

Ecology, Economy and Religion of Himalayas



Edited by :

P. Vidyarthi and Makhan Jha

ECOLOGY, ECONOMY AND RELIGION OF HIMALAYAS



Prof. A. C. Sinha

EDITED BY

L. P. VIDYARTHI
MAKHAN JHA

Department of Anthropology, Ranchi University, Ranchi

ORIENT PUBLICATIONS

114, Surya Niketan, Opp. Anand Vihar
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Dr. S. C. Sinha

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This three-day National Workshop was inaugurated by Major-General G.S. Agrawal, the Surveyor-General of India, while Shri S.K. Biswas, I.A.S., the then Commissioner of the Garhwal Division, was the Chief-Guest. Professor L.P. Vidyarthi, Director of the Centre of Himalayan Studies and Head of the Department of Anthropology, Ranchi University, Ranchi, presided over the inaugural session. Dr. M. Jha, Professor-in-Charge of the Centre of Himalayan Studies and Reader in Anthropology, Ranchi University, Ranchi, introduced the themes of the National Workshop. Shri G.S. Bhatta, Head of the Department of Sociology, and Dr. I.P. Saxena, Principal, D.A.V. College, Dehradun, welcomed the guests and participants, who came from different parts of India.

Among the distinguished participants, special mention may be made of Professor P.K. Bhowmick, University of Calcutta, Professor S.N. Ratha, University of Sambalpur, Dr. A.K. Danda, Director, Anthropological Survey of India, Professor A.C. Sinha, N.E.H.U., Shillong, Dr. M.N. Dhasmana, Professor S.C. Tiwari, Delhi University, Dr. Sunil Mishra of Akash Vani, New Delhi and a dozen officers of the Dehradun regional office of the Anthropological Survey of India, who made this National Workshop a grand success.

Dr. Rawat, the Vice-Chancellor of the Garhwal University, Srinagar, was kind enough to come to Dehradun to deliver the valedictory address on the forenoon of 12th October, 1982.

The Editors, therefore, thankfully acknowledge the co-operation of all these distinguished scholars and experts, who very kindly came to Dehradun, inspite of their busy schedule and other assignments, and participated in the three-day deliberations.

Special thanks are due to Major-General Agrawal who spared his valuable time for inaugurating this Workshop; Shri S.K. Biswas, I.A.S., who not only participated in our Workshop, but also helped our teachers and students, who were studying the polyandrous and non-polyandrous societies of the Garhwal Himalaya; and to Dr. Rawat, the Vice-Chancellor of the Garhwal University, who not only delivered the valedictory address, but also hosted a dinner in honour of the guests and participants of this three-day National Workshop.

Thanks are also due to Shri Lalit Raj Pal, Orient Publications, New Delhi, who has taken pains to print and release this volume on priority basis. We hope this volume will be widely acknowledged by the students and scholars, interested in studying different dimensions of Himalayan culture.

L.P. VIDYARTHI
MAKHAN JHA

INTRODUCTION

The Himalayas present a cultural pattern, which is quite distinct from that of other parts of India. The people, living here, have got their own way of life and activities, ecology, biological and cultural, typical sources of livelihood and religious practices, which can easily be distinguished from the plains. For many reasons, the Himalayas could not invite the outsiders in its lap except tourists, pilgrims and adventurers, through which the outside world could know about the Himalayas and its inhabitants. Due to inaccessible and difficult terrains, many parts of the Himalayas remained out of bounds for the common people and, thus people of the Himalayas could preserve some of their traditions in an undisturbed manner.

In recent years, however, this undisturbed cultural pattern has been exposed to various changes due to developmental activities. In a way it is a very critical phase of cultural transformation for the Himalayan society. In view of this, it is imperative for the anthropologists to study these changes on priority basis.

Ecology, Economy and Religion in Himalayas

Among the different factors responsible for shaping the pattern of culture in the Himalayas, three factors viz., peculiar ecology of the Himalayas, different economic structure and co-existence of various religious traditions are definitely more important.

After independence tremendous changes have taken place in the Himalayan eco-structure. New roads and dams have been constructed, and mineral resources have been explored in an accelerated speed. In many places new habitations have

been developed and forests cleared. As such, marked changes are now noticeable in the Himalayan regions. There is, therefore, an urgent need to identify factors and areas of changes and to assess the quantum of these changes. The inter-relationship among natural eco-system, the human resources and managed eco-systems is the subject of deep anthropological investigation as these have important bearing on the human population living in the Himalayas at varying altitudes ranging from five to fifteen thousand feet.

The rural economy of the Himalayas under the impact of varying ecological imbalances, has been the subject of deep anthropological study. The different patterns of land holding, methods of cultivation, indebtedness, nature of crop production and other economic as well as agricultural problems have given birth to various socio-cultural implications, which should be studied in depth on priority basis. The socio-political and economic issues influencing the Himalayan regions do influence the rest of the country particularly the entire Indo-Gangetic plains. The deforestation of the Himalayan region, soil erosion and other related factors have led to several nativistic movements including the *Chipko* movement. Therefore, the economic system of the Himalayan society is an interesting subject of detailed study.

Religion plays a very important role in the Himalayan society. Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are three important religions, besides animistic beliefs and traditions, which are found to reign over the people of the Himalayas. As a result of the existence of these religions, a large number of sacred places viz. temples, monasteries and mosques are found to be distributed in the different places of the Himalayan regions. Each of these sacred places has formed a "sacred-complex" (Vidyarthi: 1961) around it. The study of some of these "sacred complexes" (ibid) have revealed not only the pattern of life of the indigenous people living there, but also the pattern of interactions they have with the temporary migrants who visit these complexes. And these have resulted in a marked change in the life of the people of the Himalayas.

