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BHUTAN

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND
NATIONAL DILEMMA

2nd. *Revised Edition*

A.C. Sinha

The book portrays the transition of the Bhutanese frontier community from a theocratic to a feudal one. It examines the ecological ethnic and historical processes through which the **Bruqpa** theocracy was established in the 17th century A.D. After explicating the aspects of conflict between the monks and the regional feudal lords, establishment of the Wangchuk rule under the British patronage, status of the Bhutan within the Empire, the impact of the Indian freedom movement on Bhutan, it uncovers the Bhutanese national identity, nation building efforts and national dilemma of the emergent nation state. It is divided into three parts and ten chapters besides preface, introduction, bibliography, index and a couple of charts. The book is based on some of the classified materials never published before. While it identifies the process of state formation with that of the efforts to traditionalize the modern functional roles and a paternalistic populism in the context of developmental strategies, the book traces the roots of the recent democratic movement in Bhutan.

* * * * *

Professor Awadhesh Coomar Sinha, the author of the book, is a recognized authority on the Himalayan studies in India. An M.A. in Anthropology from Ranchi University, Ranchi and PhD. in Sociology from Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, he has taught in Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad, Institute of Technology, Delhi and North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. He has been visiting faculty in a number of Indian and foreign University such as Universities of Karnatak, Allahabad, Cambridge (U.K.), Paris (France), California, Hawai East-West Centre (U.S.A.). He did field work among the Santals (Bihar), Bhils and Dangis (Gujarat), elite formation (Skikim), ethnicity and politics (Bhutan) and Christianity in Nagaland. His academic interests lie in political sociology, historical sociology, sociology of Science, technology, communication on environment. He was Smut scholar in the University of Cambridge, Cambridge (U.K.) in 1983 and a Senior Fulbright Visiting Professor to U.S.A. in 1989. Author of four books, half a dozen research reports and about three dozen articles in book and journals, Prof. Sinha is the Head, Department of Sociology, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India.

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Vol. IX

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AUTHOR'S COMP. COPY
NOT FOR SALE

A.C. Sinha



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Glossary

1. *dBang-Phyud-Wangchuks* - the ruling dynasty of Bhutan.
2. *Bhotias* - Himalayan residents of the alleged Tibetan extraction.
3. *Brugpa-Dukpa-ih'opa*-originally followers of the Brug sect of lamaist Buddhism now Buddhist Bhutanese.
4. *Brug-rgyalpo*-Drukgyalpo-King of Bhutan.
5. *Chhos*-Dharma-religion.
6. *Chimis*-members of the Tshongdu ,The National Assembly of Bhutan
7. *Chinlah*-council of ministers.
8. *Dasho*-an honorific Bhutanese title for the ranked officials.
9. *sDe-srid-Deb Raja*-the secular rulers of Bhutan.
10. *Duar*-gate-the passage to the Bhutanese southern foothills.
11. *rDzongs*-forts, strategically located defence structures, now district headquarters in Bhutan.
12. *Diglam*-Namzha-code of conduct-right type of dress, etc.
13. *Dzondas*-District administrators.
14. *Dzongkha*-the tongue of the rdzongs-now official language of Bhutan.
15. *sDungtrial*-Gsung-sprul-speech manifestation of the Zhabdrung.
16. *Dorji Lopan*-the second in command to the rJe-Kham-po.
17. *Grihswamin*-Cho-rje-householding monks.
18. *Gups*-mandals-village headmen.
19. *Hinyana*-followers of the school in Buddhism, who believe in self Nirwan, release from cycle of the birth for themselves or, in southern Buddhism.
20. *Jigs-meds-Seng-ye-dbang-Phyud-Jigme* Singye Wangchuk.
21. *rJe-mKham(n) po*-the chief abbot presiding at Punakha rdzong.
22. *Kazi*-originally magistrate, aristocracy in Sikkim.
23. *Kho*-the Bhutanese male national dress.
24. *Kira*-the Bhutanese female national dress.
25. *Kuensel*-the official news bulletin of the Royal Government of Bhutan.
26. *Lhatshampa*-the Southern Bhutanese, specially the Nepalese.
27. *Longchan*-prime minister.
28. *Mahayana*-followers of the school in Buddhism, which believe in the release of the humanity from the cycle of the birth, Tibetan or northern Buddhism.
29. *Monpas*-southern in Tibetan, referred to a number of communities on the southern fringe of Tibetan plateau, a tribe in Arunachal.
30. *Ngolopas*-anti-National, referred to the Nepalese.
31. *Pahari* (Hindi and Nepali) term for the Nepalese.
32. *Penlop or rdongpen-Jongpen-subhah*-regional chiefs, governors.

