

# THE HIMALAYAS



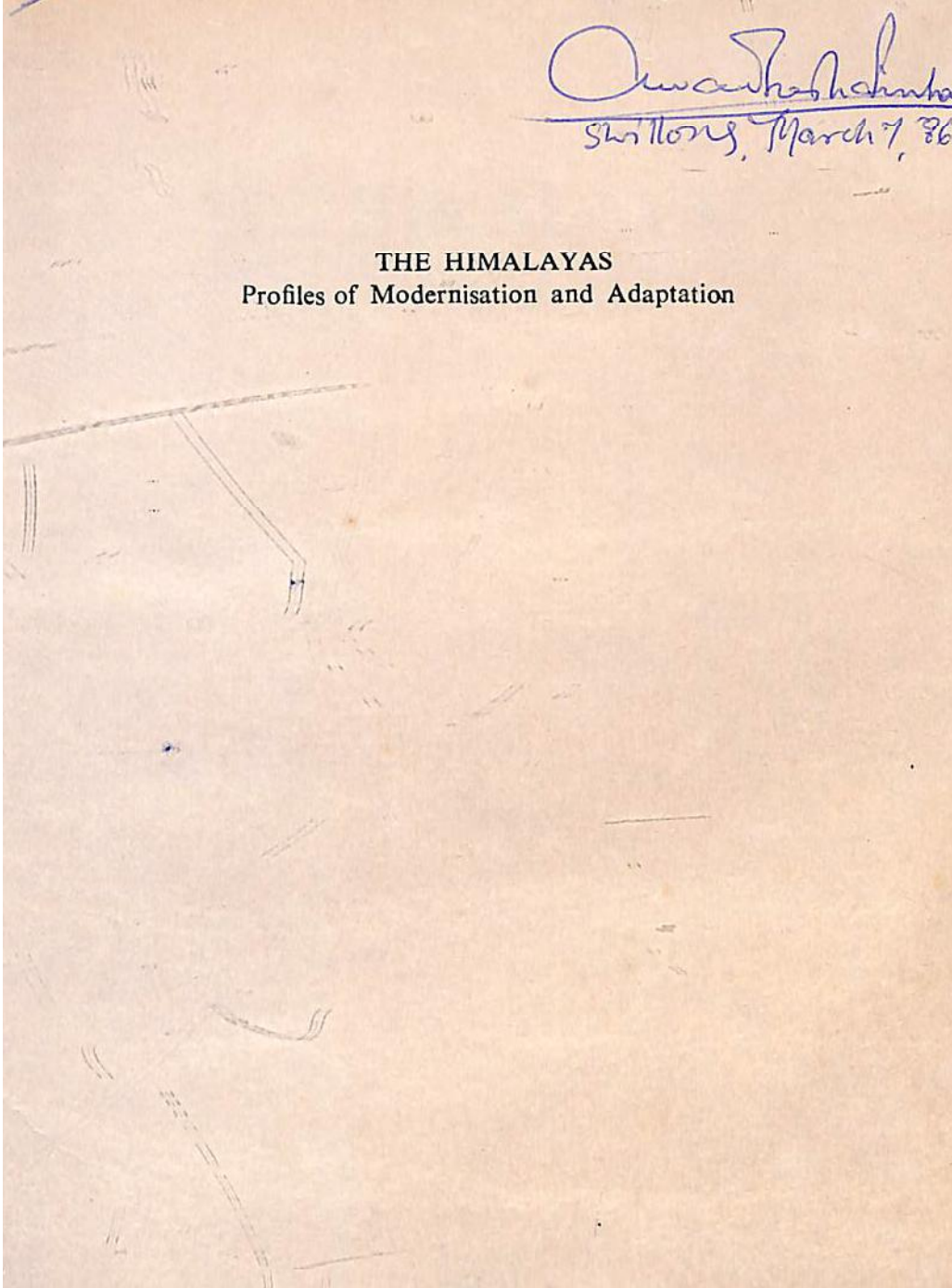
## Profiles of Modernisation and Adaptation

*Edited by*  
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**THE HIMALAYAS**  
Profiles of Modernisation and Adaptation



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## PREFACE

This volume contains revised versions of most of the papers written for the seminar on 'Modernization and Adaptation in the Himalayas, with special reference to the Eastern Himalayas' held at the Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal.