The Himalayan villages have their own deity-spirit system.

and the link between the ecology and human beings with this deity-spirit system is definitely interesting. These Himalayan villages need to be studied in terms of Nature-Man-Spirit Complex (Vidyarthi: 1963) with a view to throwing light on their ecology, economy, society and religion.

Considering the importance of these important factors—ecology, economy and religion and their related problems, a three-day National Workshop had been arranged in October, 1982 at Dehradun in which a number of distinguished scholars and experts of the Himalayan studies participated. The present volume is, thus, based on the proceedings of that National Workshop.

Organisation of Chapters

The proceedings have been arranged here into three parts viz. the Himalayan Ecology, the Economy in Himalayas and the Religion in Himalayas, each part having six chapters.

In part one, chapter one deals with the "Ladakhis: a Cultural Ecological Perspective" by Dr. R.S. Mann. He has attempted to discuss the salient features of the Ladakhis culture in relation to their ecology while Dr. Jitendra Singh throws light on the Ecological bearings in the religious milieu of the Garhwal Himalaya in the 2nd chapter. How distillery wastes disturb the ecological set-up has been discussed in the third chapter by Asha Rajvanshi and M.M. Srivastava, while in chapter four, R.C. Agnihotri, Y. Agnihotri, S.P. Mittal and P.R. Mishra have jointly discussed "Social Fencing"—a concept of harnessing human energy in the Himalayas. Dr. M.N. Dhasmana has explained the strategy, ecology and mobility in Central Himalayas in the fifth chapter, while in the sixth chapter Dr. A.K. Kapoor and Dr. R.R. Prasad discuss the relationship between environment and economic structure with special reference to a particular Himalayan community.

The second part of the volume starts with the seventh chapter wherein Dr. M.P. Joshi of the Kumaun University and Professor C.W. Brown of Sweden discuss some dynamics of the Indo-Tibetan trade through Kumaun-Garhwal. They have also discussed certain salient features of the ancient Indo-Tibetan trade routes which were operating through Kumaun-

Garhwal Himalaya. Dr. Buddhadeo Chaudhari has thrown some light on the economy, migration and development in the eastern Himalayas with special reference to the Darjeeling region in the eight chapter, while Dr. Dhasmana talks about the transformation and development in the Uttarakhand in the ninth chapter. In the tenth chapter, Dr. Kapoor and Mr. Satwani point out some of the urgent measures for the development of the non-literate societies in the Himalayas, while in the eleventh chapter Mr. Vijai Sisodia and Asha Sisodia put forward some problems and prospects for the socio-economic development of the Garhwal Himalaya. The last chapter i.e. twelfth, of this part is exclusively devoted to the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled castes in the Kumaun region of the Central Himalayas, by Dr. H.C. Upadhyay.

Discussions on religion in Himalayas begin with the thirteenth chapter, written by Professor P.R. Bhowmick on the Munda-festivals performed by the tribal migrants in the cis-Himalayan region. Dr. A.P. Singh throws some light, in brief, on the beliefs and rituals among the Bhotias of Uttarakhand in the fourteenth chapter. Shri B.B. Pandey has discussed religion of Arunachal Pradesh in chapter fifteenth while Professor S.C. Tiwary has explained some aspects of religious practices among the Rajis of Kumaun Himalayas in the sixteenth chapter.

Dr. M.P. Joshi has described the religious history of Uttarakhand in the seventeenth chapter and the last chapter of this volume, i.e., eighteenth, dwells on religion and peasantry in Kargil (J & K) written by Dr. B.R. Rizvi of the Anthropological Survey of India.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	vii

PART—I

HIMALAYAN ECOLOGY

Chapters

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1. The Ladakhis: A Cultural Ecological Perspective
<i>R.S. Mann</i> | 3 |
| 2. Ecological Bearing in the Religious Milieu of the Garhwal Himalaya
<i>Jitendra Singh</i> | 17 |
| 3. Ecological Impact of Distillery Wastes on its surroundings
<i>Asha Rajvanshi and M.M. Srivastava</i> | 25 |
| 4. Social Fencing—A concept of Harnessing Human Energy in Himalayas: A Case Study
<i>R.C. Agnihotri, Y. Agnihotri, S.P. Mittal and P.R. Mishra</i> | 32 |
| 5. Strategy, Ecology & Mobility in Central Himalaya
<i>M.N. Dhasmana</i> | 36 |
| 6. Relationship between Environment and Economic Structure: Study of a Himalayan Community
<i>A.K. Kapoor and R.R. Prasad</i> | 50 |

PART—II

ECONOMY IN HIMALAYAS

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 7. | Some Dynamics of Indo-Tibetan Trade through Kumaun Garhwal
<i>M.P. Joshi and C.W. Brown</i> | 59 |
| 8. | Economy, Migration and Development in the Eastern Himalayas: A study with special reference to the Hill Areas of Darjeeling
<i>W.B. Budhadeo Chaudhuri</i> | 72 |
| 9. | Transformation and Development in Uttarakhand
<i>M.N. Dhasmana</i> | 86 |
| 10. | Some of the Urgent Measures for the Development of the Non-literate Societies in the Himalayas
<i>A.K. Kapoor and Satwanti</i> | 101 |
| 11. | Socio-Economic Development of Garhwal Himalayas: Problems and Prospects
<i>Vijay Sisodia and Asha Sishaudhia</i> | 113 |
| 12. | Socio-Economic condition of the Scheduled Castes in the Kumaun Region of Central Himalayas
<i>H.C. Upadhyay</i> | 122 |