33. *Political Officer*-the British Resident stationed in Sikkim and then the practice continued upto 1974 by the Indian Union
34. *Kutul, sku-sprul*-the body manifestation of the *Zhabsdrung*.
35. *Pippon-Karbaris*-assistants to the village headmen.
36. *Lhengya Tsok* - the state council.
37. *Samadhi*-Sanskrit-tombs of the sacred beings.
38. *Sangha*-the Buddhist church.
39. *Samsara*-world as opposed to Dharama, religion.
40. *Terai*-southern Himalayan foothills.
41. *Thimkhang Gongma*-the High Court.
42. *Thuktul, Thugs-sprul*-mind manifestation of the *Zhabsdrung*.
43. *Tshongdu*-the Bhutanese National Assembly-Parliament.
44. *Zhabs-durng*-Dharamraja-the sacred rulers or theocrats of Bhutan.

Preface to 2nd edition

The first edition of the book was sold out within a year and half of its publication in March, 1991. It is a pleasure to acknowledge its instant reception. Bhutan and its ethnic conflict continue to be in the news. We have looked afresh in the text of the book and found it reasonably satisfactory excepting minor correctional places. This edition incorporates two additional items. First, we felt the need of a glossary for the Bhutanese/Tibetan terms at the beginning. Secondly, we have added a dozen paragraphs before the last paragraph of the first edition of the book to make it up to date with the pace of the events in Bhutan. We take this opportunity to thank the readers for their acceptance of the book and the publisher for his commendable work in reaching the book to them.

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Preface to the First Edition

Bhutan : Ethnic Identity And National Dilemma' is the study of political transition from the lamaist monk rulers to regional feudal chiefs, to contemporary nascent strategic elite controlling the destiny of the Bhutanese nation state. The study, divided into three parts, provides an ecological, ethnic and historical analysis to the various social institutions. It particularly portrays the intricate characteristics of the *Brug-pa (Dupka)* frontier community around which the typical Bhutanese personality is formed and which ultimately provides anchor sheet to the Bhutanese national identity. The third part of the study examines the contemporary political culture, emergent Wangchuk dynastic rule under the British patronage, conflict between the theocracy and the dyanstic rulers, nature of the Bhutanese state, national identity, nation building efforts and some aspects of the national dilemma. We have characterized the process of the Bhutanese transition with that of the efforts to traditionalize the modern functional roles and resort to paternalistic populism in the context of the development strategies.

The study owes its origin to a number of scholars, who inspired, encouraged and helped us in various ways in completing the research. Among them mention may be made of late Prof. L.P. Vidyarthi, Ranchi University, Ranchi, Prof. Ali Ashraf, formerly Vice-Chancellor, Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi, Prof. Surajit C. Sinha, formerly Vice-Chancellor Vishwabharati, Santiniketan, Prof. D.L. Seth, Centre for Developing Society, New Delhi, Prof. S.K. Chaube, Department of Political Science, Delhi University, Delhi, Prof. S.N. Jha and Prof. Dharendra Sharma, Jawaharlal Nehur University, New Delhi, Prof. Nirmal C. Sinha, formerly Director, Namgyal institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Prof. J.B. Bhattacharjee and Prof. Imdad Hussain of North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Caroline Humphrey, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, U.K. and Prof. Triloki Nath pandey, University of California, Santa Cruz, U.S.A.

