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Peoples and Cultures of the Himalayas

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of the ranges at either end of the Himalayas will be excluded for the most part.

The ruggedness of the Himalayas and the variety in climate have had readily understandable effects on the population of the region. The ruggedness has tended to slow down population movement and has inhibited communication so that peoples living close together have remained relatively isolated and have maintained or developed cultural differences which easier access might have blurred.² Variety in climate and terrain has required different kinds of cultural adaptations to make habitation possible and this, too, has contributed to ethnographic variety.³ Finally, the mountains have often formed a barrier to each of the great cultural traditions surrounding them. The people of each neighboring area have intruded into the mountains but have not, for the most part, passed beyond them. In some instances the mountains have served as a place of refuge for peoples under political or other pressures in their homelands. This has been especially true for the people of the plains of North India.

As a result, the Himalayas are ethnographically complex. There are several major cultural traditions represented and considerable variety exists among the representatives of each of these traditions. Despite the ruggedness of the terrain, however, and the element of isolation noted above, there is also considerable intermixture among these traditions in some areas.

There are many ways to categorize people other than by nationality. They can be classified by race, by language, by religion, by political, social or economic organization. Each categorization suffers from the common taxonomic difficulty of determining boundaries among segments of a continuum. Where is the line to be drawn, for example, between two related languages? In the Himalayas this is an acute problem with the added handicap of very sparse information upon which to base judgments. Large groups have never been studied scientifically and a few groups have not been the subject of any written work. The existing confusion over classification is one indication of the rudimentary state of our knowledge concerning this area. Not infrequently, the same people are given different names in different accounts. At one time, a given people may be described as a distinct group, at another time as a sub-group of group A, and again as a sub-group of group B, and yet again as comprising two distinct groups, C and D.

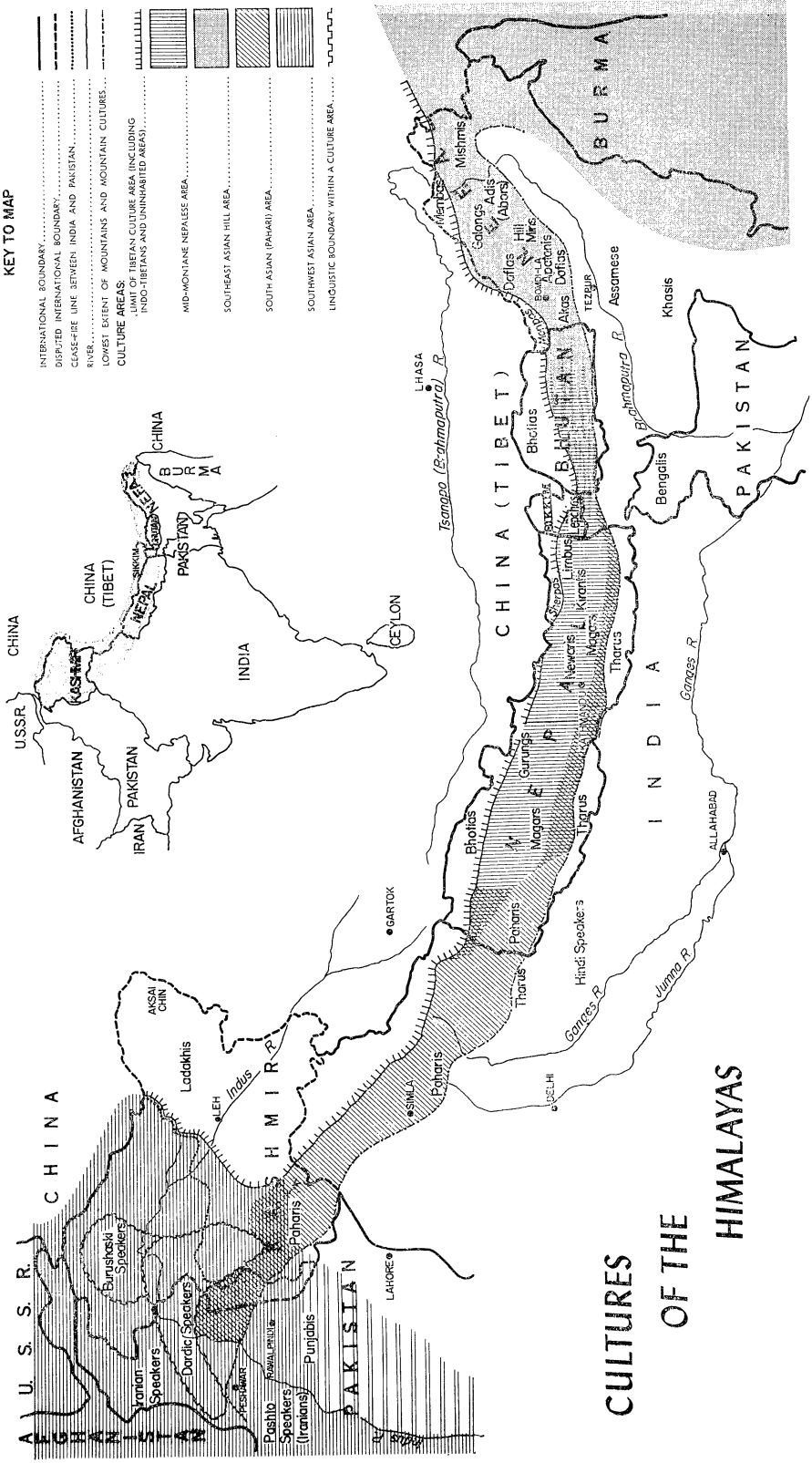
For the purposes of this article, peoples can most usefully be classified by *culture areas*. This is a term which anthropologists use to describe areas within which the ways of life of the residents are relatively distinctive and homogeneous. That is, they share more elements of culture, or more of the

