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## Bhutia Tribe in Sikkim: A Sociological Study

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### **Abstract:**

*Sikkim, a small but beautiful state in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas, 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. The present study will highlight the history, origin, present social status along with cultural practices of Bhutia Community in Sikkim.*

**Keywords:** Sikkim, Bhutia, Lepcha, Nepali, Denzong

### **1. Introduction**

Society is not a static it's a dynamic. Change is the law of nature. What is today shall be different from what it would be tomorrow. Social change is the significant alteration in the social order of a society. It includes change of Social behavior, nature, institution, social relations etc. It may also refers to the idea of social progress the socio-cultural evolution.

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".

Sikkim become the Associate State of Indian Union with the Constitutional Amendment Act passed on 4<sup>th</sup> 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 22<sup>nd</sup> Indian State.

In 8<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **2. 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 coexist 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.

### **3. History and Origin of 'Bhutia'**

Literally the word 'Bhutia' has been derived from the Nepalese language called "Bhotay" which means the people of the Bhot (Tibet). They are the Tibetan origin. They were migrated from southern parts of the Tibet like Chumbi Valley, Kham etc. in the thirteen century.

In their own language they called themselves as 'Lhapos' or 'Lhorees' which means the dweller of the southward and one of the earliest inhabitants of "The Greater Sikkim". They were the descendent of Kye\_Bum\_Sa. Kye\_Bum\_Sa was the chieftain of Bhutia people.

Kye\_Bum\_Sa has three sons namely i) Kya-bo-rab (Swindler) ii) Mi-pon-rab (leader of men) and iii) Lang-bo-rab (Plough Men). Kya\_Bo\_rab has always shifted from one place to another and even they always changing their living place so that his descendent was also known as "Yul\_Ten\_pa". The descendent of Lang\_Bo\_Rab was called "Linzer\_pa". The most intellectual son of Kye\_Bum\_Sa was Mi\_Pon\_Rab. He had married with the Sakya lady and he has four sons, the eldest son named called "Zhan\_Po\_Tar" because this son was born at his maternal uncle's house. Second son named called "Tshes\_Behu\_Tar" means was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month. Third son named called "Nyi\_Ma Gyaspa" means born on the Sunday. And last son named called "Guru Tashi" the Saint one.

Lingsarpa, the descendents of these who gradually got separated afar were said to have been called Beb\_Tsan\_Gyat(8 Clans) these are i) Phenpas, ii) Gonsarpas or Gantaputas, iii) Namtsangkors, iv) Tagchungdars, v) Karsorpas, vi) Gyonto\_pas, vii) Tsungyapas and viii) Topas or Dokhangpas. Again Phenpas are sub-divided into five classes. These are i) Nadik ii) Lhasung iii) Wo-Cha-Bonpos, iv) Nabons and v) Phenchung. All these constituted the original Bhutia clans who settled in Sikkim prior to time of Chogyal Phungtsog Namgyal in the year 1642 (Namgyal and Dolma, 1908).

Others Bhutia tribes and settlers from Paro and Haa in Bhutan came from time to time and settled in different parts of Sikkim, who becoming naturalized came to be ranked amongst the Bhutias of Sikkim. These are i) Butsawopa, ii) Lagdingpa, iii) Botpas, iv) Gyengyap v) Gorongpas vi) Topas vii) Sharpas viii) Barphung\_putsos ix) Adenphutos. Again Topas or Tromowas, who are subdivided into the following clans i) To\_Lhagopa, ii) To\_Jamyangpa, iii) To\_Chū\_Khapas and iv) Chumbipas. Topas of Tromo subdivided into i) Lhambodar, ii) Genynputos, iii) Agon, iv) Athub\_putsos, v) Dozho\_Pa and vi) Khim-Pharpa.

Other Bhutias, these are Lachungpa, Lachenpa, Assampa, Mang\_baypas, Nam\_mangpas, Shangtsangpas, Dorobpas, Gang\_gyabpas, Ahpas, Mang\_tsangpas, Pathingpa, Boripa, Kargyalpas, Dotrapas etc.(J.R. Subba, 2008).

According to Risley "the descendent of Khe Bum Sa are divided into six families but with Khe Bum Sa 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 families of Tibetan origin in Sikkim.

The Descendent of Khye-Bumsa are divided into six families. Viz:-

- Yultenpa
- Lingzerpa
- Zhantarpa
- Tshegyutarpa
- Nyimgyepa
- Gurutashipa

Eight Families of the Khye\_Bumsa now known as the Bep-TSen-Ghay. These are:-

- Phenpa
- Gong-sang-pa
- Nam-Tsang-Khopa
- Tag-Chung-Tarpa
- Kar-Tshogspa
- Grong-Tsodpa
- Tshun-Gyalpa or Gyaspa
- Do-Khangpa or Khampa.