Originally, I proposed to collect emperical data based on field work. For that, besides the macro study of the Bhutanese elite, I desired to undertake intensive village studies at three locations. This idea did not find favour with the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan. Accordingly the study was re-oriented to draw more on the historical data. The field work was conducted between July, 1878 to June, 1982 in stages. The functionaries of the Indian Embassy, Thimphu,

helped us whenever it was possible for them. We earnestly value their gesture. A number of friends and acquaintances in Bhutan, Sikkim and Darjeeling helped us to establish rapport with the subjects and locate relevant data for the study. Among them mention may be made of His Excellency Dr. T. Tobgay the then Bhutanese Ambassador in India, His Lordship Penjor Dorji (Mrs Louis Dorji) the judge, Bhutan High Court, Nado Lopen, Educationist, Jigme Thinley, the then Director, Manpower and presently the Ministry of Home Affairs, Thimphu, B.P. Sinha, Chief Town Planner, Dr. D.K. Singh, Thimphu General Hospital, the Editor *Kuensel*, the Information Bulletin, the Royal Government of Bhutan, Rudramani Pradhan, Phuntsholing, (late) Parasmani Pradhan, late Kazani Eliza Maria Dorji and late B.D. Basnet, Editor *Himalayan Observer*, Kalimpong Chandra Das Rai, Lal Bahadur Basnet and Nandlal Thapa Gangtok. I am thankful to them for their hospitality and countless favour, which are at times essential to boost sagging moral of any field worker. I shall like to express my obligations to numerous un-mentioned individuals in Bhutan and India, who helped me in various ways in the context of the present study.

A lavish research grant was provided by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. The University Grants Commission, New Delhi sanctioned in 1983, travel and maintenance grants for consulting the original records on Bhutan in the India Office Library, London, and various other libraries in United Kingdom. I am thankful to them for their patronage and bearing with me the slow pace of research on the virtually 'data-free' Bhutan. Prof. Jack Goody, Department of social Anthropology, Cambridge University, Cambridge, U.K and Prof. Alexander Macdonald, Labratoire de Ethnologie, University de Paris, Nanterre, Paris, France, invited the author as a visiting faculty in their respective departments during summer, 1983, where a series of lectures on Bhutan were organized. These lectures and specially the discussions after the author's presentation were extremely useful in clarifying certain concepts and ideas presented in the manuscript. I express my appreciation to their gesture. My supporting staff, M/s R. Dutta, N.P. Sharma and A.J. Patil typed the press copy for the publication, Prof. K.G. Gurusurthy, the General Editor of the series, and Prof. K. Ranghavendra Rao, the Issue Editor of the book, did a commendable job in editing the manuscript. I am thankful to the auditors and Dr. S.K. Bhatia, Proprietor, Reliance Publishing House, New Delhi for the publication of the book.

January 2, 1991

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General Editor's Note

Prof. Awadhesh Coomar Sinha is an authority on Himalayan kingdoms. His earlier works on Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal are very well received by both academics and policy makers. Now he is publishing a full length book on Bhutan, probably the last monarchy in the world.

Researching in societies which are accessible to field work and documentation is rather easy compared to Bhutan situation. Dr. Sinha has taken a lot of pains in collecting data-both empirical and secondary. The latter sources include historical documents available in Bhutan and London. After going through the book the readers will admire Dr. Sinha for the pains he has taken in preparing this book.

Dr. Sinha has not only used the western theories of state formation but also the data from western (British) sources. Bhutan being an oriental society some of the interpretations offered and conclusions drawn by him according to western model, need re-examination. We are sure that the book will generate ample discussion among scholars on Himalayan kingdoms and also the process of state formation there.

On behalf of SPIHOKI family Dr. K.G. Gurumurthy, who has done research on Tibetans in India, has reviewed the manuscript and Dr. K. Ranghavendra Rao, has written the Issue Editor's Foreword to the book. We extend our thanks to both of them and to Prof. A.C. Sinha, the author, for allowing us to include his book in the series.

