

SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF SIKKIM : CHIE NAKANE
REEXAMINED

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Introduction

This paper seeks to present a critique of Chie Nakane's article entitled 'A plural society in Sikkim: a study of the interrelations of Lepchas, Bhotias and Nepalis' published in Furer Haimendorf (ed.) *Caste and kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon* (1966) and to bring out the actual picture of the society, culture and economy, as obtained in Sikkim. Social anthropological literature on Sikkim is rather scanty and the bulk of the literature published on Sikkim is written by foreign or Indian administrators and tourists. Among a few important works, like those of Nakane herself, Gorer (1967) and Siiger (1967), the work of Nakane has been found to have arrested much attention. There is hardly any work published after that which does not have a reference to her work. It has been included in the list of important readings for post-graduate studies in many universities also. But her work not only suffers from a lack of adequate field experience in Sikkim, it also lacks a proper understanding of the peoples there. Surprisingly, A. C. Sinha, a noted sociologist on Sikkim, also supports her words blindly (see 1981 : 197-99). Perhaps none, except Trevor Ling (1984), has till now questioned her words. Therefore, it is worthwhile to reexamine her contentions.

It is understood that her fieldwork was carried out, during February and March, 1955, in the neighbouring hamlets of Gangtok, viz, Pabyuk, Phodang and Phensang, each of which was centred around a monastery. It is also known that she had written it out in 1961, during her stay in London as a Visiting Lecturer in

the Department of Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies. To what extent, a critique of her work, written after 23 years, is valid? I must devote a few words to this question which is methodologically a pertinent one.

Personally I was just four years old when she wrote her article, and in Class IV when it was published. But my little anthropological knowledge gathered for the last six years or so tells me that the traditions die hard. A couple of decades is hardly any time for a cultural or structural change unless a catalyst takes place. And it did take place, but only about nine years back, in 1975, when Sikkim became the 22nd State of India. The active participation of India, financially as well as technologically, in the development of Sikkim, has brought about many changes. But till now, it is not difficult to go around the villages of Sikkim and find out the situation there a couple of decades before.

Chie Nakane admits (p. 212) that two months' time was too short for an intensive study, which is, of course, true of an extensive study also, given the infra-structural handicaps and the spatial distribution of hamlets in Sikkim till now. But she should have made modest claims about her conclusions also. Her conclusions based on three villages but with an intensive study of Pabyuk only cannot, in any case, be regarded true of the whole of Sikkim, as she gives the idea. The socio-cultural and economic organizations of the villages differ from region to region and what she has presented in her article is not true of the whole of Sikkim.

On the historicity of Lepchas, Bhotias and Nepalīs

Like innumerable other writers, she also writes :

The Lepchas represent the *autochthonous* inhabitants of Sikkim, while the Bhotias and Nepalīs are immigrants (emphasis mine) (p. 214, para. 2).

There are some writings which give a different version of the Lepchas. For example, Mackean (1920 : 511) writes that the Lepchas came from the east with the Jimdars (or Rais of the Nepalese community) who went on to Nepal and settled there. The Meches who also came along with the Lepchas settled in the foot-

hills. Risley (1972: 1) writes that though the Lepchas claim to be the autochthons of Sikkim their physical features bear similarities with the Mongoloid race and 'certain peculiarities of language and religion render it probable that the tribe is a very ancient colony from southern Tibet'. Siiger also writes :

.... there are ancient traits of various kinds contributing to the suggestion that the Lepchas originally came from the east. On entering Sikkim the Lepchas found three tribes already in possession of the country, viz. the Na-ang or Na-ong, the Chang, and the Mon, of which the Na-ong were the earliest inhabitants (1967 : 27).

Linguistic studies have also shown that the Lepcha language has some relationship with the languages of the Mangars (Nepali), Anglong (or Mikir) spoken in the present-day Assam, Adis of Arunachal Pradesh and the Khasis of Meghalaya (Sprigg 1982: 16-31).

It may be mentioned here that the above reference of Siiger to the three tribes already in possession of Sikkim before the Lepchas came is a misrepresentation of the original source. K. K. Das, in the page and paper referred to by Siiger, talks of the 'Tibetans' and not the 'Lepchas' (1896 : 5).