² Gerald D. Berreman, "Cultural Variability and Drift in the Himalayan Hills," *American Anthropologist*, LXII (1960) 774-794.

³ Jiro Kawakita, "Some Ecological Observations in Nepal Himalaya," (Torbo Ethnography No. 3), *Japanese Journal of Ethnology*, XXV:4 (1961) 1-42. (In Japanese.)

KEY TO MAP

- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY.....
- DISPUTED INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY.....
- CEASE-FIRE LINE BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN.....
- RIVER.....
- LOWEST EXTENT OF MOUNTAINS AND MOUNTAIN CULTURES.....
- CULTURE AREAS:
 - INDO-TIBETAN CULTURE AREA (INCLUDING INDO-TIBETAN AND UNINHABITED AREAS).....
 - MID-MOUNTIANE NEPALESE AREA.....
 - SOUTH-EAST ASIAN HILL AREA.....
 - SOUTH ASIAN (PAHARI) AREA.....
 - SOUTHWEST ASIAN AREA.....
- LINGUISTIC BOUNDARY WITHIN A CULTURE AREA.....



CULTURES OF THE HIMALAYAS

elements deemed crucial for purposes of the comparison being made, with one another than they do with other groups. They share a distinctive pattern of learned and transmitted characteristics. The elements of culture upon which the categorization is made vary depending upon the purposes at hand and the information available. In this case as many elements as possible will be used but especially important will be language, religion, and economic organization. This categorization builds upon a pioneer effort by Elizabeth Bacon to describe the culture areas of Asia.⁴

The culture area concept does not often enable us to divide regions into areas of totally unlike peoples in cookie-cutter fashion, but it does enable us to make some useful distinctions. Contemporary North India and South India, for example, comprise culture areas. So do India, in its entirety, Tibet and Japan. The magnitude and nature of these contrasts are very different. Which contrast is more relevant depends upon the comparison to be made. In discussing the characteristic features of a culture area through time, I shall speak here of the "cultural tradition" of a people. I will also refer to "cultural type," a variation on the same theme which does not require areal continuity but which refers to similar cultures. It has been found especially useful in dealing with the peoples of Southeast Asia where culturally similar people are found interspersed among those of other cultural traditions so that area designations have been impracticable.⁵

The purpose of the classification to be presented here is to show common cultural origins and major influences among cultures, not to delineate regions of common national allegiance. There is no inherent reason why peoples of one broad cultural tradition should comprise a political entity, and certainly most of those to be discussed here do not see themselves as such. In fact, except for a very small educated elite, they think of themselves as citizens of nation states only in a very vague sort of way. Their identification tends to be with the people of their own immediate area, who speak their own dialect and with whom they interact frequently. Very often they have ties—usually economic ones—with neighboring people of quite different cultural traditions while they ignore or are unaware of people with cultures similar to their own who live at greater distances.

Not infrequently groups of people of one cultural tradition have adopted many cultural characteristics of alien neighbors without losing the evidence of their cultural origins. In this case they may well have more common interest and more interaction with these erstwhile aliens than with people of the cultural tradition from which they derive. These provisos should be borne in mind while reading the necessarily generalized comments about the peoples of the Himalayas which follow.

Who are the peoples of the Himalayas and what are their affinities?

⁴ Elizabeth Bacon, "A Preliminary Attempt to Determine the Culture Areas of Asia," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, II (1946) 117-132.