GENERAL EDITOR

Issue Editor's Foreword

Prof. A.C.Sinha's penetrating and comprehensive study of the political developments in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is welcome for many reasons. In the first place, we have very few detailed studies in the field of political anthropology in India; and this work would constitute a valuable contribution to a neglected field. In the second place, and more importantly, this study would throw much needed light on the processes that are at work when a so called traditional society begins to get caught up in the process of political modernization. But in my view, and even more important function of this study would be to raise critical questions about the standard theories of political modernization, that were dominant in the west during the fifties and sixties, and then suffered a setback in the seventies. Specifically, I believe that careful study of this work should answer the question whether there are not more than one way to being modernized, and whether the western road to political modernization disguised beneath an allegedly universal theory of political modernization, is the only road to it. Thirdly, this work is, apart from every thing else, a solid contribution to the study of Bhutanese socio-political history. Any one of these reasons could have been more than adequate to hail its publication as a welcome occasion. Now with all these three reasons before us, Dr. Sinha's work becomes welcome three-fold!

With a wealth of historical detail Dr. Sinha traces how a society he characterises as "frontier feudalism" struggles to evolve to a modern nation-state, through a transitional period of theocratic system. It was more accurately a monarchic theocracy in which the religious head and the political head came to be fused institutionally under the leadership of *Zhabas-drung*, prince-abbot. After his death, what emerged was a theocratic state controlled by an oligarchy. Currently Bhutan seems to have moved out of its theocratic past but not yet able to reach the destination of a modern national-state. But should it? Is modernization an historical inevitability? I suspect that Dr Sinha, still steeped in the tradition of modernization theory, appears to thin so. Or at least he seems to think such an eventuality desirable, even if impossible. On the historical side, Dr. Sinha offers us some paradoxical truths. For instance, he points out that British imperialism was not a monolithic monster gobbling up territories with an insatiable hunger. In fact, while the

Bhutanese royalty urged the British to incorporate the Himalayan kingdom into *Pax Britannica*, the British preferred an independent but otherwise subservient Bhutan. This was based roughly on the same logic as the dual policy in India and Africa.

What are the plus factors which may help modernize Bhutan politically, assuming that a modern nation-state exemplifies the paradigm of political modernization? The most important seems to be the presence of an elite, prepared to put Bhutan on the road to political modernization. The other is the favourable demographic situation. Unlike most modernizing Third World countries, Bhutan is free from the demographic constraint of population explosion. It is under populated but rich in potential natural resources. But as against these, there are immensely impregnable obstacles along the Bhutanese road to political modernization. First, there is a strong political culture, oriented away from modernization, backed up by vested interests with a stake in continuing the *status quo*. Secondly, there is an absence of the material perquisites for political modernization—modern communication culture, technology, and infrastructures. Dr. Sinha suggests that the *Brugpa* national identity draws its support on two on-going phenomena: the traditionalization of modern functional roles and paternalistic populism. But these may at best sustain what may be called superficial or morphological modernization. The entrenched political culture, centered round the absolute and dynastic policy, runs counter to the participator political culture presupposed by political modernization. As for the other problem of building a Bhutanese national identity, the elite confront four critical challenges — the challenge of ethnic diversity, the monarchy, elitism, and frontier particularism. As Dr. Sinha points out, the elite's resources in meeting these challenges seem to be very meagre. They have no secondary infrastructural components of modernization. This has led them to initiate a modernization process with heavy external support with regard to funds, expertise, technological know-how and even skilled man-power. Given this situation, no wonder that the elite show great caution and circumspection in their modernization efforts. On the author's showing, the political modernization of Bhutan seems to be an immensely formidable task. But then he believes that Bhutan cannot escape for long the global fate of modernization. At this point, it may be appropriate to raise a critical-theoretical issue. Is modernization inevitable? If we conceptualise it in terms of one historical articulation, that of the West, perhaps it may be unavoidable. If we assume alternative models to the Western, then the question is not one of inevitability. There can be no historical determinism. But there can be historical option.

This is a meticulous and thorough study, and the true measure of the

author's achievement can be seen from the fact that he had to work in a situation of not just lack of access to documents but one in which documents did not exist! My only mild complaint is that the author tends often to over-theorise when he cannot afford to, but under-theorises when he can. Theoretical structures generated by the data itself could have been elaborated, while theoretical structures imposed on the data could have been more sharply focussed. All in all, this is an excellent contribution to Indian Political anthropology, and it is relevant to the current global debates over the origin, history and nature of the most important of all the political institutions devised by man, the Leviathan, the State.

