
CULTURAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC VICISSITUDES OF THE BHOTIA TRIBE OF UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

The herculean task of defining a tribe and main-streaming their interests to that of the society has produced a plethora of challenges for the bureaucrats and the law-makers. In the process of inclusion, various tribes have been left behind, their social and cultural strata redefined and their native place of residence has been reduced to dust. One such tribe of the hill state of Uttarakhand is the Bhotia tribe. The paper discusses the Bhotia tribe and their socio-economic transformation through the ages along with the impact of globalization and the closing of borders of Tibet in the 1960s. The paper also discusses the impact of the new policies concerning the welfare of the tribal community and how climate change has impacted their lives tremendously.

Keywords: Tribe, Tribal community, Bhotia Tribe, Globalization, Scheduled tribe, welfare

INTRODUCTION

Tribes have been an integral part of ancient India, proof of which is evident in classical Indian literature. The Scheduled Tribe howsoever turned out to be the most under-privileged section of the Indian society. The setting up of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in 1999 by the Indian Government was a step onward in accomplishing the objective of refining the socio-economic progress of the tribes in India.¹ The bifurcation of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment was applauded by the citizens as it was imperative to fill the gaps in various institutions and programmes who reviewed the situation of Scheduled Tribes with respect to financial aid. The Scheduled Tribes have also been granted constitutional safeguard under Article 342 of the Constitution of India. Under Article 342, Scheduled Tribes have been defined as “*The President [may with respect to any State or Union territory, and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof,] by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union territory, as the case may be.*”²

The term ‘tribe’ elusively defines and brings under its purview the social groups who prefer to reside in seclusion in forests or foot-hills of high-altitude areas.³ The word has been derived from the Latin word ‘Tribus’ which means one-third and was initially referred to one of the three territorial groups that united to constitute Rome.⁴ The Imperial Gazetteer of India defines ‘tribe’ as *a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous, though originally it might have been so.* Tribes have also been defined as a group of people in a primeval or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor. The noted Indian sociologist, Andre Beteille is of the opinion that defining a tribe according to their political polarities is a herculean task and therefore the purview of definition should take into account the empirical

¹ About the Ministry, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, Available at <https://tribal.nic.in> , Last visited on November 25, 2021 at 10.34 AM

² Article 342, Part XVI, SPECIAL PROVISIONS RELATING TO CERTAIN CLASSES, Constitution of India, 1949, Available at COI_1.pdf (legislative.gov.in)

³ Ajeet Kumar Pankaj, ‘*Tribes in India* (208)’, Department of Social Work, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus Manipur, Available at igntu.ac.in/eContent/IGNTU-eContent-590220362838-MSW-2-AjeetKumarPankaj-TribesinIndia-1,2.pdf , Last visited on November 22, 2021 at 12.09 PM

⁴ Prof. Gurnam Singh, ‘*Concept of Tribe and Tribal Community Development, Administration and Development of Tribal Community*’, Available at lkouniv.ac.in/site/writereaddata/siteContent/202004131501351340Neeti_SW_Tribal_Community.pdf , Last visited on November 22, 2021 at 12.15 PM

characteristic of a particular mode of human grouping devoid of the condition of time and place.⁵

India accounts for the second-largest population of tribes after Africa and according to the 2011 census, it constitutes 8.6% of the total population of India.⁶ Contemporary India implicates tribes with no cultural or social values. It has become a catchphrase for the politically sentient sections of the country, embodying separatist inclinations, privileged treatment and barring national integration.⁷ The tribes in reality are free of political inclination and resort to their distinctive lifestyle. In the year 1952, the Commissioner for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes listed eight common features to identify a social group which can be distinguished as a tribe-

- They prefer to live in remoteness without any connections with the civilized world.
- They belong to either of the three stocks- Negritos, Australoids and Mongoloids
- They tend to speak the same tribal dialect
- They profess primitive soul also known as Animism wherein they worship ghosts and spirits.
- Their primary occupation is hunting, weaving and gathering forest produce
- They are primarily carnivores or meat-eaters
- They tend to wear next to nothing, using tree barks for covering up.
- They display nomadic behaviour and their mode of enjoyment is strictly restricted to drinking alcohol and dancing.⁸