PART—III

RELIGION IN HIMALAYAS

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 13. | Tribal Migrants in the Cis-Himalayan Region: A Case Study of the Munda Festivals in Plantation
<i>P.K. Bhowmick</i> | 151 |
|-----|--|-----|

14. Beliefs and Rituals among the Bhotias of Uttrakhand: A Study of Persistence and Change <i>A.P. Singh</i>	168
15. Religion of Arunachal Pradesh <i>B.B. Pandey</i>	172
16. Some Aspects of Religious Practices among the Rajis of Kumaun Himalaya <i>S.C. Tiwary</i>	180
17. Religious History of Uttrakhand: Sources and Materials <i>M.P. Joshi</i>	193
18. Religion and Peasantry in Kargil (Jammu & Kashmir) <i>B.R. Rizvi</i>	217
Our Contributors	230
Index	233

PART I

HIMALAYAN ECOLOGY

THE LADAKHIS: A CULTURAL ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

R.S. MANN

One of the important contemporary theoretical strategies in anthropology is of cultural ecology. Some have even treated the latter as a separate sub-category under the title ecological anthropology. In later years the correlation between external ecology and social-cultural explanations has been increasingly brought forth and stressed upon. Ecology, as one of the sharper methodological tools in anthropology has contributed an additional dimension to its already existing theoretical baggage.

Cultural ecologists speak for an intimate relationship between a culture and its environment. Such an interaction is taken as natural. In cultural ecology, efforts are also directed to the study of adaptation. For Marshall D. Sahlins (1969: 367-368) "The truism that cultures are ways of life, taken in a new light, is the ground premise—cultures are human adaptations. Culture, as a design for society's continuity, stipulates its environment. By its mode of production, by the material requirements of its social structure, its standardized perceptions, a culture assigns relevance to particular external conditions. A culture molds itself to significant external conditions to maximise the life chances. There is an interchange between culture and environment, perhaps continuous dialectic interchange. The environment-culture relation need not be one to one, but environment is never, thereby a powerless

term. Societies are typically set in fields of cultural influence as well as fields of natural influence. They are subjected to both. They adapt to both". The cultural ecologists search for cultural variation in the adaptation of societies to specific environments where they live. In other words the cultural variation is explained in searching a cultural trait as adaptive in a specific physical and/or social environment. "For cultural ecologists the relationship between culture and environment is one of mutual interaction: a society's mode of ordering natural features, whether cognitively or through physical means, frequently, leads to changes in the milieu, thereby confronting the society with new challenges to adaptation. Cultural ecology does give attention to a wide spectrum of cultural activities; or to put it in theoretical terms, adaptations to environment have consequences for other areas of life" (Honigmann, 1976: 287). The science of ecology blossomed in the twentieth century. The ecological vantage point in anthropology was, however, expressed by Julian H. Steward in 1930s. Steward first demonstrated the usefulness of the concept of adaptation in the study of cultural behaviour. He expressed that culture change takes place to facilitate adaptation. According to Steward (1955: 40-41), "The method of cultural ecology involved the analysis of: (1) The interrelationship between environment and exploitative or productive technology, (2) The interrelationship between 'behaviour' patterns and exploitative technology, and (3) The extent to which those behaviour patterns affect other sectors of culture". That the culture and environment are not the separate spheres, and that they are involved in 'dialectic interplay. . . or what is called feedback or reciprocal causality', are considered as the most important contribution of Julian Steward.

The major focus in cultural ecology, with special reference to Steward's view-point remains on interactional analysis of environmental-cultural relationships. Originally, it was in the context of theory of multilineal evolution that Steward's concept and method grew. It was the notion of 'adaptive interaction' which Steward (1955) put forth and which forms basis of cultural ecology. Speaking in favour of the effectivity of cultural ecology Anderson (1973:197) explains that

“more generally, the hypothesis of the adaptation of human populations to specific environmental conditions by means of socio-cultural institutions or behaviour has been widely employed and has produced interesting interpretations”.

Anthropologists divide the universe of culture into three major components viz., technological, sociological and ideological. The fundamental base of social-culture lies in man to man interaction; the material culture, on the other hand, is essentially an outcome of man's interaction with environment. Man to man interaction, in this case, occupies a secondary place. Man's capacity and equipment to exploit the environment determine the level of technology, a major ingredient of material culture. The nature of material objects and material way of living, possessed by a group of people are also, many times, considerably directed by the environments around. The argument is more true in case of physically and socially less exposed situations. Exposed groups have, through culture contact, imbibed some material culture traits of the outsiders. Tribal, and for that matter even the non-tribal communities, inhabiting interior and outlying areas, have greater relationship of dependence on local environments. Their material ways of living represent their adaptability to native surroundings. Innumerable examples, in this context, can be cited from various parts of the country, and even globe, posing varied environments and variety of ethnic groups. Tools, implements, containers, food, dress and decoration, house type etc., establish relationship, many times, with the environments, around. This also explains how man exploits the environments, and how environments condition or direct man to go about for particular kind of objects and their styles.

Now the point at issue, in the present attempt, is whether the kind of phenomena, explained above, can be seen, as of relevance, in the purview of social culture. To some extent, it can certainly be identified—its degree depends on the nature of eco-system. While conducting research work, of an empirical nature, on the life and culture of Ladakhis of Western Himalayas, I could form a chain of conceptions:

1. That man's interaction with man is not always inde-

pendent of environmental conditions. Or, that man's relation with man, in certain situations, can be better understood when man's relation to environment is comprehended.

2. That the nature of association, say through social groupings, has something to do with the ecology.
3. That some social institutions seek support from physical conditions prevalent around.
4. That certain cultural elements or items support their outcome, in typical forms, from the particular kind of non-human conditions around.
5. That man's adaptation to external ecology is a vital process even in shaping forms of socio-cultural designs for living.
6. That the imposing natural conditions make the human beings culturally adjusted through involving suitable cultural matrix.

