

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This chapter has been divided into two sections. The first section entitled "Recapitulations" deals with the summary of the findings in the various chapter, and the second section entitled "Reflections" makes an analytical overview of the plainsmen in Sikkim. Let me begin with the first section.

Recapitulations

Chapter I of the present thesis introduces the subject matter - the plainsmen in Sikkim. It gives a brief background of Sikkim and shows the importance of the present study. It is clear from the review of literature included in this chapter that there has been no full-length study on the plainsmen in Sikkim in particular and other hill areas of India in general. Whether it was due to the colonial practice of studying "other" cultures or for some other reasons the migrant

societies representing the Indian mainstream in its peripheral areas have not received the academic and administrative attention they deserve. Their problems are not yet known properly and the changes that their culture and society have undergone after coming in contact with the local cultures and societies have not been studied so far. There is little information even about their legal and political status in such areas.

The second chapter deals with the migrational history and patterns, distribution and politico-legal status of the plainsmen. With regard to the first, the present study shows significant difference between the pre- and post-1975 migrants from the plains of India in terms of their literacy and reasons for migration. The first category of migrants are found to have a low level of literacy and with regard to the reason for their migration business is the main. But with regard to the second category of migrants, they are highly educated and the main reason for their migration has been found to be service. With reference to their distribution it is seen that they are more con-

centrated in the urban than in the rural areas. Their male population is also found to be much higher than their female population. The male-female ratio is even more imbalanced in the rural than in the urban areas. Finally, about their politico-legal status, it is observed that their political status has considerably improved after Sikkim's 'merger' with India.

The third chapter has discussed the internal structure of the plainsmen. The various plains communities are found to have developed only a loose ethnic structure because of complex and heterogeneous historical, linguistic, cultural, vocational, and religious backgrounds. It is found that the same reasons are responsible for their failure in forming ethnic solidarities both at the inter- and pan-plainsmen levels. The narrow trade and political interests of a few affluent plainsmen are also found to be responsible for this. The class stratification that has developed within the plainsmen is indeed an important factor in this regard.

The fourth chapter has dealt with the occupational structure of the plainsmen vis-a-vis the hillmen. In the beginning of this chapter, a brief survey of the theoretical literature on occupation has been made. This has shown that most of such literature in this regard deals with the industrial and developed societies rather than the tribal or peasant societies of India or Asia. It has also been observed that the plainsmen were well entrenched in the economic or occupational structure of Sikkim. And when the service, administrative, and agricultural sectors were expanded after 1975 they could have a successful entry into these sectors also. Thus, they are found to be very well integrated into all the three major sectors of Sikkim's economy, namely, agriculture, trade/business, and service.

The fifth chapter has discussed the socio-cultural matrix of the plainsmen in Sikkim on the basis of eleven socio-cultural variables like food habits, dress, age, sex, attitude, orientation, and the like. On the basis of

the discussion it is found that there is very insignificant socio-cultural interaction not only between the plains communities themselves but also between the plains and the hill communities there. Secondly, the hill and plains communities are found to be very well integrated into the occupational structure of Sikkim but the socio-cultural integration has been far from satisfactory. Finally, the only plains community which has been found to be economically oriented to Sikkim is the Marwari though culturally, like all other plains communities, it is very much oriented towards their places of origin only.

Reflections

The summum bonum of the various findings discussed in this thesis is that the plainsmen in Sikkim have experienced a highly successful economic adaptation but not so successful socio-cultural adaptation. The former precedes the latter though the two processes may not move towards the same direction. In the case of Sikkim, the lack of socio-cultural adaptation therefore needs to be analysed.

As far as the ethnic theories related to this phenomenon are concerned they may be broadly categorized into objective and subjective theories. There is an increasing consensus to combine the two sets of theories in any attempt to explain the ethnic phenomena, which are getting increasingly complex today. One need not necessarily follow this prescription deliberately but one must see the phenomenon in its possible entirety without being biased to any theory no matter how sound.

Coming to the Sikkimese situation, it may be recalled that the primordial factors like culture, language, religion, and the like not only seem to have divided the plains communities but also the hill communities. Such primordial heterogeneity seems particularly responsible for the lack of both intra- and inter-plainmen solidarity.