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Introduction

The Bhutanese political system, based on Lamaism, has many features of mediaeval European feudalism. In the past, there has been two parallel power structures : Lamaist Church and secular administration. With the establishment of monarchy in 1907, a process was set in motion in which the dominant role of the Church was also taken over by an oligarchy. However, the Church with a nation-wide network of monasteries, nunneries and seminaries is still a force, as the present administrative units, -the *rdzongs* - are often the territories of the monasteries. Development of economic infra-structure, need for the expert handling of the state affairs, and above all a growing desire to play an increasing role in the comity of nations, have led to such a situation in which an assertive bureaucracy has emerged within the last three decades. This study makes an effort to understand how the traditional forces of oligarchy and clergy and the emerging forces of bureaucracy are contributing to the political transformation in Bhutan.

Like other developing political systems, Bhutan is in a state of transition. She has a social structure which may be termed as traditional. But internal developments as well as exposure to the wider world are bound to bring about some forms of social and political changes. These changes and a growing sense of emerging national identity constitute the matrix of political transition in Bhutan. Such a change invariably includes the efforts made for the formation of institutions such as an administrative structure, a national assembly, armed forces and other insignia and an economic infra-structure appropriate to national image. This study, therefore, proposes to delineate the intricate process through which the Bhutanese elite are engaged in transforming their 'traditional' state into an emerging nation-state.

The history of Bhutan provides its own course of transition through which the contemporary Bhutanese polity came into being. Her religious, political and ethnic institutions tend to converge into a small oligarchy. The evolution of these institutions is uniquely secured through the histori-

cal process, which shaped the typical Bhutanese personality, in which an absolute separation between spiritual and temporal estates is not recognized. That is why the lay officials occupied significant positions in the pre-monarchy Lamaist theocracy. Similarly, even in these days of democratic monarchy' the monks play important roles in the secular domains. Broadly speaking, the Bhutanese political transition may be analysed by examining the following major issues : What is the character of the Bhutanese 'traditional' polity and where does it fit in, in the developmental scale? What is the character of such a traditional polity engaged in transforming itself into a nation-state? What are the significant social forces emerged during the last three decades? Who are the elite, who man the key positions, and what are their characteristics? The main hypothesis of this study is that the transition from the 'traditional' state to the 'nation-state' is dependent on the growth of new bases of power, emergence of a new set of elite and evolution of new political institutions.

In fact, the present study has heavily drawn upon historical data gleaned from various sources besides the conventional sociological research method. The study has been divided into three parts and ten chapters. Part one provides the background material in terms of the ecological base of the Bhutanese frontier community and ethnic backdrop of the Bhutanese cultural periphery. Here we have used the concept of frontier feudalism to illustrate the case of pastoral nomads, inhabiting the better parts of the country, who laid the foundation of *Brug-pa* state. Part two is essentially an historical analysis examining the emergence of the Bhutanese political culture, the role of the great charismatic 'prince-abbot' - *the Zhabs-drung (Dharamraja)*, who laid the foundation of theocracy, and the subsequent oligarchy after his death. Here we have found that the management of frontier conflict through wars, raids and slave capture was an exercise in generating revenue for the maintenance of the state structure.

Part three examines the implications of the political transition from theocracy to the nation-state. Her location on cultural, social and political periphery of Tibetan and Indian cores helped it to a large extent to maintain its distinctive entity. Without belittling the contributions of

Ugyen Wangchuk in initiating the process of the present day Bhutan, besides its economic under-development, ethnic uniqueness and un-reformed Lamaist structure, credit goes to the British Himalayan policy of carving out a series of buffer states on the northern frontiers of their Indian empire. Needless to mention that the present day state of Bhutan owes its existence to a great extent to the British imperial designs. Here we have examined the theocratic political culture, the role of the regional chiefs and the institution of the *rdzong*, dynastic rule, Bhutan within the British empire, clash between the king and the Dharamraja, and Bhutan in the British policy for North-East India.

Two points deserve special attention here. Firstly, though it is a monarchy, Bhutan, unlike Sikkim and Tibet, has no aristocracy. This uniqueness, explained through a genealogical table, suggests prevalence of marital alliance between the families of the first king and his own sister's. Secondly, it appears from our data that unlike the popular belief, the Bhutanese kings were more than willing to join the British Indian empire. However, the British had limited interests in Bhutan as for them a stable dynastic rule was enough for the existence of a buffer state in the interest of the empire.