(It may, however, be made clear that it is not always, and in all cases, that the natural phenomena alone have a say in social culture. Some social, economic, historical and religious factors, too, find a place. My presentation, however is an attempt to explore and explain the external environment in the context of certain elements of Ladakhi cultural milieu).

Ladakh, geographically speaking, is characterised by high altitude (height ranging from 9000 to 14000 feet above sea level where human habitations are found), snow-covered hill peaks, hills of loose and crumbling sand, absence of forest vegetation (trees are hardly seen except in some valleys), scarcity of rains (annual average rain fall hardly goes beyond three inches), rarified air and scorching sun rays causing dryness, fast winds and arid conditions, dry chill very thin snowfall and that too on hill tops, scarcity of oxygen, extremely low temperature (going as low as -30°C at some places), narrow valleys with some rivers and tributaries, paucity of cultivable land, bridle paths, physical isolation, very low population density (1.7 persons per square mile). The moment one crosses Zojila or Rohtang, one enters into quite a different kind of geographical world. Zojila and other high ranges of hills curtail the entry of monsoon into Ladakh.

The region gives a barren and desolated look. Life, under such external conditions is mighty hard and difficult. However, people have been surviving there for centuries under remarkable adjustment and adaptation, including social one. This reflects in man-society-culture-nature relationship.

In Ladakhi families, the interpersonal relations are unusually free of inhibitions and constraints. Most of the members, in a family, have free and frank discourse for any kind of issue. In their talking, mixing, eating, drinking, singing, dancing etc., the restrictions are hardly reported. Factors like age, sex and kinship are not imposing to curtail the liberty in behaviour of the individuals. Veiling of face, in case of women, is absent and the members, in a family, can talk to each other without the slightest hesitation. Elements of privacy and reservations are missing. When probed into this aspect of Ladakhi way of life, it was responded that they cannot hold prohibitions in this sphere as they have to interact closely. So much so that all members of family have to sleep in the same room, that has kitchen, to keep themselves warm. Because of the severe winter, all share the same room, having fire burning inside, at least in winter season. Fire in separate rooms cannot be afforded because of an extreme shortage of wood. Ladakh is devoid of vegetation, including trees. Thus, there is no alternative but to share a common room. Members of family sleep all around the fire-place. Privacy is not bothered for. The common room is also the place where they indulge in sex. Such a condition may have been one of the reasons why sex is not valued with the feeling of sanctity. Pre-and-extra marital sex relations are of frequent occurrence. These are not taken with any kind of seriousness. The social problems, connected with sex, are also not many.

Like the intra-family relations, the pattern of family structure too, is subject to the difficult living conditions in Ladakh. As per the Ladakhi's explanation, the family corresponds to household. The latter have two major types, born of particular kind of trend which is geared up by the demand of external ecology. The major household, in the insiders' view, is called Khangchen. It consists of a man, his wife and unmarried children when they all live in the an-

cestoral house. Another household, known as Khaon, comes into being after sometime of the marriage of one or more sons. Normally it is created when the married son gets a child. In such an event, the father and mother of the married son get separated and establish the family unit of Khaon. In the household, they are also joined by the unmarried sons and daughters who, too, leave the Khangchen. In Khangchen are left only the married son/sons, their wife/wives and unmarried children. Separation of this kind, in Ladakhi families, is customary with deep roots into geographical conditions. Under the hard conditions, prevalent in Ladakh, all able-bodied persons have to work hard for their existence and survival. Except the small children and invalid ones, the rest are not conventionally permitted to live as dependents on others. As the married sons have to look after their own children, the parents and their unmarried children, if any, have to earn, through hard work, for their respective existence. Dependence is totally discouraged so long as a person is capable of doing some work. Separated members, constituting Khaon, are given some agriculture land and livestock. They bank upon the same and thus avoid being a burden on their sons and their wives. The parents, under the system, put in hard toil till they breathe last.

Other than the above structural arrangement is a feature that has again a bearing with the composition of family. Even when no birth or death is reported in a family, its size, in large number of cases, is found differing in summer and winter months. Components of family are large, in number, in winter months. This is because most of the members, then, stay in their villages. But in summer months a large number of people move out of the village with their flocks of goats and sheep. The latter are taken to still higher altitudes for grazing. The approach of summer causes melting of snow at higher elevations where more grazing grounds and material are then available. For nearly five months, the Ladakhis, with their herds, migrate to greater heights stage by stage. Then they gradually start returning with the fall of winter month, and thus finally join their family members who were left behind. Such course of migration is well-defined for all.

The songs and dances of Ladakhis are of extremely slow

nature. They are never fast. Songs are normally duats; when one sings a line, the other relaxes by keeping quiet and vice-versa. In dancing, the movement of body and legs are smooth and slow. Generally the Ladakhis avoid brisk movements. Things have been so adjusted that they involve minimum of exertion. Any over-exertion in the heights of Ladakh is risky to the life. Because of high elevation and absence of sufficient vegetation, the oxygen content in the air is less. Constant physical exertion makes one tired and exhausted very soon. Breathlessness is often reported because one has to breathe faster to inhale the required quantity of oxygen. In order to overcome such difficulties, Ladakhis have devised ways to avoid constant and over-exertion. Slow actions, in various forms, help it out. People have adjusted their ways accordingly. Likewise, the adverse effects, caused by severe dryness, are greatly avoided by the neutralizing effect of excessive use of butter. An average Ladakhi consumes a number of cups of butter-tea everyday.