While labelling a specific tribe it is indispensable to depict them through various prime indicators which includes but is not limited to, a definite territory in which they reside, whether the tribes follow a matriarchal or patriarchal form of society, a common name, a common language, a common ancestor which incites the feeling of communal unanimity in the tribe,

⁵ Dr. Nabarun Purkayastha, 'CONCEPT OF INDIAN TRIBES: AN OVERVIEW', International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences, IJARMSS, ISSN: 2278-6236, Vol. 5 | No. 2 | February 2016, Available at www.garph.co.uk

⁶ Data available at tribal.nic.in/ST/Statistics8518.pdf, Last visited on November 22, 2021 at 12.32 PM

⁷ Ajeet Kumar Pankaj, 'Tribes in India (208)', Department of Social Work, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus Manipur, Available at igntu.ac.in/eContent/IGNTU-eContent-590220362838-MSW-2-AjeetKumarPankaj-TribesinIndia-1,2.pdf, Last visited on November 25, 2021 at 11.18 AM

⁸ Ajeet Kumar Pankaj, 'Tribes in India (208)', Department of Social Work, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus Manipur, Available at igntu.ac.in/eContent/IGNTU-eContent-590220362838-MSW-2-AjeetKumarPankaj-TribesinIndia-1,2.pdf, Last visited on November 25, 2021 at 12.28 PM

common religion, common culture, common political organization distinct from the one which administers the country and common economic organization.

BHOTIA TRIBE IN UTTARAKHAND-

There are five distinct tribes in Uttarakhand namely, Bhotias, Jaunsari, Raji, Tharu and Buksas. The Bhotia tribe of Uttarakhand derives its nomenclature from the word 'Bhot' or 'Bot' which in verbatim is referred to Tibet and is an acknowledgement of their alleged Tibetan heritage. They are believed to have migrated southward from Tibet around 9th century AD and settled in the mountainous Indo-Tibetan border at a height of 6,500 ft to 13,000 ft. Geographically, they inhabit seven river valleys, three in the Garhwal division, namely Jadh, Mana and Niti and four in the Kumaon division, namely Johar, Darma, Byans and Chandans. The state of Uttarakhand is inhabited by eight major Bhotia groups namely, *Johari*, *Juthora*, *Darmi*, *Chudans*, *Byansi*, *Marccha*, *Tolcha* and *Jad* and they constitute 8.13% of the tribal population of the country.⁹ Their winter settlement known as gunshas is at a lower altitude as at 13,000 ft, the area becomes heavily snow-clad and uninhabitable. Their summer, rainy and winter settlement is also known as mait.¹⁰

As they formerly hail from Tibet, they have indoctrinated the Tibetan cultural traits but residing in India has impacted their cultural practices and plenty of them currently follow Hinduism. The transitional nature of the Bhotia tribe unveils a unification of Hindu-dominated South Asian and Buddhist Central Asian cultures.¹¹ Their nomenclature is an acknowledgment to their Tibetan origin as Bod or Bhot which is a corrupt form of Bod, translates to 'Follower of Buddhism'.¹² They are dissimilar from Tibetans by their character and commercial practices. Their main form of occupation was constrained to inter-border trade in South Asia and Tibet

⁹ Deepika Bhatt, G.C. Joshi and L.M. Tiwari, '*Culture, Habitat and Ethno-Medicinal practices by Bhotia Tribe people of Dharchula Region of Pithoragarh District in Kumaun Himalaya, Uttarakhand*', Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha (CCRAS) Tarikhet -263 663, August 01, 2009, Uttarakhand, Ethnobotanical Leaflets 13: 975-83, 2009, Available at Culture, Habitat and Ethno-Medicinal practices by Bhotia Tribe people of Dharchula Region of Pithoragarh District in Kumaun Himalaya, Uttarakhand (siu.edu) , Last visited on December 17, 2021 at 11.54 AM

¹⁰ Bishwa B. Chatterjee, '*The Bhotias of Uttarakhand*', India International Centre Quarterly, 1976, India International Centre, Vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 3-16, Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23001864>

