the family. Once cash economy was introduced, mainly with cardamum trading, the Lepchas were not able to fully adopt to it. Within their own culture, helping one

another was a way of life, and such a help was not reducible to any sort of 'wage-labour'. Money has created its own revolution. With the introduction of money and the opening of market, the Lepcha economy is being linked up with the world economy; links with the markets and outsiders are regulated in terms of money, but those within the community are carried out through gift-exchanges, help groups, and barter. For instance, money has not entered the institution of bride wealth, which is still paid in the form of *asek* presents. A lot of conspicuous consumption takes place on religious functions and ceremonies, often burdening the people.

Consumption pattern of the Lepchas shows that expenditure on meat is higher than that on vegetables. Salt is consumed more than sugar. Intoxicants constitute a major item accounting for 13 per cent of the total expenditure. Expenditure on religious ceremonies amounts to 14 per cent of the total expenditure. With such a high level of consumption and cardamum trading in the control of middlemen, the Lepchas remain indebted: 75 per cent of the households are liable for one or two debts, while 66 per cent of the loans are for the duration of less than a year. These loans are mostly for tiding over short term consumption needs and/or for necessary agricultural inputs payable at the close of the season.

The maximum number of loans are taken for household expenditure. Loans for agricultural inputs come next. Since non-farm business has as yet not gained ground, the investment is minimum here. These loans are generally taken from landlords, traders and money-lenders. With the implementation of various welfare schemes especially for the tribals, it was expected that a sizable portion of the credit needs of the Lepchas would be met by the government agencies. But only 34 per cent of the loans are from the government.

Innovations among the Lepchas are self-sponsored. For example, the government opened schools and managed them, but the Lepchas formed work groups, building *balwaris* and schools themselves. They are part of their own



community effort and furnish an example of community achievement.

The Lepchas have exercised selectivity with regard to the acceptance of exogenously-originated cultural traits. Only those that could be reconciled with their own existing cultural patterns have been accepted. Greater the number of alternatives, greater is the freedom of choice. This is true of the Lepchas and it explains the apparent paradox that the Lepchas have probably changed the least while changing the most. The nature of the contact situation has made it possible for the Lepchas to accept certain innovations, modify certain elements of their social, religious, economic and political structure in order to accommodate the changes, and retain their basic pattern of community structure.

### IMPLICATIONS

The Lepcha case has important implications for tribal approaches. It is generally believed that these approaches can be conveniently divided into—isolation, assimilation and integration—and out of these the last is preferred, the first two relegated to the background. Since neither complete isolation nor assimilation is possible—they are unethical and utopian, but since both of them have some important ingredients, a 'middle road' is devised for the tribals.

The central idea inhering isolation is that tribal culture is very precious, it gives meaning to the people, and it is difficult to dissociate it from them: thus, it is imperative to improvise procedures through which it could be saved from any kind of mass extinction, the process which began when the outsiders started invading the tribal areas and taking hold of their resources. The thesis of assimilation prompted the idea that the tribals are 'aboriginal Hindus', proffered that the tribals would not remain as they were; their constant interaction with the wider world would detribalise them. It was the emphasis on change, as a result of the dialectics between internal and external systems, that was acceptable in assim-

ilation, but what was unacceptable was that the chief good of the tribals lay in giving up their cultural life and depressing into the ladders of Caste Hindus, by accepting the purity-impurity divide, worshipping a bevy of Hindu goddesses and gods, adopting vegetarian food, stopping sacrifice and offering of liquor, etc. The respective messages of isolation and assimilation unacceptable to us, were: 'We are not concerned with how the tribals live; we should not interfere' and 'They can only live in a state and form as their outsiders live'. Combining 'good' points of both isolation and assimilation—the policy of integration—the sheet-anchor of modern planning processes—was formulated.

Elwin came under vehement attacks from social workers for, what they thought, postulating 'isolationism'. His reply was:

Today we can see the tribal peoples without sentiment, but equally without prejudice. Isolation in the modern world is impossible; it would not be desirable even if it was possible. The old controversy about zoos and museums has long been dead. We do not want to preserve tribal culture in its colour and beauty to interest the scientists or attract the tourists. To try to preserve and develop the best elements in tribal art, religion and culture is something very different from wishing to keep the people in a zoo.

We do not want to preserve the tribesmen as museum specimens, but equally we do not want to turn them into clowns in a circus. We do not want to stop the clock of progress, but we do want to see that it keeps the right time. We do not accept the myth of the Noble Savage; but we do not want to create a class of Ignoble Serfs (c.f. Rustomji, 1989: 246).

Surely, we agree with what Elwin wrote, "We do not want to create a class of Ignoble Serfs". But what should be done to safeguard the interests of the people so that the outsiders do not encroach upon their land and territory? A strong legislation is needed; the outsiders should not be permitted to acquire land on tribal areas; cases of illegal control of tribal property should be strongly dealt with; every opportunity should be given to the local people to develop the spirit of entrepreneurship, etc.

For achieving all this, although it is not required that the people be isolated, it has to be ascertained that exploiters and oppressors do not enter the tribal areas, the unscrupulous people do not gallivant them. Besides the legal machinery that imposes sanctions on any intruders, the ecological factors are equally important: the flowing in of outsiders in Gond regions was definitely higher to that in Subansiri district. Ecological factors coupled with the administrative intervention to keep the outsiders at bay have played crucial role in the development of the Apa Tanis.

In the case of Sikkim—and here it is different from the Apa Tanis—the non-tribal entrepreneurial class of Marwaris had also entered, making its foothold. A reserve was created for the Lepchas, legal sanctions were imposed on the entry of the outsiders, land transaction was almost impossible in Dzongu. The Lepchas could have the kind of environment they desired the most and it provided them with an opportunity to retain their culture. At the same time, they could absorb the best from the people they came in contact with. But then why—when they had the most appropriate situation for development—they have not progressed as did the Apa Tanis or other tribes of the North-East. The major reason is that in the realm of their external interaction, they have no option but to succumb to the economic demands and pressures set by the trading community. We saw how the latter keeps on exploiting them. The Lepchas have not attuned themselves with the nuances of cash economy. Conspicuous consumption on ritual occasions is another factor. If the marketability of their produce is properly regulated, with gains flowing to the local community, their condition could be ameliorated.

The notion of Lepcha reserve was based on keeping the identity of the people intact, and at the same time saving them from exploitation. Whenever the small communities are bombarded by the encroachment of entrepreneurs and powerful groups, they have two options—either to run away to deep forests, further isolated and

relatively inaccessible areas, or to submit to the greedy demands of the outsiders. For checking any of these to happen, the rights of the community should be defined, with every attempt made to vouchsafe them. The idea of reserve, in this perspective, did not amount to 'anthropological zoo'; on the other hand, it has raised important issues of how to regulate relations between the community and its produce with external market situation, and how they should be integrated with markets.

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