According to Mainwaring's *Dictionary of the Lepcha Language* (1898 : 189), the word 'Na-ong' or 'Na-on' means a foolish section of Lepchas. The name 'Lepcha' was given to them by their Nepalese neighbours but they called and knew themselves to be 'Rong' which in their own language is supposed to mean 'the ravine folk'. The tribe 'Chang' also most probably meant 'Chong' or 'Tsong' or 'Tsang' or the Limbus who are still known with these names in Sikkim. Mitra (1953:65) has noted them as 'Chang' or 'Tsang'. And the tribe 'Mon, should have meant the Lepchas only. 'Mon' is a term used by the Tibetans for the inhabitants of the lower Himalayas (Waddell 1979:92-3). This indicates that it could have referred to the Mangars and Limbus also because, like the Lepchas, they are also lowlanders of Sikkim. They are also considered to have settled in Sikkim since ages behind (Namgyal and Maharani 1908 : 19).

Therefore, the chronological order of the three communities—Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis—that the Lepchas are the autochthons and the latter two are immigrants, is not completely true. If Lepchas are 'autochthons' so are the Limbus and Mangars of the Nepalese community. However, if we consider the bulk of the population then the Nepalis are, by and large, 'immigrants' and so are the Bhutias.

I am personally against the word 'original' or 'autochthonous' for any caste, tribe or community living in the Himalayas from east to west. This stands for the Lepchas also. This is precisely because of the fact that the dominant mode of production in the Himalayas till almost the end of the 19th century was what is called 'shifting cultivation' and cattle breeding. The cycle of shifting cultivation was initially more than thirty years which meant that the people went around to quite far-off places, which in turn, inhibited them to stick to a particular area. This apart, they went to distant places for salt or for hunting and gathering food, which were also a part of their socio-economic life.

With this awareness, it is really difficult to place the Lepchas in this proper place. Thakur and Lepcha, writing on the question 'Who are the Lepchas?', conclude in these words :

We have here attempted to offer four-fold explanations to the origin of the Lepchas based on (i) habitational, (ii) linguistic, (iii) divinical, and (iv) historical-anthropological evidences. Yet it seems difficult to give a conclusive answer to the problem of the origin of this tribe (1981 : 225).

Differential adaptation in Sikkim

The most important and interesting part of her article is the sub-heading 'Chief features of contacts between Nepalis and Lepcha-Bhotias' where she discusses the differential adaptation between the Nepalis on the one hand and the Lepcha-Bhutias on the other. She says (p. 255, para. 3) that though the initial conditions to start with are worse for the Nepalis they soon outdo the Lepcha-Bhutias economically as well as numerically. About the reasons for this she writes :

There are many explanations for such phenomena. The basic reason, I observed, is the difference in the pattern of life, which is closely related to the religious difference between the Buddhist and Hindus. This results in a sharp contrast between the two in terms of productivity and consumption pattern (p. 256, para 1).

The use of 'blocked' concept in these lines lacks some factual considerations. First, all the Nepalis are not Hindus: there are innumerable castes among them many of which are Buddhists also. For example, the Tamangs, Sherpas, Yolmus, Buddhamargi Newars, etc. are all Buddhists. On the other hand, the Rais, Limbus, Yakhas, etc. are 'animists' though officially they are Hindus only. In fact, even among the Mangars, Gurungs and Jogis who are considered highly Hinduised due to certain historical accidents, Hinduism is often confined to reverence for cows and respect for the Brahmins only. The 'real' Hindus are the Bahuns, Thakuris and Chhetris of the high caste group and the Kamis, Sarkis and Damais of the low or 'untouchable' group but the numerical strength of these castes is relatively weaker than that of the middle castes. According to *The Gazetteer of Sikkim* (1972 : 27), the castewise distribution of population in 1891 was as follows: Brahman or Bahun 1,414, Chhetri 829, Newar 727, Rai, Jimdar, etc. 2,020, Limbu 3,356, Gurung 2,921, Murmi 2,827, Khambu 1,963, Mangar 901, Kami 1,670, and Darji or Damai 287. Though recent figures on this aspect are not available, the household census of two villages—Takuthang and Chuchen—in west Sikkim, taken in 1982 for my research, supports the above data even more strongly. For example, in Takuthang, the percentages of high and low castes population were 1.3 and 4.4. only and in Chuchen it was 0.7 and 4.0, respectively.

One important reason for this is that the high castes had dominant economic and political positions in Nepal which did not necessitate them to migrate; migration for them was more an 'adventure' than a 'compulsion'. The low castes, on the other hand, were heavily bonded to the higher castes, which made it difficult for them to leave their country.