¹¹ D.O. Lodrick, '*Bhutia*', Cengage, Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life. . Encyclopedia.com. , November 24, 2021, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/bhutia> , Last visited on December 17, 2021 at 11.42 AM

¹² Deepika Bhatt, G.C. Joshi and L.M. Tiwari, '*Culture, Habitat and Ethno-Medicinal practices by Bhotia Tribe people of Dharchula Region of Pithoragarh District in Kumaun Himalaya, Uttarakhand*', Central Council for Research in Ayurveda and Siddha (CCRAS) Tarikhet -263 663, August 01, 2009, Uttarakhand, Ethnobotanical Leaflets 13: 975-83, 2009, Available at Culture, Habitat and Ethno-Medicinal practices by Bhotia Tribe people of Dharchula Region of Pithoragarh District in Kumaun Himalaya, Uttarakhand (siu.edu) , Last visited on December 17, 2021 at 11.54 AM

as opposed to their traditional forms of occupation like pastoralism and trade. They usually traded in products like food grains, molasses, utensils, clothing, woollen goods and assorted manufactured products and barter for yak-tails, salt, wool, borax and musk.

EFFECT OF CLOSING BORDERS OF TIBET IN 1960s

The borders of Tibet were sealed during the 1960s because of the tyrannical assaults launched by the Chinese militia at the Tibetan rebels. The Dalai Lama fled from Lhasa along with a few other supporters and took asylum in India. More than 3,40,000 Tibetans deceased because of the severe famines brought on by reforming the economic strategies, resulting which the trade took a hit!¹³

It had a noticeable impact on both sides of the border. The Bhotias were forced to return to the secondary occupation of agriculture. Currently, more than a third of the community is involved in cultivation and similarly for weaving and embroidery. Very few have opted for physical labour and the traditional occupation of trade and commerce remains the primary occupation of a very small percentage of the Bhotia community. The political turbulence brought on by the closing of borders turned their life upside down. They lost their land, which was why it was challenging for them to turn to agriculture for livelihood. Their inaccessibility to land forced them to purchase food grains. The supply of wool was cut off from Tibet which hugely impacted their weaving industry leading to extreme poverty. Their livestock gradually declined. Finally, the Govt. of India in 1967 acknowledged their impoverished state of affairs and granted them the status of a Scheduled Tribe.

THE IDEA OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is a multi-dimensional phenomenon whose impact is noticeable in all corners of the world. Regardless of it being an economic-plus process, it has segregated the social echelons into three different ranks wherein the third or the last rank of the echelon is attributed to the excluded population, the ones who aren't an integrant to the cut-throat competition for safeguarding pay. The tribes fall into the third category of the social division. Their life is no more ecologically acclimatized. Their economic and societal marginalization has resulted in

¹³ Chapter 34- China/Tibet- (1950-Present), Political Science, University of Central Arkansas, Available at 34. China/Tibet (1950-present) (uca.edu) , Last visited on December 17, 2021 at 03.16 PM

their reclusion and rampant environmental degradation owing to globalization of the world at large.¹⁴

Globalization has brought about a revolution in various expansion projects and subsequently, global lifestyle. In the lieu of industrializing rural and urban areas, various river basin projects and hydro-power projects have been commenced by the State and Central government in the state. Forest produce and ancillary products factories have been established near heavily forested areas to employ labours from the tribes as well as lower strata of the society. Instead of improving the livelihood of the tribals, these factories and projects have persistently abused the cheap labour force accessible to them by engaging them at a minimum wage compelling them into insolvency. In certain areas, despite the establishment of such industries the number of tribals engaged in such industries is inconsequential. Apart from Apprenticeship Act, there are no other regulations for private or joint enterprises to hire such ejected tribal workforce.