These fourteen main families have the right to be admitted to the Tasong Monastery at Pemiongchi without payment of nuzzur or entrance fees. Again Phenpa are subdivided into five. These are:-

- Naadikpa
- Lhasungpa
- Yoschags
- Napon
- Phenchung.

Besides the above there are other families of Bhutia origin. These came into Sikkim at various times since the establishment of the Chogyal and are divided into groups. These are:-

- Putshopopa.
- Lagdingpa.
- Gorongpa.
- Tsodpa.
- Sharpa.
- Barphungputsho.
- Gyengpa.
- Adinputso.

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 13<sup>th</sup> 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.

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, Dhophthapas, inhabitants Dhophtha, a place in south Tibet, the Tromopas or Do-mu-pas, inhabitants of Do-mu.

#### 4. 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:-

- To analyze the origin and history of the Bhutia tribe in general and in Sikkim Particular..
- To describe the language, literature and their uses in day to day life of the Bhutias.
- To study different social organizations and cultural practices of Bhutia tribes in Sikkim.

#### 5. 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.

#### 6. 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.

#### 7. Review of Literature

The study of Literature connected with the subject is an important part of any research. In order to do research it is important that we know a little bit about the subject and also what has been done by others on that subject. This enables the researcher to familiarizes himself/ herself with the subject and also help ascertain if He/she on the right track and to gain specialized knowledge.

Today ethnographic fields study has been receiving increased importance in social science researchers. Many writer and scholars have written about the Bhutia Community but there is lack of literature about the Bhutia of Sikkim. Research and studies on this tribe are limited both in scope and number. Most of them have made ecological related anthropological studies which dealt with people, culture and nature. The research study related to the present study has been presented 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 families 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.

According to Namgyal and Dolma (1908), the unpublished manuscript (English Version) that the Bhutias, are said to have descended from the eight clans which is known as Beb-Tsan-Gyat of the ancestor of Khe Bumsa, a prince or chief from Dome in the Kham province of Tibet, while others say that it was from Khe-Bumsa’s three sons that they have descended and multiplied. In Bhutias there are several number of sub caste namely Shangdarpa, Pathingpa, Lachungpa, Lachenpa etc

Verma in his book “A Guide and a hand book of Sikkim” has tried to explore the historical aspects of Bhutia of Sikkim and has focused on the political side of the bBhutias history, She had tried to study the changes in the Bhutias culture over the decade and his main aim as per the book is to make the Bhutias understand their culture and help them preserve and practice it so as to keep this tribe alive.

Sonam Rinchen in his book ‘The Wealth of Sikkim’ he have made the different valuable information regarding the different communities living in sikkim including Bhutias.

According to Brooks, (1976) the authors reported that their literature review was aided by such identifiers and organizers as equity, diversity, social justice, liberatory education, race, gender, ethics, urban school, global education, critical pedagogy, oppression, social change, social development, and social order, among others. From the review of the literature around these key terms, the authors envisaged social change as bringing about a “new social order” in which marginalized peoples would have the same educational and social opportunities as those more privileged.

Drury & Reicher, (1976) As the list of identifiers above suggests, the concepts of *social justice* and *equity* have been significant in discussions of social change in education, in psychology, and in social and cultural studies. The writing and advocacy of Paulo Freire, Ivan

Illich, civil rights leaders, and feminists during the last half of the 20th century influenced these understandings and helped shape the particular emphases of social change in recent decades.

## 8. Geographical Distribution

Geographically, Bhtuia people are found in all district of Sikkim. The highest concentration of the Bhtuias population are found in northern part of Sikkim is in Lachen-Lachung, Kabi Lunchok, Phodong-Phensang and Mangan. Similarly, the southern part of Sikkim, the highest bhtuias population are found is in Ralang, Rabongla. Temi-Tarku, Ben. The western part of Sikkim, the highest concentration of Bhtuias population are found is in Tashiding, Pelling, Yoksam, Rinchenpong and Gyalshing. Lastly, apart from three district the highest ratio of the Bhtuias population are found in the eastern part of Sikkim is in Gangtok, Gnathang, Pathing, Sang-Martam, Rumtek, Khamdong, Aritar, Sumik Linzey, Sumin, Penlong.

## 9. Major Findings

### 9.1. The Family

The family of the Bhtuia people are mostly patriarchal. Father is the head of the family and followed by the mother and also the eldest son. All the important decisions within the family are taken by the father or jointly by the parents. In their absence, the eldest son has responsible to take decisions. Within the Bhtuia community the daughters are not given that much priority in decision-making process. In case the father's death, the mother takes the all responsibility until the eldest son get married.