⁵ Raoul S. Naroll, "A Draft Map of the Culture Areas of Asia," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, VI (1950) 183-187.

The answer seems to be that nearly all of them derive their cultures in large part from one or more of four major and well-known traditions which in turn can be grouped into two pairs of distantly related cultures. First, there are the Indian or South Asian and the Afghan-Iranian or Southwest Asian traditions. These two share common origin and consequently might be called the Indo-Iranian traditions or, on linguistic grounds, the Aryan traditions. These impinge upon the Himalayas primarily from the south and west respectively. The South Asian tradition includes Indo-Aryan languages, Hinduism and settled agriculture as prominent features. The Southwest Asian tradition includes non-Indic, Aryan languages, Islam and both settled agriculture and pastoralism as its prominent features.

Contrasting with this pair are the Tibetan and Southeast Asian or Burman traditions which also have common ties and therefore may be described as Tibeto-Burman traditions, using a linguistic designation. These impinge on the Himalayas from the north and east respectively. Tibetan cultures are characterized by Tibetan language, Lamaistic Buddhism, and a combination of pastoralism and settled agriculture. Southeast Asian cultures of the hill variety found in India include as distinguishing features, Tibeto-Burman languages, indigenous religious systems unrelated to the "great traditions" of Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism, and settled agriculture including prominently that of the slash-and-burn type. In addition, each of the four traditions displays distinctive features of dress, architecture, social and political organization which will be touched on below.

South Asian Area

Within the Himalayas are culture areas representing each of the traditions mentioned above and regions of cultural mixture. Most populous among the peoples of this area are the *Paharis* ("of the mountains;" high caste Paharis are also known locally as *Khasa*, *Khasiya*, *Khosh*, *Chhetri*). The Paharis live in the lower mountains of India and Nepal and share most of their culture with the peoples of the plains of North India and Pakistan.⁶ They speak languages derived from Sanskrit and closely allied to others of North India. Nepali is the eastern dialect of the Pahari language. They are for the most part Hindus, and in social organization form part of the North Indian culture area. For example, they share the system of hereditary, ranked, endogamous groupings and associated features which comprise the Indian caste system. Economically they also resemble other North Indians in that they practice intensive agriculture using the plow and bullocks common to the plains to cultivate wet and dry rice, wheat, millet, barley, maize and legumes. Within the village, occupational specialization and the system of exchange of goods and services follow

⁶ See Berreman, 1960, *op. cit.*; also Gerald D. Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

patterns well-known in northern India. The list of traits common to Paharis and plainsmen could be expanded greatly.⁷

However, the Himalayan Hindus are distinct from their relatives in the plains. In each of the ways in which I have described them as culturally similar to plains people, they are also different. Their languages, for example, are similar but distinct. Pahari languages are more like one another than they are like Hindi or Punjabi or other North Indian languages, and they are not mutually intelligible with such other languages. Pahari Hinduism is distinctive and is disparaged by plains Hindus. Animal sacrifice is practiced by even the high caste Paharis, for example.

The caste system and social usages of Paharis differ from equivalent features of the plains so that hill people are thought by others to be incorrigibly unorthodox. There are fewer castes in the hills, there is freer interaction among castes and occupational specialization is less rigid. Marriage in the hills includes a cash gift from the family of the groom to that of the bride rather than a dowry from bride to groom as is generally true on the plains. Divorce and remarriage is easy rather than difficult or prohibited in the hills. In several Pahari areas a woman may have as her husbands a group of brothers, a practice which plains people find abhorrent. Agricultural techniques in the mountains are uniquely adapted to the mountain terrain and climate with terracing the most distinctive feature. Houses in the hills are made of stone rather than mud brick and are roofed with slate or wooden shakes rather than with tile. Corresponding differences exist in every sphere of life.

Therefore, the Indian tradition in the Himalayas is a distinct Himalayan version of the greater North Indian cultural tradition. This version is shared, with regional variations, by the inhabitants of the lower Himalayas—the mountains from the edge of the plains to almost 8,000 feet altitude—all the way from western Kashmir through western Nepal and to some extent and in a mixed version into eastern Nepal. It forms a distinct culture area. The boundary with the plains is sharp but it is becoming less so with increasing contacts. The boundary with Tibetan culture is even more distinct, for it shares less with that culture.