Globalization has indubitably initiated a remarkable economic alteration but it has also amplified the gaps of equality, leaving a trifling component of the transactional profit to the tribes.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL ALTERATIONS- THEN & NOW-

The socio-cultural-economic transactions, communication, settlement and transport in the High Himalaya have always been determined by the rugged contour. They have always followed restrictive methods owing to the unavailability of hilly terrain-competent transportation. Their lifestyle has been limited because of the regular struggle of making a living in inhospitable conditions.¹⁵

Due to the uninhabitable land, the Bhotia community principally practiced transhumance and their primordial reliance on livestock was evident till the mid-twentieth century.¹⁶ They were predominantly dependent on trade for their living. The size of the herd was determined by the affluence of the Bhotia families wherein the wealthier families kept a large number of livestock

¹⁴ Rahul Kabiraj, 'Globalization and its Impact on Tribal Society in India', Academia.edu, Available at (DOC) Globalization and its Impact on Tribal Society in India | rahul kabiraj - Academia.edu , Last visited on December 20, 2021 at 12.11 PM

¹⁵ Nirmesh Sharma, 'Challenges faced by the Bhotias for their livelihood and preservation of culture', International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, Vol.12(2), pp. 51-58, April-June 2020, DOI: 10.5897/IJSA2020.0841 Article Number: 13DD4B963943 ISSN 2006- 988x, Available at <http://www.academicjournals.org/IJSA>

¹⁶ R.P. Srivastav, Ed. Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, 'Tribe-Caste Mobility in India and the case of Kumaun Bhotiyas', Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon: Anthropological Studies in Hindu-Buddhist Contact Zones, 1996, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, pp. 161-212

and toured distant markets of Delhi, Kanpur and Calcutta to vend their yield whereas the poorer families amongst the tribe were engaged as herdsmen or labourers for the wealthier families.¹⁷ Their summer and winter settlement, differing according to the seasons gave them access to diverse trade routes all over the year. During the summers they specifically transacted with Tibet as their summer residences were adjoining the passes in Himalaya and during the winters, they operated in Uttarakhand and the adjoining plains.¹⁸

The colonial rule saw a major decline in the practice of pastoralism in the country. Pastoralists were regarded as oddities under the new property law introduced by the colonialists and were striped from using the land. Only bonafide agriculturalists were permitted to graze cattle and the nomadic pastoralists and agro-pastoralists grieved due to the non-inclusiveness of the policies.¹⁹ There was a substantial decrease of pastoral mobility in Uttarakhand owing to the reservation of forests. The forests became an essential source of expansion for the government. Globalization and Imperialists expanded the railways into the country and the timber from the forest was an important source of manufacture of sleepers for the railway tracks. They began comprehending the significance of forests in their expansion spree and they started administering the forests for the larger good. On their way to sustainable management of the forests, they opined that unregulated grazing and pasturing had no place among the state-regulated forest and hence, levied a long list of constraints on their lawful users.²⁰

IMPACT OF THE NEW POLICIES

The imposing of the restrictions meant restricted mobility and access to the forest. Particular areas of the forest were designated for cattle grazing and tree lopping, the halts and routes were inconvenient for the tribesmen, irrational charges were levied on basic activities and consequently their seasonal migration took a hit. Further, alternatives to borax were made accessible which ceased the import of borax from Tibet. Cheap salt from the plains supplanted the Tibetan salt and Bhotiya wool and woollen products were traded by cut-rate replacements. The incompetence of Uttarakhand to cultivate a surplus produces owing to decrease in soil

¹⁷ E.T. Atkinson, '*Himalayan Districts of North Western Provinces*', 1982, Cosmos Publication, 3 volumes, Delhi

¹⁸ Dharendra Datt Dangwal, '*The Lost Mobility: Pastoralism and Modernity in Uttarakhand Himalaya (India)*', Nomadic Peoples, 2009, White Horse Press, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 84-101, Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43123852>

¹⁹ N Bhattacharya, eds. D. Arnold and R. Guha, '*Pastoralists in a Colonial World*', Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia, 1995, Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp 49-85

²⁰ Dharendra Datt Dangwal, '*The Lost Mobility: Pastoralism and Modernity in Uttarakhand Himalaya (India)*', Nomadic Peoples, 2009, White Horse Press, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 84-101, Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43123852>

fertility and mounting population halted their trade with Tibet.²¹ When Tibetan salt trade lost its bartering value, it triggered a disruption in balance between Uttarakhand and Tibet. Trade with the low lands surged due to the onset of railways in Kotdwar in 1897 and Dehradun in 1901.²² Trade with Tibet completely terminated due to the Indo-China War in 1962.²³