The British went all out to safeguard the interests of the newly established dynastic rule. This went to the extent that the British openly sided with the *Brug-gyalop* against the last incarnation of the *Dharmraja* in which the latter lost his life in a mysterious circumstance.

We have classified various efforts to carve out a distinct *Brugpa* national identity into two. Firstly, what we have termed as the traditionalization of the modern functional roles which include the royal advisory council, the council of ministers, the national assembly etc. These are the new institutions as per the contingency of the emergent *Brugpa* nation-state, but they have been presented in such a way that they appear in the garb of the *Brugpa* political culture. Secondly, what we have referred to as the paternalistic populism includes certain steps of the state, which give the impression that there is popular participation in the state-sponsored programmes of district development council,

graduate orientation programmes. Needless to add that Bhutan as an absolute and dynastic polity has little formal fora of political participation in the decision-making process. However, the above programmes are designed with a view to generate inter-regional, inter-ethnic and inter-religious participation in the nation-building activities.

The next chapter examines the issues around the emerging Bhutanese national identity, various concrete steps for nation building, a number of dilemmas faced by the Bhutanese strategic elite in the course of their very arduous task. Among such national dilemma in Bhutan's transition from tradition to modernity, we have identified the national versus ethnic identity, the king versus the national assembly, elitism versus populism and the frontier particularism versus universal modernity. This process of transition has already started affecting the Bhutanese society and economy. When, in what form, and at what cost will this transition be complete are some of the questions which are yet to be answered.

Bhutan has been termed as "data-free" country in the sense that social research is entirely a new phenomenon for the Bhutanese. Except the 'religious' text discoverers' accounts, legendary feats of the holymen, Lamaist mysticism, religious texts of Indian and Tibetan origins and biographies of the monk state functionaries, there are not many other sources. The *rdzongs* used to be also the centres of the holy scriptures, where some texts of sociological relevance might have been found. But we are frequently informed that fire and earth-quakes devastated the *rdzong* repositories. The idea of having an individual in public library is yet to find acceptance. The state archives are in a state of infancy. Thus, we had to consult the records in the India Office Library, London, on the sequence of development in the 20th century Bhutanese political system. To a large extent the non-availability of research materials within Bhutan was thus compensated.

Journalism is yet to emerge as a profession even among a few individuals; there is no extensive reading habit among the universally uneducated masses. In such a situation, there is no source of authenticity except the statements of the functionaries. Then there is no recognized fora or

programmes of public dissent. Even the statements and approach papers and such state documents do not present the existing state of affairs, but they are rather indicative of the state of intentions. It becomes most difficult to locate the copies of the state policies on various decisions, rules, procedures and proclamations. We did consult a number of such state documents, reports, proceedings and bulletins, whenever they were available, which were of immense values.

Bhutan is among those of a few blessed polities where census enumeration is not done even today. Their development planning is based on some official estimates, which vary in many cases. On the top of it, two more problems for the researchers are added. Firstly, as means of public transport is yet to be established for the most part of the country, it is difficult to reach the inaccessible interiors, even if somebody is permitted to go to most of the prohibited regions. Secondly, as Bhutan is a monarchy with a strong input of Lamaist theocracy and a type of closed society in itself, it has yet to develop a critical approach to individuals, institutions, decisions, policies and programmes. Consequently, a critical or rather a searching question makes the respondents most uncomfortable.

Bhutan is among those countries of the Third World unlike her south Asian neighbours, which possesses rich untapped natural resources and a sparsely distributed unskilled population. The process of development in terms of providing some of the most basic amenities amounts to leaping decades and generations forward. The non-Bhutanese agencies are providing funds, expertise, technology and even manpower for the Bhutanese programmes. But it goes without saying that for the common Bhutanese these external inputs have encapsulated the centuries, generations and decades into the present. It is a fact that the Bhutanese strategic elite are aware of this situation and have decided to proceed cautiously on the "road to development." However, the much desired technological and infra-structural development demands smooth institutional sustenance in case the breakdown to the present social and political fabric is to be avoided.