Southwest Asian Area

In the westernmost part of the Himalayas is found the influence of the peoples of Southwest Asia, such as those of Iran and Afghanistan. Like Paharis and other peoples of North India, Southwest Asians are racially Caucasoid. They are related linguistically and in other cultural respects to the North Indian peoples, albeit remotely. For the most part the people of this culture who are most relevant to our discussion occupy mountainous regions adjacent to the Himalayas, extending west and south of the Indus, the eastern terminus of the Himalayas. They live in much of western Kashmir and speak Pashto, a language which is classed as

⁷ See *ibid.*

Iranian along with other languages spoken in Iran and Afghanistan. According to Grierson, Iranian languages are Aryan but separated from the stock later than did the Indic or Indo-Aryan whose descendants are the modern Sanskritic languages of North India.⁸

The peoples of the Southwest Asian area are Moslems who do not share the caste system of India although they have social usages which approximate to it in some respects. The influence of these peoples is felt throughout India and Pakistan as a result of many centuries of Muslim rule in India and has taken concrete form in the creation of the Islamic nation of Pakistan on the South Asian subcontinent. They, in turn, have been heavily influenced by South Asian culture and most of those who live in Pakistan and India are for many purposes best described now as South Asians. They are agriculturists who rely for their livelihood on raising wheat and barley, pastoralists who raise cattle, horses, sheep and goats, and artisans and other occupational specialists who serve the farming and livestock-raising peoples.

Of more direct concern to the present discussion are peoples of Southwest Asian affinities in western Kashmir who speak languages known as Dardic (or Pisaca). Kashmiri, spoken in the valley of Kashmir around Srinagar, is a version of Dardic speech.⁹ Dardic speakers are, for the most part, Muslims who have a culture based on the Islamic faith and on an agricultural economy which partakes heavily of the South Asian culture but also of the Southwest Asian.

To the north and west of these people is a group that has become moderately well-known due to several popular accounts, the people of Hunza. They speak a non-Aryan language, Burushaski, with no known affinities, and they are Muslim farmers. To their east is Baltistan (west of the cease-fire line between India and Pakistan), which is occupied primarily by Muslims of the Southwest Asian culture area, and Ladakh district (east and south of Baltistan) whose residents include 40,000 Tibetan-speaking Buddhists, western representatives of the Tibetan culture area. This culture area differs fundamentally from both of those described above.

Tibetan Area

While Tibetan culture is not uniform, it does form a single culture area with many common features along the entire northern frontier of India, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan; in fact, from Ladakh to the northern

⁸ George A. Grierson, *The Pisaca Languages of North-Western India*, (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1906).

⁹ The Dardic languages are identified by Grierson as being "neither of Indian nor of Eranian origin, but [they] form a third branch of the Aryan stock, which separated from the parent stem after the branching forth of the original Indian languages, but before the Eranian languages had developed all their peculiar characteristics." (*Ibid.*, p. 4). Today Dardic languages are often classed as Indic or Indo-Aryan along with Sanskrit and its derivatives.

borders of Assam. Racially, Tibetans are Mongoloid, as are Burmans and Chinese, rather than Caucasoid as are Southwest and South Asians. Linguistically Tibetans are related to Burmese and Chinese too, rather than to South Asians. In religion they are Lamaistic Buddhists with a heavy retention of non-Buddhist elements which makes them seem a very unorthodox kind of Buddhist indeed to most other Buddhists in the world. The non-Buddhist religious tradition is a shamanistic one called *Bon*, and is thought to have preceded Buddhism which thrived in Tibet after the seventh and eighth centuries. Lamaistic Buddhism is distinct from other forms of Buddhism in many ways, perhaps most notably in the belief that deities appear incarnate in human form and in the emphasis on belief in a variety of good and evil spirits. The monastery or lamasery plays an important part in Tibetan social and economic organization as well as in religion. A significant proportion of the men in the society live in these institutions part of their lives and much of the land has been owned and cultivated by them.

In economic organization Tibetans combine agriculture and pastoralism. Those groups living near and in the Himalayan valleys depend largely upon agriculture while those on the desolate Tibetan plateau emphasize or depend exclusively upon their herds.¹⁰ The most important crops in Tibet are barley, buckwheat and wheat, in that order, cultivated by use of the plow pulled by cattle except at the very highest altitudes where human traction may be used. Most important animals are cattle, including the yak, and sheep. The former are used for work, for meat, milk and hides, while the latter are the most valuable animals of the pastoral Tibetans, providing meat, milk, hides, wool and transportation. Horses, donkeys and mules are also used for transport but to a lesser extent.

Tibetans lack the caste organization of India but there is in Tibet a pariah group similar to groups found in Japan and Korea and resembling in status the untouchables of India.¹¹ In social life, probably the best known and most distinctive feature in Tibet is the custom of fraternal polyandry whereby brothers share a common wife. In various forms this is found from Ladakh to eastern Tibet. The occurrence of a similar practice among Paharis has led to considerable speculation as to possible diffusion of this marriage form between the two cultures, but they may well be independent developments.¹²

People of this cultural tradition occupy much of Ladakh, the greatest area of Tibetan culture in what is politically part of India. They also live in regions of cultivable land in the higher Himalayas of western India outside Kashmir, in Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Assam. In most of these

¹⁰ Pedro Carrasco, *Land and Polity in Tibet*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959), pp. 4-5.