The period of 1970s saw woke environmentalists coercing the Government to preserve and protect the forests and wildlife. It prompted the formation of a number of designated national parks and sanctuaries where human existence was considered detrimental to the protection and preservation of the reserved forests. The grazing areas of the Bhotia tribe fell under this category and the reduction in grazing area meant lesser probabilities of sustaining a large livestock. The remaining pastures were rehabilitated to agricultural land, wildlife sanctuaries and some were swiftly urbanized owing to the mounting population. Further, the Bhotiyas were nomadic in nature, the villagers became hostile to the migrant groups and didn't fancy sharing their land and resources with them.²⁴ When their trade with Tibet ceased, their yearly migration also stopped. The underlying intention behind journeying to summer houses was to reinforce entitlement over their agricultural land and to secure pasture for their large livestock. They also took up the profession of accumulating medicinal herbs from the forests to sell commercially.²⁵

Modern ways of living have impacted the Bhotiyas quite tremendously. They are choosing to educate themselves and secure government jobs for maintaining a modern lifestyle. The option of migrating to summer residences has failed because of the unavailability of proper education. This change in attitude was encouraged by the reservation provided to them by declaring them as a Scheduled Tribe in 1967.²⁶ The government provides them food grains at a subsidized rate to lessen their burden of migrating to cultivate their land. Pastoralism and transhumance have stopped being options after the advent of such a situation. Their religious affinity has also been altered owing to the influence of Hindu religious practices and Hindu culture. They no longer associate themselves to Buddhist religious practices even though they have a considerable mixture of Scythian, Dard-Khas, Caucasian, Hun-Rajput-Jat-Gujar, Tibeto-Mongoloid and Gurkha blood in them. The influence of Hindu religion has also impacted their marriages.

²¹ D.D. Dangwal, *'Himalayan Degradation: Colonial Forestry and Environmental Change in India'*, 2009, Cambridge University Press, Foundation Imprint, Delhi

²² H.G. Walton, *Gazetteer of Garhwal*, Government Press, Allahabad

²³ R.R. Prasad, *'Bhotiya Tribals of India: Dynamic of Economic Transformation'*, 1989, Gian Publishing House, Delhi

²⁴ V. Hoon, *'Living on the Move: Bhotiyas of the Kumaon Himalaya'*, 1996, Sage, Delhi

²⁵ V. Hoon, *'Living on the Move: Bhotiyas of the Kumaon Himalaya'*, 1996, Sage, Delhi

²⁶ R.R. Prasad, *'Bhotiya Tribals of India: Dynamic of Economic Transformation'*, 1989, Gian Publishing House, Delhi

Dowry is prevalent in the form of goods and arranged by the elders of the Bhotia family. Their rich oral tradition has also seen a steep decline owing to large-scale migration and their traditional dance form famously known as 'Chhura' in which an experienced shepherd teaches a young shepherd how to conduct trade effectively is no more passed down as a customary knowledge.

EFFECT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE BHOTIA TRIBE OF UTTARAKHAND

It is a well-known fact that agricultural practices in the hills and the lifestyle of the ones residing in the higher altitudes is impacted by the natural and seasonal cycle. An alteration in the weather pattern is bound to distress the rain-fed farming practices of the state. Climate change threatens the people who are reliant on climate-dependent natural resources for sustaining their livelihood. A study published in the American Journal of Environmental Protection²⁷ focusing on the observation of the Bhotia communities with respect to fluctuations in their natural environment says that the juxtaposition of the tribes to the glaciers is bound to influence the way they sustain. Their sensitivity to climate change is driven by the glaciers and their traditional life support approach. Their limited traditional wisdom falls short against the challenges put forth by nature.²⁸

86 % of the people who participated in the study are assured that there has been a major climatical shift in the upper Himalayas and it has undeniably obstructed their way of life. There has been a noticeable escalation in the average temperature from 1.7 degree Celsius to 2.2 degree Celsius and variation in the precipitation regime. The rains have become unpredictable and their timings have changed. The variability in the amount of rain has caused major flash floods in the region leading to loss of life and property. 89% of the participants agreed that winters have gotten shorter and the snow melts faster than it used to which in turn has caused an imbalance in the glacial structure²⁹ and disruption in the agro-horticultural operations. The destabilizing glaciers have made the terrain vulnerable to natural disasters in the proportion of