In certain areas of Ladakhi customary laws, the intervention of eco-system cannot be lost sight of. At times it appears that the very formation of social law is ecology-based. People, it seems, were, at one stage, conditioned to do it so that their adjustment with some of the ecological situations is made possible. The rule of primogeniture can be quoted as one such example. This kind of inheritance pattern was coined more because of the small cultivable land-holdings. The latter, under the law, are kept unfragmented. Otherwise, any fragmentation of small holdings would make them economically quite unviable. As the agriculture produce, under the climatic conditions of Ladakh, is already less, any fragmentation may further reduce it. Primogeniture could be one protective legislation to the same. And this is one way of how the Ladakhis could make maximum use of the limited land resource.

Certain areas, connected to the social institution of marriage are also interpreted in the light of eco-system. One important of these is the custom of polyandry. Instances of fraternal polyandry are reported in case of Ladakhis. As many as three brothers can be found sharing a common wife. One interpretation in regard to the origin and existence of

the custom is connected to the physical conditions. Almost inhospitable geographical conditions, coupled with limited resources, could not sustain population rise to a large extent. The Ladakhis were made to realise that polyandry could be helpful in curbing population. In case of keeping individual wife, the number of children, in a family, would be more. The custom of polyandry would have been further suitable because the sex urge, in the freezing temperature of Ladakh, would not have been that demanding. At the same time, the custom went well in consonance with the law of primogeniture. When brothers share a common wife, and when the eldest one is inheriting the land and other property, there was no alternative left but to live together. In any case, the focus has been on avoiding the division of land. In this respect, the force of primogeniture was augmented by the polyandrous practice. Polyandry keeps both, the brothers and the land, united. Under the circumstances one explanation is that polyandry grew to meet the need of adaptation of human beings to the difficult geographical conditions. The practice of Phorsak, an additional husband other than the real brother, has had a similar root. To meet the challenge to difficult conditions, help could be better taken of a man, in various economic activities, when he was associated, in a recognised way, as an additional husband. It was practised where a man had no brother but needed an additional hand for working. Under the lately changing conditions, such practices are fast declining. The additional husbands have been having all privileges of the seniormost husband. Under the customs of polyandry and Phorsak, a large number of women were left unmarried (It may be mentioned that among the Ladakhis, the women are more in proportion to men). As an adjustment, such females were absorbed in the monasteries. They took vows of celibacy in the name of their dedication to religion; religion has a big say and force in Ladakh. In a way, the religion has also been helpful in boosting up such customs, for ultimate adaptation of people to the geographical conditions. Even at a direct plain, the religious institutions subscribed to the population control through the introduction of practice of dedication of the youngest son, in family, to the monastery. He joined Lamahood and could

never go in for marriage.

Some of the taboos, which the Ladakhis observe, and which are linked to various ways of life establish relationship with the environmental conditions. One such taboo forms part of birth and death rites. When a person dies, his or her spouse is prohibited from crossing the small water channels found in the village. The restriction is for a period of one month after the cremation is over. The same taboo holds true after the delivery of a woman. The woman who has delivered the child, as also her husband who stays only inside the house with her for at least seven days, are tabooed to move out and cross the water channels. The period, immediately following birth and death, is treated as unclean. Crossing water channels, under such condition, would be annoying to the gods responsible for water provision in those heights. These gods are believed to cause snow-fall. From the melting of snows is obtained water, that flows through channels, used for drinking and irrigation. The other sources, especially for drinking, are springs which, too, are believed to be protected by gods. The explanation that the gods alone manage to give them water, and that the same can cause its scarcity, if annoyed, and the connected taboos to take care of them are only as warning signals to the people to be careful in the use of water. Also, to see that it is not at all wasted. Such considerations are needed because water is one of the precious items in those heights. Even bigger worships are arranged to ensure supply of water and to get more snow-fall on hill tops. All kinds of life in water is protected. The best way to see that water sources are properly respected and cared, and the water is miserly used has been at the root of recognition of water gods and their fear through the taboos, as discussed. Ladakhis have to be very careful of the use of water because it is not available in sufficient quantity. Rainfall is extremely low, springs are rare and small, dryness takes away some water, and in winter even the rivers and tributaries, whatever they are, get frozen.

The practices connected with the disposal of dead are very intimately linked to the local environments. The relationship involves elements of adaptation as well as compulsion. The variation in practices goes with altitude, isolation, vege-

tation, fast winds and season. Even the major custom of disposal of dead varies. In the villages, at highest elevation, there is no custom of cremation. Rather, the deadbody is cut into pieces and thrown on the top of adjoining hill. But if one dies in summer months when the rivers, if they are in the vicinity, are not frozen, the pieces of deadbody are thrown into the river. Cremation is not resorted to by the highlanders because the fuel-wood, for the purpose, is not available. At higher elevations, one hardly comes across trees. As the inhabitants, at lower altitude, can manage for some fuel-wood, as some trees are grown there in the valleys, they go in for cremation. But because the trees are not many, the Ladakhis have devised particular style of cremation in which minimum possible wood is used. Tied with ropes, the deadbody is arranged in a sitting posture. In this position, the deadbody is then fixed in a hollow space made in a solid stony structure, square in shape. Such a structure is closed from all sides except on top from where the body is inserted into it. There is a small opening at the bottom of the structure. From this are inserted pieces of burning wood to dispose of the body. The structure is so built that every bit of fire's flame is purposefully utilised. The target-area of the body is also squeezed to the smaller size. At the same time, the interference of fast wind, that blows in Ladakh, is avoided because the structure breaks the same and does not allow it to disturb the flames of fire.