The objectives of the seminar, held with assistance from the University Grants Commission, were (1) to systematize the available social scientific data on the theme, (2) to examine the prospects of further social scientific research in the field, and (3) to help formulate specific proposals for further research by preventing duplication and overlapping. The thematic foci of the seminar were the following:

- (1) *Ecological*, involving the impact of the modernizing (including demographic) trends on the Himalayan-ecology and, vice versa, the impact of ecological changes on the health, economy and social systems of the Himalayan peoples.
- (2) *Socio-economic*, involving the emergence of socio-economic forces out of the efforts at modernization, such as urbanization, growth of literati, role of trade and commerce as well as of the development agencies.
- (3) *Institutional*, involving achievements and problems of the processes of nation-building, the crucial role of the government and religious institutions.

The seminar, as will be found, fulfilled the objectives only partially because of the paucity of data and also because of paucity of time on the part of scholars engaged in Himalayan studies. A few scholars in fact could not be physically present in

the seminar. The volume therefore may reflect thematic inconsistency with regard to *all* the regions even within the Eastern Himalayas. Assuming, however, a relative uniformity all over this difficult and backward region, the readers may see some justification in the publication of this volume.

The editor has taken some liberty in organizing the papers in terms of the thematic and the area approaches. The first paper in this volume is by the editor. It is a note circulated in the seminar placing studies of this nature in the Himalayas in a historical perspective. The next two papers mainly offer a geographical view of the Himalayan societies, one generally, one specifically (with reference to Bhutan).

The next three papers relate to the ecological problems resulting from modernization. The first wave of modernity probably came to the Himalayas in the form of tea plantations. More recently, the Himalayas are subjected to the onslaught of tourism, of the more exotic variety than that of traditional pilgrimage. The sixth paper deals with ecology and 'tea' holds a crucial position in the ecology as well as economy of the Darjeeling Himalayas.

The seventh paper deals with the demographic trends in the Darjeeling hill areas since their colonization, and highlights the stagnation that has set in since the advent of crisis condition in the tea industry. A significant point about the high rate of immigration is its Nepal component. Absorption of Nepali immigrant families constitutes a major challenge to the decision-makers in the Eastern Himalayas and sub-Himalayan northeast India.

The eighth paper seeks to examine the adaptation of the various Nepali castes in Darjeeling to their new social condition.

Demographic pressure and economic distress ultimately leads us to the question of land reform and modernization of agriculture. The ninth, tenth and eleventh papers deal with this question.

The next three papers deal with the problems of the tribal people in the Eastern Himalayas. It should, however be noted that the term tribal has a definite legal-constitutional meaning in India. The term does not encompass the people of the sovereign state of Bhutan. The entire Nepali-speaking population in the Eastern Himalayas is outside this status with the

result that the 'tribes' in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas—the indigenous Lepcha-Bhotia people, besides a handful of tea-garden labourers—constitute only 14 per cent of the population of Darjeeling and 25 per cent of that of Sikkim. It is in Arunachal Pradesh that the Scheduled Tribes constitute 79 per cent of the population. The two slightly overlapping papers on the Totos present case studies in social change in one of the groups in the foothills who have been subjected to the chequered experience of alternating political control.

The last three papers deal with the recent processes of nation-building in the Himalayan states of Nepal and Bhutan. The first two of these emphasize the role of monarchy, while the last describes in some detail the planning strategy in Bhutan.