The castes bluntly called 'animists' again have a wide variety of religious practices (see Bista 1980). They, taken as a group, differ from the Nepalese high and low castes, even ritually or religionwise. Caplan (1970:66-60), with particular reference to the religious differences between the Limbus and Brahmans, writes that they differ in various respects such as objects of worship, forms of worship, dietary practices, mourning practices, marriage practices, 'pleasure complex', forms of recreation and the very 'style of life'. Though his place of reference is east Nepal, this is remarkably true of Sikkimese Nepalis also.

Nakane clubs the Lepchas and Bhutias together but Waddell writes :

Now that you see a pure Lepcha, side by side with these other tribes, you could never mistake him, not even for a Sikkimese Bhotia, of whom many possess a considerable strain of Lepcha blood, so sharply is he distinguished from all these in physique, features, and dress, in speech and manners, in customs and character (op. cit. : 93).

Basnet writes in this regard :

In character the two peoples (Lepchas and Bhutias) were poles apart : the Tibetans were very property conscious, the Rongs were carefree; the Tibetans were vigorous and aggressive, the Rongs were timid and docile; the Tibetans were polyandrous, the Rongs detested polyandry and were polygynous; last but not the least, the Tibetans were Lamaist Buddhists while the Rongs were spirit worshippers (1974 : 11).

Though a large number of Lepchas are known to have followed Lamaist Buddhism, Gorer comments :

With the exception of the prohibition of the killing of animals by Lamas, the Lepchas have not incorporated the system (the elaborate and hierarchical religious system) of ethics in anyway. The supernatural sanctions, they believe in, are communal, not individual; wrong conduct risks producing a year of disaster for the community, not post mortem punishment for the individual. And because the system of ethics

has not been incorporated, the Lepcha's conversion to Buddhism is basically meaningless (1967 : 118-19).

Nakane further writes :

Among the Lepcha-Bhotias the potential labour force is reduced by the fact that some of them engage in priestly activities, whereas all the Nepali available labour force engages in production (p. 256, para 2).

Even if 'production' here refers to the whole avenue of the sources of income she is not entirely correct. Among the Nepalis also, there are many Bahuns, specially the Upadhyayas, who profess priesthood which is, however, a rewarding profession without much of manual labour. The same is true of the Buddhist priests also. If she here means only the 'agricultural production' even then there are many Nepalese castes like Newar, Kami, Sarki and Damai some of whom still follow their traditional occupations like business, ironsmithy, cobblery and tailoring, respectively. Even otherwise, hers is a selective case, not entirely true of the west, south and east districts of Sikkim. Priesthood in these districts is by and large 'a matter of choice' and such cases are very rare. And if their being engaged in priesthood is really a factor for their backwardness then the Buddhists in the districts other than the north should have been richer than those in her villages or in the north district. But my field observations do not support it.

To quote her again :

Marriage for a man means the acquisition of more labour force, so as to raise his production, rather than another dependent to be fed. This is why even poor Nepali peasants often practise polygyny. All Nepalis can engage in all kinds of labour other than cultivation : such as coolies in the bazaar collecting various kinds of products from the jungle for their own consumption as well as for sale in the bazaar; construction of roads or buildings, etc. On the other hand, Lepcha-Bhotia peasants engage in hardly any work other than cultivation, even when they face poverty (p. 256, para 2).

This is an entirely a wrong conception of her. In Takuthang and Chuchen villages of west Sikkim where I worked intensively I came across only one Nepali Rai with two wives and this was purely for personal reasons and nothing to do with increasing labour force or raise the production. The rest of the Nepalis with 81 out of 94 in the former and 70 out of 82 households in the latter were all monogamous. The picture could not have been very different a couple of decades before. I may also add that a polygynous Lepcha family was also found in Chuchen village. Can the same logic that she applies on the Nepalis be applied in this case too? Probably not.

Now about the 'work ethics' hardly any member of the local community does works considered 'low' within his locality, unless the situation is too pressing, but does not mind doing the same in another locality or society. This is a universal phenomenon and nothing special about the Nepalis, or, for that matter, the Lepcha-Bhutias too. If the Lepcha-Bhutias had to be thrown into a new locality they would in every probability, do the works she describes the Nepalis do.

She adds :

Another economic drawback of the Lepcha-Bhotias in terms of productivity as compared with the Nepalis, is that they are greatly handicapped by a higher consumption pattern than that of the Nepalis (p. 256, para 3).