Among the Ladakhis has been reported a typical kind of social group. Its formation is not based on age, sex and kinship. Rather it is a collection of families who worship a common god. Such a group is termed as Phasphun and includes only a manageable number of families. The major function of Phasphun is to ensure mutual help and cooperation. The members of such a social group help one another on festive as well as sad occasions, especially on occasions of birth, marriage and death. As a matter of fact certain functions are reserved only for the members of Phasphun, and they alone do it for each other. For instance, the deadbody, so long as it is detained in the house, prior to cremation, is taken care of by the Phasphun members of the bereaved family. The relationship of this nature is obligatory on the

part of members. For generations, the families continue to belong to particular Phasphun. Their solidarity is maintained through the annual worship of common god. However, any family, say when its members shift to some other village, can leave a Phasphun group. New ones, too, can be admitted if the size, in the eyes of the members, remains within limits. Beyond family, the Phasphun group is most effective. All Ladakhi families must belong to one or the other Phasphun group. Under the cultural heritage of Ladakhis, and under the kind of geographical conditions, prevalent in Ladakh, no family can maintain itself without being affiliated to a Phasphun group. The formation of such a group is stated to be an outcome of the compulsion of eco-system. Living under the hard and difficult conditions, people always require help and cooperation from fellow beings. One source of getting it may be the relatives connected through blood and marriage. But this too is not considered very reliable. The other source which people have created to meet the challenge of hard conditions is the group of families united under a common god and committed to defined functions under His fear. This source assumed a more reliable form because of the involvement of supernatural element. By all means, people adhere to their commitments to ease each other's difficulties under very severe climatic cover.

It may be mentioned that for the last nearly two decades, the district of Ladakh has been fast thrown open to outsiders. Places of importance have already been connected through roads. A regular communication has been established with other important trade centres of the country. As a consequence of such conditions, as also of some others, a large influx of population into Ladakh has occurred. Thousands of people, either in services or trade, have come to Ladakh. The contact of local population with the non-Ladakhis is of such an intimate nature that it was never so before. Culture contact with other ethnic groups has become comparatively more regular. Development of Ladakh, for various purposes, has created employment opportunities of various kinds. Employment has been given to thousands of Ladakhis. Outsiders have generated many new sources of earning and income. People have not merely to be dependent on the tradi-

tional sources. Many new and alternative items are now available. Supply of things, needed in day-to-day life, no longer remains of a poor order. Programme of formal education has vast expanded. A good network of communication, through roads and transport, has been created. Things which the Ladakhis, under traditional conditions, could not imagine have happened. With the advanced technology of outsiders, some of the impossibles, under native perception, have been made possible. Income of Ladakhis has largely increased.

Under the rise of conditions, mentioned above, man-nature relationship has also shown some changes. The trend of this kind has, then, subsequently reflected on man's works i.e. culture. In some of the cultural traits, outlined in this paper, the earlier rigid adherence has, to some extent, been shaken. The difficulties, posed by the hard natural conditions, that had say in the cultural elements, are not exactly realised in the traditional style alone. The relief to the same, provided through man-made environment and new opportunities, has had its place in the matter. Now, with more awareness, money, availability of things, alternative occupations, and mobility, people do not always esteem phenomena around in the old spirit. In some cases, the natural conditions do not sound that imposing because of the viable alternatives to which the people recourse to. Polyandry is showing a declining trend; some roles or activities in family, Phusphun etc., are, at times, not strictly observed because of the growing economic independence; taboos have been coming hard because many people cannot remain confined within the house for long as they have to go on duty, when in employment. However, the permanency of old arrangement and adjustment still goes strong in comparison to new forms, under new conditions, which are yet to be properly crystalised into regular ways. But at the same time, the picture of transitional phase is not to be lost sight of for the purpose of academic interpretation.

In the methodology of anthropology, therefore, cultural ecological approach has an important place. It provides an effective tool, in addition to others, for the study and analysis of cultural milieu. Some aspects of social system do establish a relationship with one or the other component of eco-system

around. The specific situation, discussed in this paper, is again a support to the argument that a social system, in comparatively more isolation, is closely understood through such a methodology. On the other hand, an exposed system where new things, ideas and technology have been brought in, does not appeal to be in that close association with the natural conditions around. Then the man's relation with the environment takes a slight turn. This, in turn, reflects upon the relevant cultural items; the latter lack support and show signs of deterioration from their original shape and magnitude. In other words, man-culture-nature relationship is more revealing and intact where innovations have not gone down deep. There, this method of studying social-cultural phenomena is of a great use. Such a claim, however, does not mean that under the conditions of change, the method ceases to be functional.

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ECOLOGICAL BEARING IN THE RELIGIOUS MILIEU OF THE GARHWAL HIMALAYA

JITENDRA SINGH

Despite its strict technical usage to elucidate the process of interaction between nature and living beings, the concept of 'ecology' now-a-days is often used interchangeably with 'environment'. Of the multiple constraints, peculiar to Himalayan ecology, altitude, gradient, snow, rainfall, wind and temperature are some noteworthy factors and their composite or individual effect create an impact—positive and negative, among the inhabitants. They feel constant insecurity due to dangerous tracks, forests full of lurking beasts, varieties of natural upheavals, climatic extremes, crop failure, disease and death etc., different factors of their habitat. These elements of insecurity at every step have made Himalayans to be God-fearing. They are so scared of their ecological setting that even the sound produced by the breeze on the dry leaves in the lonely forests is enough to accept the presence of some malevolent spirit. In this manner the Himalayans ought to perceive a number of deities and spirits, one behind each of the ecological happenings and place them in their pantheon. Likewise liturgy, shrines, religious performances, specialists and ideology etc., various aspects of religion in Garhwal Himalaya reflect ecological bearing.