It is an onerous privilege of an editor to review and edit papers in a volume without having any direct responsibility for the material furnished. Considering, however, the Herculean job of compiling papers reflecting the scholarly biases of a score of contributors, the editor hopes to be excused for any flaws and deficiencies that may have crept in. He has also sincerely tried to abstain from tampering with the contents of the papers, except for avoiding repetition.

The idea of preparing this volume emanated from Shri Kartick Chatterjee of Sterling Publishers. The editor has received encouragement from Dr. P.K. Ghosh, Vice-Chancellor, University of North Bengal. Ungrudging typing assistance was provided by Shri Sushanta Kanjilal of the Centre for Himalayan Studies.

*S.K. Chaube*

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# 1

## MODERNIZATION AND ADAPTATION IN THE HIMALAYAS: A CONSPECTUS

S.K. Chaube

### **Indian Studies on the Himalayas**

It is not easy to quantify the importance of the Himalayas.<sup>1</sup> The awe and respect for the world's most majestic range of mountains in the layman's mind and the long-cherished curiosity about the region shown by explorers and natural scientists have, however, hardly been matched by social scientific interest.

While mainland India's cultural contacts with the great Himalayan regions have been fairly ancient, there is no denying that modern Indian scholarship entered the region in the footsteps of the British. Purangir Gossain's verbal report translated by Turner in 1800 may not strictly deserve the status of a scholarly treatise;<sup>2</sup> but Baboo Kishen Kant Bose's account of Bhutan is surely a standard reference work for scholars interested in Bhutan.<sup>3</sup> Colonel J. T. Walker employed two Pundits, (British subjects from the upper valley of the Himalayas) usefully in the great trigonometrical survey of India in 1866-67 which entailed travel through Nepal and Tibet.<sup>4</sup> In more recent times, Sarat Chandra Das's standard works on Tibet have sprung from his official assignments.<sup>5</sup>

Outside the official arena, Haraprasad Sastri's visit to Nepal led to important discoveries about the origins of the Bengali language. Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayana has made significant contribution to the study of not only Tibetan civilization, but also Mahayana Buddhism.

In independent India studies of the Himalayan region have proceeded along both official and non-official channels. Because



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of the political changes in the fifties, and consequent sensitivity of the border region, however, non-official studies about the Himalayan region have been staggered. There is also the problem of finance for non-official ventures in this difficult region. Among the official ventures in India, the publications under the auspices of the Arunachal Pradesh (erstwhile NEFA) administration are numerous.

Beyond the border, research has prospered greatly in Nepal due to the enlightened policy pursued by its government since the fifties. A number of Indian scholars have also been engaged in Nepal studies.

The direction taken by social science research on the Himalayas has also been changing slowly. In the British period commerce and geopolitics seem to have been the primary factors motivating research. The Tibet issue and the border conflict have, understandably, strongly drawn the attention of Indian scholars. At the same time, increasing attention has been paid towards the understanding of the Himalayan peoples and their milieu, with particular reference to their developmental problems.

### **India and the Himalayas**

Independent India has been confronted with a much more serious task than ordinary considerations of power-politics or ideological cleavage postulate. That task flows from the broader problem of nation-building which India shares with her Himalayan neighbours.

In the first place, India inherited a 1500-mile long border, much of which was unsettled. Although the concept of territorial sovereignty was distinctly a British contribution to Indian culture, the British themselves failed (or did not care) to effectively administer the entire territory upto the border that they drew up. It is important to note that except Kumaon, annexed through the Anglo-Gurkha war, and the northeast frontier tracts, the external boundaries of which were determined by the Simla Pact (1914), the entire northern border of British India was covered by the dependent states of Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal, a number of native states (Garhwal, the Simla states and Kashmir, including Ladakh) as well as a patch of territory governed as a 'tribal area' (the North Western Frontier Tract

now in Pakistan). According to the Government of India Act, 1935, a 'tribal area' was outside British India but within the executive authority of the Governor-General.<sup>7</sup> The main reason for the British desire to retain the Himalayan outlets under their direct control, according to Lamb, was the increase of trade with Tibet.<sup>8</sup>