THE ECOLOGICAL BASE OF THE BHUTANESE CULTURAL PERIPHERY

Part 1

BHUTAN :

Ecological and Ethnic Background

CHAPTER-1

THE ECOLOGICAL BASE OF THE BHUTANESE CULTURAL PERIPHERY

With a view to understanding the areal spread of the cultural characteristics, the structure of culture is broken into traits, complexes, areas and patterns. Traits are conceived as the smallest identified unit which can further be combined with other traits to form a complex and complexes are so oriented as to give a culture a distinctive form that is termed as its pattern. And distribution of similarly patterned ways of life in a given region constitutes a cultural area. Then the areas, that have been, thus, mapped out, correspond in a rough way to ecological areas reflecting a basic relationship between material culture and the habitat. Such a concept of culture area exists in the mind of the student as a construct and it may not have much meaning to those who inhabit the area. "Ideally, the student considers the distribution of traits in region studied, discovering those cultures in which the greatest number of manifestation of these traits is found. It is these concentrations that then most clearly differentiate the culture types. They represent, for the student, the peaks in the cultural landscape and are the points about which his areas cluster." (Herskovits, 1952 : 194).

From a sociological point of view, it is imperative to examine the concept of centre and periphery in the areal context. "There is a central zone in the structure of society. This central zone impinges in various ways on those, who live within the ecological domain in which society exists... The central zone is not, as such, a specially located phenomenon. It almost always has a more or less definite location within the bounded territory in which the society lives. Its centrality has, however, nothing

to do with geometry and little with geography. The centre or central zone is a phenomenon of the realm of values and beliefs which govern the society. It is the centre because it is the ultimate and irreducible; and it is felt to be such by many who cannot give explicit articulation to its irreducibility.. (It) is also a phenomenon of the realm of action. It is a structure of activities, of roles and persons, within the network of institutions. It is in these roles that the values and beliefs which are central, are embodied and propounded." (Shils, 1961 : 117).

The larger territorial social units consist of various sub-systems such as the economy, the status-system, the polity, the kinship system, the ecclesiastical system, etc. These sub-systems are organized "through a common authority, overlapping personnel, personal relationships, contracts, perceived identities of interest, a sense of affinity within a transcendent whole, and a territorial location possessing symbolic values." These sub-systems or organizations characterize the pattern of authority symbolized by the individual actions. "Those who are closely and positively connected with authority are thought in consequence of this connection, to possess a vital relationship to the centre, the locus of the sacred, the order which confers legitimacy. Land-territoriality - has similar properties and those who exercise authority through control of land have always been felt to enjoy a special status in relation to the core of the central values system. Those who live within given territorial boundaries come to share in these properties and, this, become the objects of political sentiments. Residence within certain territorial boundaries, and rule by common authority, are properties which define citizenship and establish its obligations and claims."-(Shils, 1961 : 122).

Similarly, Karl Wittfoegel makes a distinction between a farming economy that involves small-scale irrigation (hydro-agriculture) and one that involves large-scale and government-managed works of irrigation and flood-control (hydraulic-agriculture) as a sequence to his studies in the institutional settings of what he terms as *Oriental Despotism*. He goes on to describe systematically man's hydraulic response to arid,

semi-arid and particular humid environments, turning the major aspects of hydraulic society into a dynamic institutional pattern. This institutional going concern "constitutes a geo-institutional nexus which resembles industrial society in that a limited core area decisively affects conditions in large interstitial and peripheral areas. In many cases these marginal areas are politically connected with hydraulic core areas; but they also exist independently." (Wittfoegel, 1963 : 3). In this context, reference may be made to J.C. Mackinder's studies, in which he has pointed out the significance of land power against the sea power. With the improvement of land transportation, the states occupying the great "heartland" of Eurasia could deny access to sea power and could extend their conquest over "rim-lands" of the continents.