²⁷ Piyoosh Rautela, Bhavna Karki, 'Impact of Climate Change on Life and Livelihood of Indigenous People of Higher Himalaya in Uttarakhand, India', American Journal of Environmental Protection, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 4, 112-124, Available online at <http://pubs.sciepub.com/env/3/4/2>, Science and Education Publishing DOI:10.12691/env-3-4-2, Last visited on March 14, 2022 at 10.41 AM

²⁸ Piyoosh Rautela, Bhavna Karki, 'Impact of Climate Change on Life and Livelihood of Indigenous People of Higher Himalaya in Uttarakhand, India', American Journal of Environmental Protection, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 4, 112-124, Available online at <http://pubs.sciepub.com/env/3/4/2>, Science and Education Publishing DOI:10.12691/env-3-4-2, Last visited on March 14, 2022 at 10.41 AM

²⁹ Dyurgerov MD, Meier MF, 'Glaciers and Changing Earth System: A 2004 Snapshot.' Colorado, USA: Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research, University of Colorado, 2005

man-made disasters.³⁰ 92% of the people said that the availability of water has been distressed due to the following factors:

1. Gradual rise in temperature and erratic dry spells
2. Glacier recession
3. Earthquakes
4. Monsoonal inconsistency
5. Irregular rainfall or less/heavy rainfall
6. Landslides
7. Climatic changes
8. Reduced snowfall
9. Erection of dams
10. Deforestation
11. Appearance of ground fissures
12. Land collapses³¹

Earthquakes have desiccated water resources at certain places and have led to overflowing of some wells at others.³² The residents have started facing dearth of water for supporting livelihood and are obligated to travel long distances to acquire water from other sources.

The impact it has had on agriculture is tremendous. 95% of the people who participated in the study agree that the yield of the land has taken a hit and pest invasions have become rampant. The quality of agriculture is adversely impacted by the longevity of the snow cover in the hills. Snow impacts the moisture in the soil which in turn affects the agricultural productivity of the region.³³ 65 percent of the people who contributed to the study have agreed that the timing of flowering and fruiting of plants has altered because of adverse climate change. This change is ascribed to increase in temperature, reduced and less severe winters and early arrival of summer

³⁰ Kumar K, Dumka RK, Miral MS, Satyal GS, Pant M, 'Estimation of retreat rate of Gangotri glacier using rapid static and kinematic GPS survey', Current Science, 94(2):258-262, 2008

³¹ Piyoosh Rautela, Bhavna Karki, 'Impact of Climate Change on Life and Livelihood of Indigenous People of Higher Himalaya in Uttarakhand, India', American Journal of Environmental Protection, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 4, 112-124, Available online at <http://pubs.sciepub.com/env/3/4/2>, Science and Education Publishing DOI:10.12691/env-3-4-2, Last visited on March 14, 2022 at 10.41 AM

³² Sneed M, Galloway DL, Cunningham WL, 'Earthquakes rattling the earth's plumbing system', 2003 U.S. Geological Survey Fact Sheet 096-03, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/fs-096-03/>

³³ Piyoosh Rautela, Bhavna Karki, 'Impact of Climate Change on Life and Livelihood of Indigenous People of Higher Himalaya in Uttarakhand, India', American Journal of Environmental Protection, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 4, 112-124, Available online at <http://pubs.sciepub.com/env/3/4/2>, Science and Education Publishing DOI:10.12691/env-3-4-2, Last visited on March 14, 2022 at 10.41 AM

in the hilly area. Agriculture is steadily becoming an economically unfeasible option amongst the tribes residing in the inhospitable terrains of Uttarakhand because of the financial input vital for agrochemicals owing to the pest infestations and low productivity output.