One of the reasons for British reluctance to take over direct control of the Himalayan territory was the consideration of Chinese sensitivity.<sup>9</sup> Although the Simla convention was drawn up in 1914 out of acute geopolitical consideration, the British never took effective steps to implement it, so that, even in 1951, Tibetans were reported to be collecting taxes in Towang.<sup>10</sup>

The North Eastern Frontier Tracts were of course administered technically as an 'excluded area' from 1935. Regular administration however penetrated the hills only in 1953, when the Indian Frontier Administration Service was created and the district head-quarters shifted from the plains to the hills.<sup>11</sup> Until March 31, 1937, the district of Darjeeling was administered as 'backward district' of Bengal. The general pattern of control of the Himalayan borderland in the British period was thus that of either thinning out of administration or transfer of its responsibility to the local chiefs and Rajas.

While the integration of states after Independence went some way in removing the administrative anomaly, India acknowledged the sovereign status of Nepal and Bhutan, though the latter has still some special treaty relations with India. In 1975, Sikkim, after a democratic revolt, joined the Indian Union. The inhospitable terrain, the land-locked condition, and years of neglect, however, have left Nepal and Bhutan in much the same position as the territories bordering India in that region.

This discussion not only gives a generally dismal picture of the Himalayan region, but it also suggests a generalization of some theoretical significance. Territorial authority, at least in the developing countries, tends to thin out towards the periphery. To the same extent administrative and development interest tend to diminish and/or be indirect. Archaic socio-economic institutions tend to persist and, in turn, impede reform measures.

### **Democratization**

As the border areas tend to be administratively integrated

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with the mainland, there is a definite, though occasionally staggered, trend towards democratization. In the first place, the former native states on the Himalayan frontier of India were integrated with the mainland and democratized. The year 1975 in India is marked by, among other things, integration and democratization of Sikkim. In the same year, universal adult franchise was extended to Arunachal Pradesh. Before that, in 1969, *panchayati raj* was introduced in NEFA. *Panchayats* were working in Sikkim, before integration only at the local (village cluster) level.

Nepal and Bhutan are also taking steps for integration of their border areas. In Nepal, the despotic 'Ranashahi' was replaced by a constitutional monarchy in 1951. In 1959, a constitution was given formalizing the new system and an election held for a parliament on the basis of restricted but territorial franchise. Before the end of the next year however the parliament was dissolved. In 1963, *panchayati raj* was inaugurated there hierarchically integrating the village level administration through a number of rungs, with the central panchayat permitting no partisan representation. There is only a rudimentary non-statutory system of village authority in Bhutan through which the villages have representation in the 'Tsogdu' (the Bhutanese parliament which, of course, also consists of nominated members and monks). There is, however, no doubt about the supreme role of the monarch, either in Bhutan or in Nepal.

It is well known that the territorial panchayats encroach upon the authority of the traditional tribal or caste panchayats, and change is not easily possible. However, the pyramidal *panchayati raj* in which only the village panchayat is elected by the people and the higher authorities are elected by the lower authorities, retains much of the traditional village and caste alignments in the power structure. It is likely to suffer from, among other things, parochialism.<sup>12</sup> Most of the Indian states have a pyramidal panchayat system, but the state legislatures are independent of the panchayat system and elected directly by the people. In 1978, Arunachal Pradesh got a territorially elected Assembly. (Nepal got it in June 1981). The panchayat system in West Bengal, including the Darjeeling hill areas, is, that way, a radical departure from the neighbouring patterns.

All its rungs are elected directly by the people.

In view of the structural specialities of the panchayats, it will be worthwhile to study the extent of successes of the respective systems with the task of development in as much as panchayats have been recognized as the main democratic instruments of social mobilization. By the same token, it will be useful to examine the extent to which the panchayats are replacing the bureaucracy as the instruments of formulation and implementation of development policies in the overwhelmingly 'rural' hill areas.