Here 'higher consumption' is taken in terms of (i) feeding the Buddhist monks, (ii) donation to *gonpa* or monastery and (iii) taking of rice-beer daily. The first two are true of the Buddhist Nepalis also. The Nepalese high caste Hindus have to feed the priests for 13 days during the funeral ceremony and their expenses on religious activities is not negligible just because they have no obligation to *gonpa*, as she writes (p. 257, para 2). They contribute voluntarily to the *gonpas* and also fulfil their obligations to temples or *mandir*, *gyangs* or Tamang *gonpas*, *Bijuwas*, *Jhankris*, *Phedangmas*, *Ojhas* (tribal priests), etc., also. The Lepchas also have double obligations—to the *gonpa* and to their *Bongthing* (tribal priest)—while the Bhutias have it only to the *gonpa*.

About the third factor—the rice beer—there is some misunderstanding on her part. The rice cultivation in Sikkim is insignificant, 50 percent of its cultivable area or 2.00 lakh acres at present being under maize cultivation, 20,000 acres under cardamom, 2,500 acres under orange and the crops like paddy, wheat, oilseeds, potato and ginger as marginal crops (Sikkim 1981). Therefore, rice could not have been a staple food, as she writes (p. 257, para 1). Moreover, I personally know that *malt* or beer is prepared out of maize, millet, barley, tapioca and many other such crops, and rice beer is a rare phenomenon. If we take the consumption pattern, the Rais, Limbus, Mangars, Gurungs, Tamangs and more recently even the high and low castes indulge in it but the indulgence comparable to that of the Lepcha-Bhutias is found among the middle castes only.

To quote her again :

They have a few Hindu festivals according to the Hindu calendar, but the expense of these is very low in comparison with that of the Buddhists. In these Hindu colonies, festivals are not at all elaborate—they dine together having paid homage at a small local temple where a stone Hindu image has been dedicated. (p. 257, para 2).

She appears biased towards Buddhists ignoring, or, without having proper knowledge of, the numerous festivals of the Hindus like *bhaitika*, *dashain* or *durga puja*, *laxmi puja* or *tihar*, *holi*, and so on. Some of these like *dasain* and *tihar* involve considerable amount of expenses and loss of mandays. Even *losar* or the new year festival of the Buddhists is celebrated by most of the Hindu Nepalis also.

Nakane's paper would perhaps carry more meaning if she had explained the backwardness of the Lepcha-Bhutia Buddhists vis-a-vis the Buddhists of her motherland, Japan. She could have given the best light on what features of Buddhism have played foul here and fair in Japan, since the Japanese who are also Buddhists are very advanced. Unfortunately she did not do it.

Nakane in her own words again :

The simplicity and plainness of Nepali peasants covers not only their diet, but every aspect of their life. The materials

and tailoring of the Nepali costumes are simple and cheap, and are obtainable in any bazaar in the Himalayas: on the other hand, the Tibetan style Bhotia costume, which has now become the Lepcha costume also, requires a great deal of special tailoring and is much more expensive than that of the Nepalis. In the case of houses, too, a Nepali house is built by a man himself out of local mud, while a Bhotia-Lepcha house is built of timber, which is expensive to buy, and requires the expert handling of carpenters (p. 258, para, 2),

Her idea that the Nepali costumes are 'simple and cheap' is not correct, if she here means the traditional costumes. The traditional Nepalese costumes called *daura suruwal* and *dhaka topi* for males and *chaubandi choli* and *pharia* for females are difficult to sew and not very many tailors can do it. If she means the modern dresses like trousers, shorts, blouses and saris these are used by the Lepcha-Bhutias also. The traditional Lepcha-Bhutia dresses may be costlier but these also last much longer than the Nepalese dresses because these are made of handwoven and thick clothes loosely hanging or draped around the body while the Nepalese dress except the *pharia* is body-fitting and gets torn within six to eight months. The Lepcha-Bhutia dresses, on the other hand, last upto 3 to 4 years also. Moreover, there are some differences between the Lepcha and Bhutia dresses also. About the Lepcha dress in Sikkim, Waddell says :

His lissom figure is clad in a long plaid of blue and white striped cloth of home-spun nettle-fibre or cotton, which is wound round his body and descends to the knee, the loose end being thrown gracefully over his shoulder, leaving the right arm free (op. cit : 94-5).