¹¹ Herbert Passin, "Untouchability in the Far East," *Monumenta Nipponica*, XI (1955) 27-47.

¹² Gerald D. Berreman, "Pahari Polyandry: A Comparison," *American Anthropologist*, LXIV (1962) 60-75.

areas they are called *Bhotia* (literally "Tibetan") by Indo-Aryan speakers. This term designates a variety of peoples with Tibetan affinities, the more southerly and easterly of whom have been greatly influenced by neighboring cultures. In many of these areas in addition to agriculture and herding, Bhotias were engaged heavily in trade, prior to the recent deterioration in Sino-Indian relations, carrying goods of India to Tibet and the salt and other goods of Tibet to India. In their trading, many of those who live in what is politically India are closely tied to the peoples of the lower mountains and plains of India rather than to Tibet.¹³ The same is true of herders. Bhotias north of the region of my research, in the mountains west of Nepal, spent several months each year among Paharis in the lower mountains of India with their flocks of sheep in order to escape heavy winter snows in their home regions. They had never seen Tibet.

Mid-montane Nepalese Area

Throughout most of Nepal, excluding only the westernmost part, and probably in Sikkim and Bhutan as well, there is a broad belt in which Tibetan culture does not directly meet Indian culture as is the case in western India and the adjacent section of Nepal. This region deserves special attention in any discussion of the peoples of the Himalayas.

Nepal, like all of the Himalayan region, can be divided into three major areas corresponding to cultural areas. One of these is the lowland or terai, a swampy forested region bordering the plains of North India and not exceeding 2,000 feet in altitude. This region is for the most part occupied by peoples who are culturally continuous with those of the plains of North India (an exception are the Tharus, to be discussed below). At the other extreme are the high Himalayas, mostly above 10,000 feet in altitude. This area is culturally continuous with Tibet and its people are the Tibetans or Bhotias. The Sherpas of Mt. Everest fame are in this group. Between these two areas are the low and middle Himalayas ranging from about 2,000 to 8,000 or 10,000 feet in altitude. In this intermediate area in Nepal live Paharis and, toward the higher end of the range, the distinctively Nepalese peoples who combine Tibetan, Indian and probably certain aboriginal elements common to neither and deriving from cultures which may have been preceded by both. The affinities of the antecedent cultures are unknown. They may have been western extensions of the Southeast Asian hill cultures which persist today in the hills of northern Assam and which evidently did not penetrate very far west of Nepal. They may have been early Tibetan groups or they may have been groups independent of any of these other traditions. In any event the peoples of this area today share many cultural traits with Tibetans. They speak Tibeto-Burman languages and their religious practices have been

¹³ S. D. Pant, *The Social Economy of the Himalayans*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), pp. 215-225. See also R. P. Srivastava, "The Bhotia Nomads and Their Indo-Tibetan Trade," *Journal of the University of Saugar*, VII Pt. I, Sec. A (1958) 1-22.

heavily influenced by Lamaistic Buddhism. Some peoples of the area have been thoroughly Hinduized and others are tending in this direction as the prestige and influence of conventional Hindu groups increase in this Hindu-dominated country.¹⁴ Increasingly also, the Indo-Aryan Nepali language is gaining a foothold among these people through its use in trade, in education and in government.

The cultures of Nepal which fall in this intermediate zone are described variously as Nepali, sub-Tibetan, Himalayan, and tribal cultures. It is not appropriate here to go into terminological questions or even to consider in any detail the distribution and characteristics of the groups involved. One should note, however, that recently a fair amount of ethnological research has been undertaken in this area. Of the British anthropologists, Fürer-Haimendorf has done research there intermittently for some years and others, such as Colin Rosser, have followed him. Kawakita and other Japanese scientists have carried out studies in 1952, 1953 and again in 1958. Shortly before his death, the young French anthropologist, Bernard Pignède had completed a monograph based on his research in Nepal in 1957-58. American anthropologists who have worked with Nepalese material include Victor Barnow, Ferdinand Okada and most recently, John Hitchcock. Therefore, we know considerably more about these cultures than was previously the case, and more information can be expected shortly.