61 percent of the respondents have agreed that the forest cover around them has substantially decreased. The reasons behind the same have been articulated below-

- I. Road construction activities
- II. Increase in fuel wood use due to increase in population
- III. Loss of vegetation due to glacial action and other disasters
- IV. Forest fire
- V. Over-grazing
- VI. Decreased regeneration rate of trees in the forest areas³⁴

The above-mentioned reasons have also had an adversative bearing on livestock rearing for the Bhotiyas who sustain a huge herd of animals and migrate to their summer residences for supporting their livestock and practicing animal husbandry. Efficiency of grasslands and pastures have declined due to the warmer and drier climate and in turn have forced the Bhotiyas to devote time, searching feed for their livestock.³⁵

Additional difficulty comes in the form of dearth of forest resources. The tribes have inherently been part of the forest, meaning the whole clan sustains themselves on resources derived directly or indirectly from the forest. The resources from forest also supplements their income.³⁶ A low agricultural productivity usually results in increase in reliance on forest resources which mostly ensued during droughts or natural calamities. The fluctuating climatic conditions have ensured that the dependency on forest resources intensify, irrespective. They have started sustaining themselves on the forest resources reducing the scope of making a market profitability of the resources derived. The increase in footfall of tourists to such ecologically-sensitive areas has indirectly hampered the income of the people relying on the

³⁴ Piyoosh Rautela, Bhavna Karki, 'Impact of Climate Change on Life and Livelihood of Indigenous People of Higher Himalaya in Uttarakhand, India', American Journal of Environmental Protection, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 4, 112-124, Available online at <http://pubs.sciepub.com/env/3/4/2> , Science and Education Publishing DOI:10.12691/env-3-4-2, Last visited on March 14, 2022 at 10.41 AM

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Piyoosh Rautela, Bhavna Karki, 'Impact of Climate Change on Life and Livelihood of Indigenous People of Higher Himalaya in Uttarakhand, India', American Journal of Environmental Protection, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 4, 112-124, Available online at <http://pubs.sciepub.com/env/3/4/2> , Science and Education Publishing DOI:10.12691/env-3-4-2, Last visited on March 14, 2022 at 10.41 AM

growth of caterpillar fungus. The number has substantially decreased and rampant and unchecked collection of the fungus doesn't provide the fungi much time to reproduce.³⁷

Climate change has also affected the way wild animals interact with human. They have increasingly started to wander close to human habitations owing to unavailability of food and destruction in the forest cover.³⁸ Human interferences in the wild have increased enormously. Due to this interference, wild animals are forced to venture out of their habitat and in the process happen to destroy the crops of the village. A classic example of this is apparent in Bhagirathi Valley. Potato production has significantly reduced due to the sudden attacks of the wild animals.³⁹ Climate change has also impacted the reproduction cycle of birds, in turn affecting plant reproduction, flowering of plants, food availability and habitat alteration⁴⁰ along with being the foremost reason behind reduction in bee population. Bees are climate-sensitive and a reduction in their number has resulted in reduced honey production and killing of pollinators.⁴¹

Indigenous people are heavily reliant on traditional knowledge and the basis of traditional knowledge is etched in the process of learning, testing and adapting. They have developed new methods to tackle the change in weather and use it to their advantage which means they have shifted to the production of various other crops instead of the indigenous ones. The unavailability of indigenous fruits and vegetables due to shortage has impacted their income altogether. The common people are not the only one feeling the burnt of climate change. It has affected everyone adversely.

CONCLUSION

The unapproachability of jobs and suitable living environment in the complex topography has always served as a constraint for people residing in the higher altitudes, let alone this tribe. In spite of establishing a well-dominated barter system with Tibet, the Bhotias are reluctant to live in such inhospitable conditions owing to nominal aid from the State Government. Many

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Hill CM, 'A conflict of interest between people and baboons: crop raiding in Uganda', International Journal of Primatology, 2000, 21:299-315

³⁹ Piyoosh *Supra* 27 at 7

⁴⁰ Kai, K.H. and Corlett, R.T., 'Seasonality of forest invertebrates in Hongkong, South China', Journal of Tropical Ecology, 2002, 18: 637-644

⁴¹ González-Megías, A., Menéndez, R., Roy, D., Brereton, T., Thomas, C.D., 'Changes in the composition of British butterfly assemblages over two decades', Global Change Biology, 2008, 14:1464-1474

schemes have been employed for the advancement of the tribes in Uttarakhand but they seem to be oblivious to the existence of such schemes.