### **Politics and Social Change in the Himalayas**

In essence, the entire Himalayan territory can be designated as 'backward'.<sup>13</sup> A part of this backwardness can surely be explained by the geography of the region. But a thorough understanding of the problems of the Himalayan peoples will be possible only if they are examined from the social scientific angle, and in the light of history.

It is important to note, for instance, how political changes have affected the fate of the people from time to time. The introduction of a rigid territorial border at once disrupts the traditional commercial and socio-economic ties and may also radically alter their conditions, as has happened to many of the border peoples of India not only in the Himalayas, but also in the north-east Indian states. The breakdown of traditional trade routes may lead to total disruption of a region's economy. Deprivation of the traditional means of livelihood and severance of traditional ethnic ties may reduce a border people to a hopelessly frustrated state.<sup>14</sup>

One of the profound impacts of territorial determinism falls on the distribution of river waters. The pace of modernization, at the same time, makes increasing demands on the river waters. This, along with petty crimes like smuggling, theft and robbery across the borders may jeopardize international relations. Smuggling and river water are two potential sources of tension in India-Nepal relations.

The 'internal' repercussions of political changes may be no less profound. The change in political power frequently leads to change in the pattern of dominance, not only of classes but also (frequently, along with) ethnic groups. It has been found that

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one of the tendencies of the politically less-privileged groups is to scatter away from the centre of power. There appears to be an increased rate of emigration to other countries among such people.<sup>15</sup> The emigres, moreover, tend to settle in the border areas of their 'new countries', thus creating new problems in their host countries.<sup>16</sup>

Politics is of course one of the causes of migration, along with several other socio-economic and ecological factors which need to be studied before a broad pattern of migrations can be determined. There is no denying, however, that in the colonial and post-colonial era, politics has played a crucial role in shaping the demography of the hill regions.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Tradition—Modernity Duality**

If 'modernization is the central tendency of our times;<sup>18</sup> politics provides the key to such modernization in the developing countries. The Himalayan regions attract the attention of the social scientists not only as a geo-politically critical area but also as an arena for testing their competence for tackling the challenge of development.

In the post-colonial period, politics has played the most profound part in developmental efforts. As private enterprise in the Himalayan region is proverbially shy, except in plantations, Government has a great deal to do in regenerating the economics of the regions. The India-China border war has drawn the attention of the Government to the problems of the Himalayan regions. There is a substantial emphasis on the development of the road and communication system in the border. Money economy has penetrated into the remotest parts of the hills, and cash exchange is rapidly replacing the barter system of the old. Communal ownership of land is gradually yielding place to private rights as terracing increases in pace. There seems to be a slow improvement in life expectancy, though a thorough study of health and diseases in the hills is yet to be made.

Reduced mortality partly offsets the benefits of reduced immigration in this region as far as the ecological balance is concerned. The greater damage to nature in this part of the world has of course been caused by the rapid pace of modernization, through urbanization, tourism, deforestation and even unplanned cultivation of the hill surface.

This places a critical problem before policy planners. Modernization is of course aimed at promoting human welfare. Unplanned destruction of natural resources, on the other hand, is ultimately prejudicial to human survival itself.

While unplanned destruction of natural resources should, and can be checked by rigorous governmental measures, enough damage has already been done. At the same time, increasing demographic pressure will remain a permanent challenge to the policy planners. Checking wanton destruction of nature will, therefore, not be sufficient. It will be necessary to plan for continuous regeneration of the natural resources in the depleted areas.

The classical dualism of tradition and modernity reappears as the dominant theme of social scientific studies of the Himalayas. The traditional societies are believed to have evolved their own equation with nature and indigenous shock-absorbing institutions which enabled them to adjust themselves to slow changes. It is believed that their ways of exploitation of nature can hardly disturb the ecology or deplete the natural resources. The two social institutions which have served as most effective stabilizers are political authority and religion.