Among the best known peoples of this mid-montane region are the Magars and Gurungs who occupy large areas west of Kathmandu, with Magars generally farther south and hence more Hinduized than Gurungs. In the Kathmandu valley itself are the well-known Newars who are also found throughout Nepal as traders. Unlike other groups of this region, significant numbers of Newars are Hindus, though many are Buddhists. Also unlike other mid-montane Nepalese the Newars have an Indian-type caste system which appears among both Buddhist and Hindu Newars. East of Kathmandu are several peoples, notably the Kiranti tribes of which the Limbus are the easternmost group. The Limbus appear to be related to the Lepchas of Sikkim and have migrated to southern Sikkim in significant numbers in recent decades. They evidently share more cultural traits with Bhotias than do the peoples mentioned above for this area except possibly for some Gurung groups. They may share more with the hill peoples of Assam than do other peoples of Nepal. Mid-montane people in general become more Tibetan in culture as one moves north in Nepal.

Kawakita and Iijima of the Japanese expedition have commented on the close correspondence between ethnic groups and altitude in central Nepal, a feature noted also by Fürer-Haimendorf and others. Indeed, these scientists noted that the ethnic identity of the occupants of villages along the way could be predicted with great accuracy before entering the villages, merely by consulting an altimeter. Kawakita attributes this fact

¹⁴ Shigeru Iijima, "Hinduization of a Himalayan Tribe in Nepal," manuscript (1963).

to the different crops and animals which the land will support at various altitudes and to the "great attachment to their respective combination of staple crops" among each of the ethnic groups.¹⁵ In the area of his research there was a close correspondence between the Indian cultural tradition and the presence of rice cultivation (frequently combined with maize and millet as summer crops) up to an altitude of 1,900 meters (about 6,200 feet). The mid-montane Himalayan cultures (Gurung, Magar and, above them, such groups as the Thakali) were found primarily above the rice-growing region, between 1,900 and 2,500 meters (about 6,200 to 8,200 feet) where people depend upon barley and wheat as winter crops and maize and millet or, at the higher end of the range, buckwheat, as summer crops. A modified form of Tibetan culture (Bhotia, "Bhote-Gurung," Punnel, etc.) extended from 2,500 to 3,200 meters (about 8,200 to 10,500 feet) where barley and wheat were winter crops and buckwheat was the summer crop. What is termed "pure Tibetan" culture was found above that level. There a single crop of wheat or barley was produced per year rather than two as at lower altitudes, and yak and sheep replaced the conventional cattle and goats of lower regions as the most important livestock.¹⁶

To the east, in Sikkim and Bhutan, the situation is similar to that in Nepal except that most of the indigenous people are of the more Tibetanized and less Hinduized groups and traits common to the Assamese hill peoples may be more prominent. The people in the lower hills seem to be mostly immigrants from eastern Nepal (especially Limbus) and, in smaller numbers, from the plains of India. The Lepchas, who live in the middle region of Sikkim, are the best known indigenous people of the area. They share with Tibetan peoples a number of cultural features, most notably their religion. However, they have some un-Tibetan practices which they share with the Southeast Asian hill peoples to the east, especially slash-and-burn agriculture, use of bamboo, mats and thatch in house construction (combined with use of stone, the characteristic material of the Himalayas to the west and in Tibet), and raising of pigs and chickens for food.¹⁷ Peoples similar to the Lepchas are probably to be found in interior Bhutan. Probably some of the peoples of eastern Bhutan resemble more nearly the Southeast Asians of the mountains of adjacent Assam than do the Lepchas, but reports on the people of Bhutan are almost entirely lacking. In both Sikkim and Bhutan fully Tibetan people evidently live in the highest mountains just as they do in Nepal and

¹⁵ Jiro Kawakita, "Ethno-Geographical Observations on the Nepal Himalaya," *Scientific Results of the Japanese Expeditions to Nepal Himalaya, 1952-53*, (Vol. III, Peoples of Nepal Himalaya, 1-362), ed. by Hitoshi Kihara, (Kyoto: Fauna and Flora Research Society, 1957), p. 20.

¹⁶ See Kawakita, 1961, *op. cit.*, p. 3, and Shigeru Iijima, *Agriculture and Land System in Nepal*, Research Series 18, (Tokyo: The Institute of Asian Economics, 1961), p. 102 (in Japanese).

¹⁷ Geoffrey Gorer, *Himalayan Village*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1938).

western India, and people from eastern Nepal and India occupy the lowest regions and the towns in large numbers.