The primordial differences are strengthened by subjective differences emerging from the competition for limited environmental resources (Barth (1969). The resources in Sikkim being scarce,

as elsewhere in the country, they cannot be appropriated by all the members of any state or even a particular community. Hence, it is only a few communities or families of a community, who succeed in controlling the resources and once they are in control they do not want to forgo with them. The net result is that the socio-cultural adaptation is hampered at all levels of society.

Another reason for the low socio-cultural adaptation of the plainsmen is rooted in the history of Sikkim itself. It is to be remembered that no matter what the exact statutory status of Sikkim was earlier, it was a separate nation and its various subjects had separate political statuses. It was only before fifteen years or so that its status changed from country to state, from Sikkim as a Himalayan kingdom to the 22nd state of India. While the transition of its political status has been completed, the emotional transition of the people, particularly the Buddhist Lepcha-Bhutias who had ^{to} lose most, has not been

completed. It is no wonder therefore that the Sikkimese often refer to the plainsmen in Sikkim as 'Indian' as if they are not themselves. It is also equally unsurprising to find many Indians in Delhi or Bombay asking a Sikkimese about visa and other details for visiting Sikkim.

The Government of India is aware of this problem in Sikkim. It is probably due to this awareness that it does not want to scare the local Sikkimese communities by guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities to the plainsmen as Indian citizens. It is perhaps for this reason only that the local hill communities have been allowed to enjoy the primacy over their Indian neighbours from the plains of India. The government also cannot afford to have its border states like Sikkim fretting with ethnic tensions.

But the result of this policy has been that the plainsmen have been deprived of the opportunity to feel Sikkim as a part of India or to feel themselves as Sikkimese. There is not much hope in the near future for any radical change in the

existing arrangements of the administration in Sikkim. But the young children who are born and brought up in Sikkim itself are not expected to suffer from the complex which their parents suffered from. Hence, a new socio-cultural situation may emerge once the first migrants are eliminated by their age and the new generation takes charge of the affairs there.

Writing on similar situations in the north-east India, B. P. Singh (1987) isolates two key factors with regard to this region - "limited socialization" and "rapid modernization". These two factors are responsible for the situation in Sikkim also. But "limited socialization" is actually an event rather than a cause. Socialization may have been limited not only because of various primordial differences but also due to factors like attitude and orientation. Therefore, the second factor is clearly the most important determinant of the ill-adaptation of the plainsmen in Sikkim with regard to their socio-cultural aspect. When a region is rapidly exposed to the forces of modernization and development, the local people and the migrants do not get the opportunity

to understand each other properly and develop networks of social and cultural relations. Instead, the interacting groups and cultures get insulated and sharpen their identities like "insiders" and "outsiders".

Thus, the lack of socio-cultural adaptation of the plainsmen in Sikkim is due to a large number of factors like primordial differences within and without, administrative policies, and rapid modernization. In this context, one is compelled to exalt the Elwin-Nehruvian policy of "protected development" or "hastening slowly". Both Elwin and Nehru were aware of the consequences of exposing a backward region rapidly to the forces of development and modernization. Looking at the consequences of such a process in Sikkim, one feels that A Philosophy for NEFA, published in 1959, could still provide the guiding principle in the post 'merger' Sikkim. It was therefore quite natural that Nari K. Rustomji lamented the development in Sikkim in his Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy (1987).

It should be remembered here that Rustomji was closely associated not only with the ex-

Chogyal of Sikkim but also with Sikkim's administration as its Dewan. But persons of his stature are branded as pro-status quo and outdated by the present day administrators or advisors to the administrators. Had the insight developed by Elwin been borne in mind the socio-cultural adaptation of the plainsmen in Sikkim would perhaps be more successful than it has been witnessed there.

Finally, a word about integration. There is a growing consensus on abandoning the policies of 'assimilation' or 'isolation' for the backward tribes and regions in favour of the policy of integration. But since the policy of integration is not free from many misgivings, the administrators would do better if they clearly laid down what they mean by integration and with what. The National Integration Council members would do better if they scratched their heads hard and found some solution to this keeping in mind the situations in the peripheral societies and not the interests of their sponsorers in New Delhi. They would also do better if they involved some related social scientists actively in the attempt

rather than spend thousands of rupees in organizing functions and melas.

A common misgiving of the peripheral societies about integration is that it means integration with the mainstream Hindu culture and ethos. If this suspicion is not got rid of completely it may instead further isolate such societies rather than integrate them.