### 9.2. The Status of Women:

The status of Bhtuias women are distinct from others community. Women are equal right with the men but not on property earlier. Now a days women have equal right to get the property. They do not have restricted to go to school, colleges and also for higher education to educate themselves. They are allow to do government job and other services. The idea of the Bhtuias women empowerment has taken over the minds of increasing number of people in recent times. It is now widely employed in the press, on television, in political and legal services. Although officially the Government of India has encouraged greater participation by the women in India in 50% reservation in Panchayati Raj System in political and administrative life. Economic development has increased opportunities for women to participate in fields such as medicine, academic, administrative etc.

Bhtuia 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.

### 9.3. The Kinship

The kinship system of the Bhtuias may be termed as "Classificatory" as the fundamental features of the system is the application of the same terms for a number of persons, belonging to both lineal as also collateral relationship.

### 9.4. The Marriage System

Marriage is a universal social institution. Changing pattern of the marriage of every community is very prevalent. In earlier times polyandry was the system of marriage in all Bhtuia households and also mostly they were arranged marriages. Arranged between families. If the elder brother took a wife, she was common to all his brothers. Inter caste marriages were not preferred except Bhtuias and Lepchas. Bhtuias and Lepchas were treated as equal caste in terms of status. Nowadays the inter-caste marriage also allow with Bhtuias community.

The marriage is endogamous at the community level and exogamous at the 4 ru and 8 ru level in the early days but now this is not strictly followed. Sororate junior and levirate junior are also in practice. Modes of acquiring mates were by service in the early days but negotiation has been a common practice now. Now monogamy is the general practice. Now, most of the families are nuclear and vertically extended, though some carry remnants of the joint family also. Avoidance relationship exists between mother-in-law and son-in-law, daughter-in-law and father-in-law, sister-in-law (BW) and elder brother-in-law (H (e) B), etc. Joking relationship exists between sister-in-law(e) BW and brother-in-law H(e)B, with sister-in-law W(e)S and W(y)S with brother-in-law W(e)B and W(y)B.

During the marriage ceremony, a representative from the groom's house arrives at the bride's house with gifts and raises the offer of marriage. In Bhtuias community, the marriage procedure of Bhtuias is very elaborative and expensive and could be described in various parts as follows:

#### 9.4.1. Dichang

It is the first step of marriage whereby the uncle of would bridegroom of in his absence one capable elder person from village accompanied by a mediator (Phami) and 2-3 persons seek the hand of the girl by visiting girl's house. With them they carry brewed millet (Liquor). An astrologer follows after this procedure. The astrologer will match the Lotak of the boy and the girl. He will also look for the auspicious day of marriage solemnization. After going through various formalities the group come back to the boy's house. Within three days if the girl's side returns the brewed millet it ultimately means they are not interested. But if the materials are not returned within the mentioned days, they assume that they are agreeable to give away their daughter as a bride.

#### 9.4.2. Kachang

After making the decision of handing over their daughter, the paternal uncles and paternal aunts of would be bride gather to rejoice in the bride's house. In this occasion to the lama invite and after being sip by the Lama rest of the family members take sip of it turn-wise.

### 9.5. Religion

The Bhutias are Buddhist by religion. Guru Padma Sambhava, the Lotus born, also known as the Guru Rimpoche, brought Buddhism to Sikkim through Tibet in the eight century. He was a teacher of mysticism at the Nalanda University in the North of India and was well versed in Tantricism, an amalgamation of Buddhism with primitive beliefs and nature worship, then current in India. Guru Rimpoche, whose fame as a mystic and teacher had spread across the Himalayas into Tibet, was sought after by the Tibetan King, Thi-Strong De-Tsan, who reigned from about A.D. 742 to 800.

Buddhism was the main religion of the Bhutias Community in Sikkim in the seventeenth century. It was professed by the Bhutia people of Sikkim. The introduction of Buddhism in Sikkim coincides with the establishment of a political institution. The three monks who had come to Sikkim from Tibet started propagating the religion and constructing monasteries. There were two types of Buddhism: Mahayana (The Large Vehicle) and Hinayana (The Small Vehicle). But a majority was Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhism was the state religion in Sikkim.

There were two sects of Mahayana Buddhism in which the majority of the Buddhists in Sikkim was organized by Nyingmapa and the Karma\_ Kadgupa. Most of the Bhutias believed in Nyingmapa Sect.

### 9.6. Language and Literature

Bhutia tribe has its own language and scripts. In the study it is found that in the house, the Bhutia people speak and communicate with each other by their own language but outside the house they generally speak Nepali languages. The younger generation, due to establishment of English medium Convent schools throughout the state, mostly do not know complete Bhutia scripts.

### 10. Conclusion

Rapid development in the state after its merger with India in 1975, have undergone massive change and development. Due to cultural transmission, cultural assimilation, development of transportation and communication facilities, establishment of industries particularly, Pharmaceutical industries, development of tourism, establishment of English Medium schools, Colleges, Technical and Professional institutions; the people of Sikkim in general, Bhutia in particular have gone a radical changes in every sphere of their life.

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