We have had the opportunity to interact with few school children of the Bhotia community and their awareness seems to be limited to the reservation provided in the country to the scheduled tribe communities in colleges and employment.⁴² The beneficiaries of schemes implemented for the tribal communities are low as compared to the intended numbers and certain nodal agencies of the government have denied the existence of any fund allocated to them through such ST-welfare schemes.⁴³

The Bhotias of Uttarakhand are undergoing a socio-cultural change. The cultural shifts are mainly due to the economic upliftment of certain Bhotias who have shifted to metropolitans in search of a better livelihood or are employed in the armed forces. Their practice of living in joint families has ceased to exist and they are preferring nuclear families. Their marriage rituals and the deities they worship, are similar to that of the Hindu religion. Their practice of depending on medicinal plants by deriving it from the jungle is currently restricted because of the deterring policies of the government and the Forest Department.⁴⁴

It is necessary for the State government to extend them a certain degree of freedom to reside in the forest and use those resources as they have inherently been

The pre-followed societal structure of the Bhotiyas needs to be reinstated to assist them in retaining their ethnicity and originality. Dignifying and respecting their culture, howsoever diverse from the other cultures is just the foundational stone to the path of encouraging them to accept their exceptionality and not be prejudiced by the conventions of other culture. The Juang tribe of Odisha, in spite of belonging to the people of Munda have a distinct dialect and practice marriage rituals which are different from that of the Hindu population around

⁴² This information is furnished on the basis of personal conversation with Bhotia students of various EMRS who we had the chance to interact with during the Tribal Festival held in the state of Uttarakhand from November 11-13, 2021.

⁴³ This data is furnished on the basis of the data collected by Tribal Sub-Plan Cell of T.R.I. from various nodal departments about the fund allocation under STC and their beneficiaries under various schemes. The data is confidential and no part of it can be represented in any form without prior permission from the Department of Tribal Welfare, Uttarakhand.

⁴⁴ Anjali Chauhan, '*Ethno- medicine of Bhotia tribe in Mana village of Uttarakhand*', International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, October 2014, Article Number - D7E560C47661, Vol.6(10), pp. 296-304, Available at <https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2014.0540>

them.⁴⁵Neo-liberalism has had, had a disturbingly palpable impact on every community, let alone the Bhotiyas. The scourge of unemployment and inaccessibility of basic facilities in the high hills is consistently driving the Bhotiyas away from their usual residence to find abode in the city where employment options are plenty and there is a significant dip in educational inconvenience.

There is a crucial need to reverse the effect of climate variation in the world. The tribes of India have intrinsically been part of the forest and they play an indispensable part in reversing the climate change. Their customary laws and community forestry practices have protected the forests for so long that authoritarian intrusion has wreaked mayhem to the forest cover of the country. Welfare and development of the tribes at the national and state level has reached its threshold. The Government has to ensure that the implementation of the welfare scheme is insinuated at a regional level where Gram Panchayats and the village communities are involved first-hand. Minimal intervention of the government officials and establishment of easily accessible justice system will encourage the communities to be active participants of the process of governance. The tribes have to be assured that the advent in technology and cultural shifts will have no visible impact on the way they lead their lives by providing them with the basic necessities in the beginning. For them to retain their ethnicity, it requires the combined effort of every citizen of the country. Large scale development of the hilly terrain needs a lot of financial and infrastructural assistance. The government has amped its efforts regarding the development of the hills by increasing the financial allowance to the hill states and reforming the tourism sector to raise money for the overall development. The hope that the tribes will return to their original residences and practice agriculture and allied activities is far-fetched considering how jobs have been made easily available to the tribal youth for their welfare in the cities. The Government has been making consistent efforts for them but the results are yet to be seen at the ground-root level.

⁴⁵Prasanta Kumar Mohanta, 'Juang Tribe', Tribal Culture of Odisha, Available at <https://tribalcultureofodisha.blogspot.com/2012/05/juangtribe.html?msclkid=f45f845faf2e11ec8f9c930e74a8f1ef>