And about the Bhutia dress :

Their ordinary dress is like that of the Lepchas, as this suits the country better than Tibetan costume, but they usually wear a soft felt Tibetan hat....Over their inner vest and trousers of cotton is worn a large loose woollen gown of a

claret colour, high collared, and with very long wide sleeves, turned up at the cuff to show the white and blue lining, and girdled at the waist by a scarf (ibid : 103-4),

The following lines of Waddell also speak contrary to what Chie writes about the Lepcha-Bhutia houses. About the Lepcha houses he says :

The house, with the exception of the log framework, is built almost entirely of bamboos. The floor, the walls, the roof and the thatch are all of bamboo, as well as the vessels and cooking utensils (ibid : 96).

My personal observation also shows that the Lepcha-Bhutia houses are made of timber, as Nakane writes, but almost all those houses were built very crudely : there was no smoothening of the surfaces nor any nails used to fix the ends. The ends to be joint were cut with hand-axe and put one on another. Above all, the timbers used were extracted from the forests surrounding their houses or villages. And, if she finds them to have built their houses with timber bought dearly, it only shows their prosperity.

Her own words again :

The expense incurred by a marriage too makes a great difference : in comparison with Bhotias and Lepchas, who have to pay high bride-prices and to give costly wedding-feasts, the expense of a Nepali marriage is negligible (p. 258, para 3).

It is almost impossible to work out the marriage expenses of the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis because there is no parity between the 'ideal' and 'actual' expenses. Though the 'ideal' expenses of marriage in a certain community are more or less the same, the 'actual' expenses vary according to one's reach.

The Lepchas have the 'bride-price' system but this can be reduced by working in the girl's father's field for one or two years though at times the groom has to make full payment of the bride-price and also work in her father's field (Stocks 1975 : 151). I am not much aware of the Bhutia marriage expenses but I know that the expense of a Nepalese marriage is not negligible, as Nakane

writes. The Limbus, for example, invite all the relatives and neighbours to the wedding and entertain them with ample food and drink. When the couple visits the girl's parents' house after some days, the groom has to take enough *janr* or fermented millet, liquor and a whole pig with about 40 kilogram at the least and present her parents and relatives with gifts and money. Among the Tamangs also, the giving of gifts by girl's parents called *gorda* such as brass or copper pots, cooking utensils, clothes, gold ornaments and cattle to the girl, besides expenses on wedding is well known. The Mangars and Gurungs also have a similar marriage custom and a similar practice is seen among the Bahuns and Chhetris also.

What is really ailing the cultural system of the Buddhist Lepcha-Bhutias is the funeral ceremony but Nakane misses this point. Not that the Nepalese funeral ceremony does not cost at all or costs very little. Their economy is heavily affected when they feed at least 3 *lamas* or priests continuously for 49 days during when the villagers and relatives keep visiting, who are to be fed and sent back with money and rice. A Lepcha bureaucrat of Sikkim put it in the best of his humour: 'A funeral ceremony means 49 days' *free canteen* for all the people around' (emphasis in original).

Conclusion : an alternative explanation

The differential adaptation between the Lepcha-Bhutias on the one hand and the Nepalis on the other had been explained by Nakane chiefly on the basis of religion and other social and cultural factors associated with it. The above discussion has shown that hardly any of her factors stand firmly.

My first premise by way of conclusion is that a 'blocked' concept cannot be used in the context of the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis in Sikkim either in socio-culturo-religious sense or in the economic terms. The intra-community differences in these respects are remarkable and cannot, at any cost, be ignored. My own study (1984) in west Sikkim has amply shown the intra-community and intra-caste differences of the Nepalese society in respect of land, education, occupation, income, indebtedness, spatial mobility, etc.

The question of differential adaptation, in the context of Sikkim, becomes more significant at the individual or group level than at the caste or community level. In each caste or community there are households which are very rich and also very poor by the local standards. Numerically, however, it is clear that the Nepalis have far outweighed the Lepcha-Bhutias.

Now, if we take it for granted that the Nepalis are today more advanced than the Lepcha-Bhutias, economically or otherwise, it is probably more because of the abundance of land among the latter than anything else. I shall present the data in this regard first and explain how the land abundance acts as a negative factor with regards to their all-round development. The *kazis* and *thikadars* (landlords) should, however, be excluded from the analysis here because though they own huge plots of best lands they are not involved in the agricultural operations directly.

According to the records of the Land Revenue Department, Government of Sikkim (1979), the tentative number of excess holdings and the excess land (from the ceilings laid down) per community are as follows : Lepchas—total number of holdings 60, excess land 645.40 acres; Bhutias—total number of holdings 187, excess land 2,795.01 acres; and the Nepalis—total number of holdings 201, excess land 1,352.83 acres. It means that the excess land per holding is : Lepchas 10.8 acres, Bhutias 14.9 acres and the Nepalis 6.7 acres. Thus, while the Nepalis have the largest number of excess holdings, the Bhutias have the highest amount of excess land likely to be acquired by the State.