The present article aims to delineate different elements of ecology responsible for originating faith in deities and liturgy

adopted for sacred performances, in Garhwal Himalaya, as evident from the field studies from Badeti, Deora and Dharali villages of Uttarkashi district of Uttar Pradesh.

Geo-physical background

The district of Uttarkashi is a part of erstwhile Native Kingdom of Garhwal, and belongs to Central Himalaya, having a tangled series of mountain ridges with innumerable spurs separated by narrow valleys. The mountain ridges radiate from a lofty series of peaks bordering Tibet at the height of 20,000 to 23,000 feet above sea level. Snow melt water and rain water is drained by a number of streams and rivulets, which together give rise to three main river systems—the Bhagirathi, the Yamuna and the Tons and three synonymous valleys. The valleys are deep and narrow and mountain ridges have steep gradients.

On the basis of rainfall, elevation, wind and temperature etc., variants, the habitable mountain area of the district is to be categorised into three broad vertically graded climatic zones. The first being the lower altitude (below 4,000 ft.) or the Monsoon zone with tropical climate; the second is the middle altitude (between 4,000 to 7,000 feet) or the Monsoon zone with temperate climate, and the third the high altitude (above 7,000 ft.) or the Arid zone with colder climate. During summers everywhere the places exposed to sun become warm at the day time while nights are cold throughout. Snowfall occurs as low as 4,000 ft., in winters.

Interplay of local configuration and climate is largely responsible for the variation in seasons in the three altitudes. In middle and lower altitudes there are three seasons—the *Sitkal* (winter, October to mid February), the *Rudi* (Summer, mid February to mid June), and the *Vaskal* (rains, mid June to September). However, in middle altitude *Sitkal* persists a little longer and *Rudi* lessens. But high altitudes enjoy only two seasons—the long spell of *Sitkal* or *Heund* (October to mid April) and summer or spring in the rest months of the year.

Ecological Basis of Garhwali Religion

Several climato-ecological constraints of the Himalayan

topography outlined in the preceding paragraph incessantly affect the cultural milieu of the people, of which religion is a part. Religious faiths and practices evolved as natural instincts of adjustment against the adverse environmental conditions prevail at every nook and corner of the habitat. Usually, the ecological factors and happenings beyond the controlling capacity of mankind are thought to be controlled by supernatural forces, which are deified and perceived in the forms of deities, manes and other benevolent or malevolent spirits. They are diligently propitiated or appeased by placing them in pantheon and arranging regular offerings to ward off the dangers associated with their influence on one hand and on the other to secure prosperity, progeny, health and happiness.

Ecology Oriented Deification

Ecological bases for deification and beliefs, specific to each supernatural force are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Rocky ridges of Garhwal Himalaya present steep gradients of uneven surface having a few metres of soil crusts on these and that too is highly erosion-prone. All the activities of life including habitations and food producing strategies solely rest on the soil. Realizing the utmost importance of soil and instable surfaces, people have deified it in the form of *Bhumia* or *Matia* and placed in their pantheon. The deity *Bhumia* or *Matia* protects soil erosion and land-slides during seismic thrusts and excessive rains etc., natural calamities.

Visiting over *Danda* or *Kantha* (mountain tops) for tending cattle, collecting fuel and fodder and other items is a routine work of the Himalayans. But these tops are lonely, insecure and full of a kind of fragrant air, which make the visitors unconscious. To cope with such circumstances, people believe in a supernatural force called *Pari*, and offer the offerings when people feel the attack of *Pari*.

People of Garhwal have long association with *Dhangaar* (mountain slopes), where they live, walk, play and do agriculture, always retain the risk of slipping down hundreds and thousands of feet below the surface where death is inevitable. To avert these unexpected incidences, Goddess *Matri* or

Achhri is worshipped.

Multiplicity of *Khala* (ditches) and *Gadhera* (rivules) in the Himalayan topography has again created troubles and life risks for the people and cattle, where they usually visit for different purposes. To overcome troubles associated with these phenomena people believe in *Jharmand* and place in their pantheon.

Places like *Margad* (graveyard) and confluence of rivers are believed to be very fearsome because these are frequented by demons and spirits which harm the people passing nearby. To save themselves from these miscreants, people appease the deity *Bhainrav* and give timely offerings.

Garhwal is full of forests and they are the part and parcel of the life of the people. They largely depend on the forests for the supply of fuel, fodder, building material, medicinal herbs, honey, gum, spices, fruits, berries and roots etc., many important forest produces. Besides, forests give shelter to a variety of animals and birds which are the constant source of meat and other valuable products to cater local needs. For this inseparable dependence on the forests, people have placed these as deity *Banakya* in their pantheon and worship for appeasement.

Mountain topography with its enormous vegetation and caves provides suitable habitat to flourish a great variety of animals and harmful creatures. To get rid of the lethal attacks of these wild animals on themselves and their domesticated cattle, people worship a deity called *Narsingh*.

Abundance of snakes and other poisonous creatures in the Himalaya is always a terror for its people and cattle. To get rid of snake bites and the bites of other poisonous creatures God *Nagraja* is appeased by the offerings of milk and milk products. It is believed that the deity also protects cattle, increases their progeny and milk in them.

Being the homeland of vegetation the Himalaya also houses varieties of Bacteria and virus which cause different types of diseases in human beings and cattle in which dangerousmost are epidemic because they dispeople the villages. For the effective control of such diseases Goddess *Kalka* is propitiated by placing in pantheon and dedicating different offerings.

Long Himalayan winters, during which most of the territories remain frozen under heavy crusts of snow and the rest face chilly cold, completely paralysing the life of the people. This ordeal is finished by the warmth of the rays of the sun, so people attribute additional importance to sun and place it as Sun-God in their pantheon and appease through various performances.