Terai Area

Most of the peoples of the sub-montane terai area of India and Nepal are strictly South Asian peoples of the Indo-Gangetic plain. However, one group which is widespread along this narrow strip in Nepal and in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh fits into none of the classifications presented here. Since it is sometimes described as a Himalayan tribe, it deserves separate mention. This group is the Tharus.¹⁸ Fűrér-Haimendorf, an expert on the indigenous or tribal peoples of Nepal and Northeast India as well as of middle India, concludes that the Tharus "though predominately Mongoloid in their physical makeup . . . appear to be distinct from the Mongoloid tribes occupying the middle ranges of Nepal. . . . It would seem that most of their cultural characteristics conform roughly to the culture pattern prevailing among the aboriginal tribes of Middle India."¹⁹ Hence they are not South Asian in the sense of the term being used here (although they have been Hinduized significantly) nor are they Southwest Asian, Tibetan or Burman. They are of the Central Indian tribal tradition. They do not extend out of the terai into the Himalayas to any significant extent, however, so they do not need to be discussed further here.

Southeast Asian Area

To introduce a discussion of the people of the eastern Himalayas, I will quote from the report of a Government expedition:

We found ourselves on our way to Assam heading for an obscure part of the borderlands between India and Tibet . . . where the Government . . . had launched an ambitious programme of exploration and development. . . . I learnt that I would be assigned to the Balipara Frontier Tract, where I was to "establish friendly relations with the unadministered hill-tribes, collect data on general conditions and tribal customs, and ultimately explore the upper reaches of the Subansiri River."²⁰

This statement has a nineteenth century ring to it but was written in 1956 about an expedition undertaken by Fűrér-Haimendorf in 1944 into the hills of the North-East Frontier Agency in Assam. Fűrér-Haimendorf did not have the opportunity to explore the upper reaches of the Subansiri River as he had hoped to do, so this small segment of the tribal country along the Tibetan border and the McMahon line remained unexplored.

¹⁸ S. K. Srivastava, *The Tharus: A Study in Culture Dynamics*, (Agra: Agra University Press, 1958).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, "Introduction" by Fűrér-Haimendorf, p. v.

²⁰ Christoph von Fűrér-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Barbary*, (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1956), p. x.

In 1956 Haimendorf wrote that "the valley of the Upper Subansiri, the Agla Marra of the Miri tribesmen, remains to this day terra incognita."²¹

Although the British explored most of these mountains in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and the Government of India has sponsored research in the area since 1956, the above quotations give some indication of the isolation of the people who have been in the path of the most extensive fighting between the Indians and Chinese during the fall of 1962 in the eastern Himalayas. It remains for us to discuss these people.

As in Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, there are typically North Indian people living in the plains adjacent to the eastern Himalayas in Assam—in this case the Assamese. These are Indo-Aryan speaking Hindu farmers, craftsmen and service groups. Also as in the regions to the west, there are typically Tibetan peoples at some points in the high mountains. In the western part of the area the Monpas are an example, while farther east are the Membas and, near them, the Khambas.²² A Tibetan-like group at lower altitude are the Sherdukpens near Bomdi-La.²³

There is a good deal of trade through the mountains north and south. But the majority of the people in these mountains are of a cultural tradition whose affinities are to the east, in Burma and Yunnan, and to the south-east in the Naga Hills and adjacent areas. Following the classification of cultures of Southeast Asia adapted by Naroll from Heinegeldern these can be called Southeast Asian Hill Cultures. Guha says of them: "these tribes are scattered over a very large area in the Sub-Himalayan region in the mountainous areas of Assam and North-Eastern India merging gradually into those of Burma and southern Yunnan, from which no strict line of demarcation either from the geographical or ethnical standpoints can be drawn. They form, on the whole, a compact block and with minor interruptions are continuous along the whole of the North-Eastern Frontiers of India."²⁴ Therefore, although we are here discussing only the Himalayan members of this group, it extends south and east to include many peoples, nearly all of whom speak Tibeto-Burman languages closely related to one another and to the languages of Burma. The single exception is a non-Himalayan group, the Khasis of Assam, south of the Brahmaputra River, who speak a Mon-Khmer language, another language stock in Southeast Asia. Some of the better known Himalayan hill peoples of the North-East Frontier Agency are, from west to east, the Akas, Daflas, Apa Tanis,

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

²² Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, (Shillong: North-East Frontier Agency, 1959).

²³ R. R. P. Sharma, *The Sherdukpens*, (Shillong: North-East Frontier Agency, 1961).

²⁴ B. S. Guha, "The Indian Aborigines and their Administration," *Journal of the Asiatic Society (Science)*, XVII (1951) 19-44.

Miris, Galongs, Abors (now known as Adis), and Mishmis.²⁵ There are numerous other named groups and there is no cultural line of demarcation between those who live in the Himalayas and those to the east and south.