Land abundance does not act as a negative factor in all situations but it does so in Sikkim. Due to a lack of proper infra-structural facilities, spatial distribution of the households and an absence of schools nearby even now, most of the villagers are engaged in agriculture only. They seem to gradually develop an inferiority complex due to a lack of exposure to the outside world. I met some Lepchas and Bhutias in west Sikkim, who had not gone even upto Jorethang—a town which takes 5 or 6 hours walk from their villages. This was more true of the females in those villages. The Nepalis, on the other hand, cannot stick to agriculture only

for it does not sustain even the landed among them for more than 5 or 6 months as their holdings are, by and large, smaller than those among the Lepcha-Bhutias and many of them are landless too. They go to far-off places to work, leaving their family members back and return with new ideas if not always with money or other articles. Moreover, necessity compels them to look for alternate sources of income, which automatically makes them more forward than the Lepcha-Bhutias.

On the one hand, they have enough land which they cannot part with due to emotional bonds and also a lack of alternative. On the other hand, they do not seem to have fared in the terraced cultivation as well as the Nepalis. Nor do they seem to have shouldered as much hardships in this cultivation as the Nepalis have. Thus, the meeting of their two ends often becomes difficult and they fall victim of the landlords and moneylenders to whom they have to dispose of their cattle, goats and, at times, lands too. Earlier, their lands passed into the hands of the landlords including the Nepalese but now the latter cannot buy their lands (the reverse can take place), while the Bhutias can, and, in fact, their lands are passing on to the Bhutias and some richer people amongst themselves.

Another factor which is very much linked with land is the change in the mode of production which was rather disastrous to the economy, and other socio-cultural strings attached to it, of the Lepcha-Bhutias. The Lepchas used to practise shifting cultivation and supplemented their income with hunting and gathering food from the forest. The Tibetans who came later were basically traders and herdsmen though some of them were in administration and agriculture also. Their immigration did not bring about any change in the dominant mode of production in Sikkim.

The Nepalese influx changed the very picture of Sikkim. They not only cleared the forest, built the roads and started terrace cultivation but founded the very basis of the agrarian society there. The Lepcha-Bhutias also gradually adopted the terrace cultivation which they found more productive and the increase in the population also made it rather necessary to follow the terrace cultivation

because the land-man ratio changed very significantly. But while the Nepalese had mastered this mode of cultivation and the use of agricultural implements needed for it, it was completely a new thing for the Lepcha-Bhutias who had to learn it afresh. A deep feeling of insecurity crept in their minds, specially in the minds of the Lepchas, not only for having lost their forests and forgoing cultivation of the traditional type, which sustained the major part of their daily needs but also for lagging behind in the competition for agricultural production.

The Bhutias also had to change their ways of earning their living after 1890 when the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet was fixed by the Anglo-Chinese Convention (Basnet 1974:9). The Bhutias who are more concentrated in the north earned a good part of their income from the trans-border trade. But following the closure of the Indo-Tibet trade in 1947, certain occupations related to handicrafts, carpet and blanket weaving and others, had to be abandoned. Till then they were totally dependent on Tibet for grazing (Lall 1981 : 227). They still had interactions with Tibet till 1962 when the Indo-China war completely separated the people of Sikkim and Tibet.

The change from shifting cultivation to terrace cultivation or from trade and herding to settled cultivation affected their lives more than anything else. A few Nepalese *thikadars* were also affected by the closure of Indo-Tibet trade but they, like their Lepcha-Bhutia counterparts, had enough resources to maintain their aristocracy. The religious and other socio cultural factors emphasized by Nakane have some role to play in their over-all setback but not as much as she thought or as much as the change in the mode of production.

A change in the mode of production does not just mean a change in the agricultural production techniques; it includes the whole fabric of socioeconomic and cultural life of the people involved or affected. It, for example, means a jolt to their traditional way of life and competing in an imperfect production market for the Lepcha-Bhutias for the Nepalis are far superior in this game. It also means the beginning of new relationships based on agrarian categories, if, not 'classes' always and resultantly affecting

their traditional 'clan' or 'kinship' relations. With reference to Lepcha-Bhutias, it further means a shedding-off of their personality as they had to adapt, less successfully, to the various lights and shades of a new polyethnic society. Above all, it means a feeling of insecurity among them, which is really difficult to overcome.

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