While the veracity of each of these statements may be subject to examination, there is no denying that the pace of change and the number of options are so great that the traditional societies find it impossible for their time-honoured norms and institutions to maintain stability. Demographic growth and monetization are putting relentless pressure on their traditional economy. New types of social differentiation are weakening their erstwhile solidarity. Political authority now appears to be partisan even when it acts as a modernizer. Indigenous religious faiths are under the pressure of competitive 'great religions'. A study of the processes through which the Himalayan societies adapt themselves to the transformation will not only enrich the social sciences, but also be a significant contribution to policy-planning.

#### **Need for a Forum**

The Himalayan regions are not exceptional in respect of the tradition-modernity dualism. They are, however, special in the following ways:

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1. The topography of the region makes the task of the policy-makers challenging.
2. They are very important for the countries concerned with them.
3. They have been neglected too long to wait for attention.

The seminar on modernization and adaptation in the Himalayas with special reference to the Eastern Himalayas was conceived largely with a view to gathering social scientists from India and her Himalayan neighbours to focus attention on the problems of the Himalayan region. As the new perception of the Himalayas as a mosaic of several cultures replaces the ancient veneration of it as an abode of the gods, social scientists become increasingly aware of the wind of modernization that is coming over such societies. It becomes imperative on the social scientists concerned with the region to study the impacts of the developmental activities that started over three decades back, the consequent tensions and the ways that local people adjust themselves to the challenges. The forum opened will, let us hope, continue for the sake of not only knowledge but also its utilization for the benefit of the peoples who live in this attractive but difficult region of the world.

### Notes and References

1. 'The geographical feature which dominates India most is the Himalayas'. K.M. Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1959, p. 47.
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3. Babu Kishen Kant Bose's 'Account of Bhutan' (1815) was published in Ashley Eden's, *Political Missions to Bhutan*, first published in 1865 and reprinted, Delhi, Manjushri Publishing House, 1972.
4. See Clements R. Markham (ed), *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa*, London, Trubner & Co., 1879, pp. cix—cxv.
5. See Sarat Chandra Das, *Autobiography: Narratives of the Incidents of My Early Life*, Calcutta, Indian Studies, Past and Present, 1969,
6. See the 'Preface' in Shibani Kinkar Chaube, *Hill Politics in Northeast India*, Calcutta, Orient Longman Ltd., 1973.

7. Section 311 of the Government of India Act, 1935.
8. Alastair Lamb, *Britain and Chinese Central Asia: The Road to Lhasa, 1767 to 1905*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960, p. 107.
9. See Parshotam Mehra, *The North-Eastern Frontier: A Documentary Study of the Internecine Rivalry between India, Tibet and China, Volume 2, 1914-54*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1980.
10. 'In 1951, Towang, the last pocket of Tibetan rule south of McMahon Line, was brought under Indian administrative control. S.P. Verma, *Struggle for the Himalayas: A Study in Sino-Indian Relations*, New Delhi, Sterling, 1965, p. 132. Also see Neville Maxwell, *India's China War*, Bombay, 1970, p. 73.
11. 'Practically all the district headquarters were opened in their present locations during the years 1953 to 1955. P.N. Luthra, *Constitutional and Administrative Growth of the North-East Frontier Agency*, Shillong, Northeast Frontier Agency, 1971, p. 25.
12. Such a system existed, with minor modifications from time to time, in Nepal from 1962 till May 1981 (see Bhuwanlal Joshi and Leo E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal: A Case-study of Political Acculturation*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1966). It did exist in Arunachal Pradesh in 1969-78.
13. Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1970, p. 1.
14. The news that occasionally trickles in from the other side of the border also suggests the prevalence of similar conditions in Tibet.
15. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. 'The Changing Fortunes of Nepal's High Altitude Dwellers', in Fürer-Haimendorf (ed.) *Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1977, pp. 98-113.
16. F. Donaldson, *Lepchaland*, London, Sampson Low, Marston, 1900, p. 208, quoted in Lionel Caplan, *Land and Social Change in East Nepal: A Study of Hindu-Tribal Relations*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 6. See also M. Dasgupta and A. Samad, 'Nepal's Land Revenue System and Demographic Changes in Darjeeling Hill Areas' *North Bengal University Review (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 1. 1, June 1980, pp. 69-78.
17. See H. Gaige, *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*, Delhi, Vikas, 1975, for the problem of ethnic immigrants in Terai Nepal. The problem of Nepali migration in India has received considerable attention in recent times. Tibetan refugees in Bhutan have created similar problems.
18. See D.B. Bista, 'Patterns of Migration in Nepal', in *Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, No. 268, *Himalayas: Ecologie-Ethnologie*, Sevres-Paris 7-10 December 1976, 1977, pp. 397-99.