These Burman-speaking peoples of the Himalayas have a number of traits in common besides their linguistic affinity. For their livelihood they depend largely upon slash-and-burn (*jhum*) agriculture. This means that to clear their fields they cut down the large trees, burn over the area and then plant seeds in the open ground between the stumps. This is done with hoe and digging stick without the aid of plow or animals. The plots are abandoned after three or four years when the soil is exhausted or the forest takes it over again. In some areas more intensive agriculture is practiced, usually without the aid of plow or animal traction but, of course, recently these items have been adopted in suitable regions. Rice, especially dry rice, and millet, maize and tubers are the main crops.

A distinct variety of cattle along with pigs and chickens are the important livestock. Fish are a prized food. Some other features of the aboriginal culture of the area which distinguish it from the rest of India include the great importance of raiding and defense between villages or households with villages organized on this basis, and the importance of "soul matter" obtained from human victims through head-hunting or allied practices to assure the vitality and fertility of village members. These practices have been abandoned by most groups, however. Religion is in most cases an indigenous variety independent of Hinduism or Buddhism and involves the propitiation of a variety of largely malevolent deities with the assistance of special religious practitioners some of whom are intermediaries between men and the deities. Two or three groups to the east are recent Buddhist immigrants from Burma. There is no caste system among the Southeast Asian hill peoples. Villages are in many groups made up of several long-houses containing a number of patrilineally related families, each with its own hearth. The houses are raised on piles and are made of bamboo in contrast to the stone houses of the rest of the Himalayas and the mud brick houses of most of India and Southwest Asia. In short, these people are culturally Southeast Asian. Racially they are Mongoloid like the Tibetans and like other Southeast Asians. They are termed "Indo-Mongoloids" in much of the contemporary literature from India. It is not unlikely, as has been mentioned above, that they derive from the same source as many of the Tibetanized and increasingly Hinduized peoples of the central mountain region of Nepal and their relatives in Sikkim and Bhutan. If so, the cultural similarities have been largely obscured through time.

²⁵ See Elwin, *op. cit.*; Verrier Elwin, *India's North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); Fürer-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Barbary*, *op. cit.*; B. K. Shukla, *The Daflas*, (Shillong: North-East Frontier Agency, 1959).

Conclusion

These are the peoples of the Himalayas, described in very broad outline. The over-all picture is one of peoples of Tibetan culture living in the high mountains from Ladakh along the northern borders of western India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and northeastern India. Peoples of South Asian or Indian culture are found on the plains bordering the southern edge of the Himalayas over most of their length and a distinct mountain version of that culture is found in the lower Himalayas themselves from Kashmir to Nepal. This Pahari or mountain culture is found below 6,000 feet in altitude throughout this expanse and up to 8,000 feet in western India. In the mid-montane area of Nepal, between 6,000 and 8,000 feet, are a number of peoples who are heavily influenced by Tibetan culture but whose cultures form a distinct group as a result of a combination of Hindu influence and other traits which evidently carry over from antecedent traditions deriving partly, perhaps, from Southeast Asia or from some other antecedent source. In all but the highest reaches of the eastern Himalayas (east of Bhutan) are found cultures of Southeast Asian type similar to those in adjacent Burma and Yunnan. In the westernmost Himalayas are cultures whose affinities are in part with the Southwest Asian cultures of Afghanistan and Iran.

I would reiterate the fact that these cultural affinities are not to be mistaken for political allegiance. Most of the peoples mentioned have little national awareness and even less national commitment. Their horizons tend to be limited to their own local area and their own dialect group; all others are, to varying degrees, outsiders.

None of these cultures has existed in total isolation in the past to say nothing of the present. Trade relations in a north-south direction have been prominent throughout the Himalayas in all known time periods. Pilgrimage, search for livelihood, and retreat from difficulties have all led to incursions into the Himalayas from various directions. For the most part the relations among Himalayan peoples have been characterized by a kind of peaceful co-existence.

One might hope that the relations among these peoples and the integrity of their cultures will not be abruptly destroyed by contemporary international problems, or by the side effects of such problems, as these places become rapidly militarized. Prime Minister Nehru, with regard to the status of tribal peoples, has expressed alarm at "how anxious people are to shape others according to their own image or likeness, and to impose on them their particular way of living."²⁶ It has been the policy of the Government of India not to force conformity but to facilitate the incorporation of all Indian peoples into the larger society without sacrificing the unique contributions and assets of each group. This is a policy of the middle path between rapid, forced and complete assimilation and detribalization on the one hand, and artificial isolation and insulation from

²⁶ Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

the advantages of modernization and assimilation on the other. It is a difficult path but one which gives promise of being successful if current events do not lead to its abandonment.

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