Incidences of *Gola* (hail-storm) and thunder bolt are very frequent in Garhwal Himalaya. They ruin life and crops within shorter time. To have an effective check over such natural occurrences deity *Bijar* is worshipped at regular intervals.

Himalayan eco-system is very treacherous and creates critical conditions through sudden earth-quakes, floods and draughts. To combat these conditions lord *Shiv* is worshipped and appeased. Lord *Shiv* brings rain, stops flood and seismic thrusts.

The vast and tough territories of Himalaya are very calm and quiet. In utter silence lone individual even in his house feels the presence of some invisible forces. These forces, it is said are malignant and termed as *Bhut* and are propitiated when someone feels their influence.

Ecology Oriented Liturgy

Like religious beliefs, liturgy too emanates ecological elements. Liturgy followed to observe rituals in Garhwal is almost similar for all excepting the nature of offerings. The most striking feature is the practice of exorcism and predictions about the happenings of nature with whom Himalayan life is tagged. Playing of different types of games, and days and nights long collective dances of *Raso* and *Tado* regardless of sex and age are other notable features. All these constitute essential part of the rituals, besides, the offering of flower, milk, water, incense, Akshat, Diva, Halwa, Puri etc., arranged by common contributions or efforts on village level as in Badeti and Dharali or on Patti level as in Deora.

Playing of competitive strenuous and lithargic games during rituals such as *Genda* and *Hindoda* traditional to Deora and *Badta todo*, *Latha todo*, *Bhela* or *Ola* (fire play) in all places, lays emphasis and encourages people to keep their bodies fit and energetic to sustain hazardous mountain life.

These games also provide people with a source of entertainment in monotonous mountain life. Likewise ritual dances and songs of different kind, give people enough entertainment and rejoicing. During dances people forget all sorts of worries ecological or otherwise and feel fresh and ready to combat with the adversities of their terrain. The chilly nights of winters, when atmosphere remains frozen, is passed by such dances around fire-places. The month of *Poos* (Dec-Jan) has a chain of festivities in continuation for nine days. These nine days are passed by enjoying lavish dishes and various enjoyments to lessen the harshness of climate.

The time of the performance of most of the religious rituals mark climatic changes, and natural happenings. The rituals conducted on the *Sankranti* (1st day) of each month mark the passage of Sun from one constellation to another. Although each Sankranti day in Garhwal is considered to be ritually important still the *Bissu* the Sankranti of *Mekh* in the month of Baisakh and *Makravan*—the Sankranti of *Makar* in the month of Magh have greater importance. Because they respectively mark *Dakshinayan* (winter solstice) and *Uttarayan* (summer solstice)—the two important seasonal conditions. Since *Uttarayan* heralds an increase in day span and consequently warmer days to break ice-cold ordeal of winters, it is welcomed by celebrating festivals for nine days in continuation in the month of *Poos*.

Similarly, festival of lights marks onset of winter season. In the lower and middle altitude the festival of lights is called as *Baqwal* and celebrated for two days from 14th to 15th of *Kartik* i.e., Amavas. But the festival of lights in high altitude is known as *Shelku* and celebrated quite earlier for two days from *Bhadon Masant* to *Asoj Sankranti*, in the similar pattern.

Nag Raja is worshipped two times, once on any Wednesday (June-July) and second time in the month of *Sravan* (July-August), on *Nag Panchmi* day. Both the times mark rainy season, when snakes and other poisonous creatures usually come out of their hides and loitre on the surface. This is the time of their mating also. So, for obvious natural reasons they become furious and to avoid their bites deity Nag Raja is appeased at proper time.

Likewise, other deities which are responsible for different

ecological constraints are also propitiated before the time of happenings and in very few cases after the occurrence of accidents in their topography for the effective control of further incidences.

Attributing special importance to exorcistic performances in Garhwal also reflects ecological grounds. The hazardous terrain, they cover to reach rivers for sacred dip along with their deity palanquine and come back to religious shrines is really very challenging task for the Himalayans. Such strenuous ventures are eased when they are possessed with the charge of their pet spirits. When charge of the deity possesses people, they take palanquine of deity on their shoulder and turn towards destination and they are followed by the villagers who for simple curiosity forget or say overlook the risks and fatigue of their way. The exorcistic performances taken into account in Garhwal are Pandav Nantch, Dhol, Doli, Jagar, Ghadyala and Bedarth Radana. They are performed to avoid natural calamities, diseases, and unwanted natural risks. These performances provide good entertainment to people, who enjoy these ignoring crucial factors of ecology. The exorcists when possessed with charge of deity are considered to be similarly powerful and people have deep faith in their oracles as regards to natural upheavals, disturbances, diseases, epidemics etc., All the exorcistic practices have their oracular tradition. The oracles are symbolized and these symbols are interpreted by the experts to public to understand the future happenings of their habitat. They also speak of remedies to get rid of those natural calamities by propitiating responsible deities.

Concluding Remarks

Ecological constraints of different nature prevailing in the Himalayas have largely been responsible for the formulation of a type of cause and effect belief for the origin of different natural phenomena based deities, and liturgy in Garhwal. The deities are propitiated through rituals which not only provide relief to people from the natural calamities and diseases but also give entertainment in that monotonous terrain. Different types of games and exorcistic and oracular performances are the part of Garhwali rituals. The games played at the times

of ritual encourage people to do hard work and to keep their bodies fit to encounter Himalayan hazards. The tradition of exorcism and oracle, which constitute the essential features of religion in Garhwal undoubtedly originated on the basis of ecological factors and practiced to forecast natural happenings around which their life revolves.

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