## DETERMINANTS OF MODERNIZATION AND HUMAN RESPONSE IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS

Harvir Sharma

The Eastern Himalayas lie between  $86^{\circ}$  to  $88^{\circ}$  E latitudes. They cover the eastern part of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. This part of the Himalayas is blessed with plenty of natural resources, the human responses to these attractions depending upon the physical variables, such as slopes, elevation and climate. Thus, the major factors which open up areas to human settlements, their functional rationality (from primary functions to tertiary functions) and, ultimately, the extent of modernization in this region, are physical.

*Physical set-up:* The Eastern Himalayas present three salient features. First, there is the great elevation of this mountain system which presents altitudinal barriers and consequences of their presence. Second, there are variations in rocks (hard and soft). The distribution of these rocks in large masses has made possible direct excavation of longitudinal valleys in soft rock and, indirectly, deepening of others which are linked thereto. Hence, the great contrast of high peaks and steep slopes. Lastly, there is the preponderance of length over breadth of this mountain system which enabled man at an early date to penetrate a chain that could not be skirted. This final factor led to a comparatively early settlement and cultivation, despite the obstacles of altitude and topography.

Physically, this mountain mass has three major lateral

divisions which, to a great degree, exhibit homogeneous characteristics. The Great Himalayas, the Inner Himalayas and the Foothills and the bordering Sub-Himalayan 'Piedmont Plain' locally called Terai in Nepal and Duars in Bhutan. The first division is adjacent to the Tibet Plateau. Here peaks rise to 29,000 ft. For much of the 700 mile northern border of the Himalayan kingdoms, the mountains average more than 20,000 ft. above sea level. This part is dissected into a series of north-south mountain blocks by the Manas, Kosi, Gandak, Karnali, Teesta, Sankosh, Amo and Brahmaputra river systems.

The second division—the Inner Himalayas—is a complex area of forest covered ranges and intervening fertile valleys. While it is not as forbidding as the Great Himalayas to the north, it has nonetheless served to further isolate the fertile valleys from the Indian plains to the plateau of Tibet. Except for the major valley centres of Pokhara, Kathmandu, Gangtok, Paro, Punakha and Brahmaputra, the region in general is moderately populated. Though the natural drainage lines are mostly north-south, the numerous gorges and the rugged terrain make human approach in any direction difficult.

The third division comprises the Churia Hills and the Terai and Duars plain. As a matter of fact, the southern Terai part of the region is quite accessible and developed, but the northern Terai and Duars are negative areas which add to the isolation of the Inner Himalayan Valleys.

*Human responses to the physical set-up:* The altitude is the most important environmental factor, causing rapid and profound physical changes in the Himalayas. The effects of altitude, however, are complicated by the exposure to the sun's rays, and relief which enhance the regional or local differences in the Himalayan region.

(a) *Land use:* The foremost of human responses is use of land. There are three zones: crop-growing, forest, and alpine pastures. The crop growing region is extensive, stretching upto about 13,500 ft. altitude. In Nepal extensive cultivation occurs upto 8,000 ft. Crop and altitude are inversely linked in this area. It has been further observed that between 7,000 and 11,000 ft. the soil and climatic conditions are seldom suitable for farming and consequently the cultivated plots are small and the crop yields low.