In case we examine the concepts of cultural core, political centre and geographical heartlands within the political boundaries of a given state such as India or for that matter China, concentration of various 'national' activities are likely to be inwardly directed. Conversely, such 'national' activities or domains of specialized behaviour may be found thinly distributed towards the fringe or frontier. Frontiers or zones or belts of territory possessing small or great areas are subject to continued change as human agencies bring about modification in their character and utilization. "Frontiers are area, boundaries are linear in character. The former may be correctly described as 'natural' in so far as they are parts of the earth's surface; in some cases they possess the quality of individuality based on their functions as traditional zones. The latter are artificial since they are selected, defined and demarcated by men, here in conformity with physical features of the terrain, there in complete disregard of such geographical factors." (Moodie, 1974 : 73-74). Further, frontier, be its character physical, linguistic, religious or ethnic, cannot be moved; it may change its character; it may lose much of frontier function, but it must remain *in situ*. By contract, boundaries are by no means immovable.

A frontier refers only to a transitional zone, while borderland should indicate exclusively the cis-boundary part of the

transitional zone. The boundary, which is a line without width, has to undergo the process of delimitation. There are the various stages of this process such as delimitation proper (or allocation), definition (or description), delineation (or mapping) and demarcation (or abornement). In days gone by, natural features such as mountains, rivers, deserts, marshes, forests or seas have provided complete or continuous limits of states. But with the increasing sophistication in the technology of culture, these natural objects as dividing lines have been losing their significance. "It is usual to refer to an area in which peoples have intermingled, and a definite dividing line is difficult to draw as a frontier one. The frequent association of frontier in popular speech with a mountainous area at least in Britain is accidental. The frontier in this sense is a zone, which by reasons of topography, climate or ethnography, is difficult to control. The frontier most often in the minds of Britons in the past happened to be the Indian frontier, particularly the North-West Frontiers in the Himalaya. Hence the association. For the peoples of India and Pakistan, the frontiers remain in the mountains.... For the citizens of U.S.A.... frontier then come to stand for the zone which demarcated a spirit of self-reliance and adventure, of enterprise and thoroughness in the individual... In South America, the term is sometimes applied to the zone of the "national territory" i.e., the developing territory and the region still in a more or less primitive stage, i.e., the zone between the settled areas of Brazil and Amazonian forests." (Crone, 1969 : 61).

Cultural Zones and Their Frontiers in Himalaya

Apart from the individual cultural traits and trait complexes enumerated or available to the casual observers, certain obvious cultural patterns occur in the Himalayan region. "The Himalaya is the abode of great variety of people. They include unsophisticated people of the secluded valley bottoms and exposed lake beds, the semi-nomadic pastoral tribes and even said head-hunters among a few tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. The topography of the Himalaya precludes

quick movements and intermingling. It is because of this reason that quaint customs have developed in various pockets. Usually the environment has made the people of the Himalaya cheerful, happy, simple, honest, courageous and resourceful. However, the culture changes from one type to another across mountain barriers. A number of dominating cultural flows may be recognised. The two main types of currents are the Tibetan culture of Lamaism, with a Buddhist religion from the north and the Hindu culture from the plains of India. A third flow of culture is the Muslim-Persian influence from the West, which is dominating in Kashmir, and has more or less spread up to Kinnaur in the Sutlej valley. The Sindhu-Ganga watershed beyond is also cultural divide" (Bose 1977 : 72).

Agehanand Bharati with his long first hand experience of the social context of the Uttar Pradesh Himalaya and studies in the Himalayan ethnographic materials identifies two dominant cultural configuration : Hindu and Lamaist. He proposes to arrange the multiple ethnic groups from the Himalaya along a continuum from high cast Hindus to discrete cultural isolates. "Thus, stress on ritualistic purity, vegetarian diet, the non-remarriage of widows, merges with high-ranking in the Hindu hierarchies. Now it is tempting to select contrary patterns of social and individual action as generation obverse hierarchical ranking on the analogy of tribal societies, in the Indian plains, when in the process of 'Hinduzation' and 'Sanskritization'... The process of "upcasting is ubiquitous among the groups, which rebel against low hierarchical ranking in the area... Tibet Bhot-province admitted or domiciled, conveys the image of meat-eating (or worse, bovine *Yak*-eating), polyandry, easy divorce, re-marriage of widows and suspect ritual to *pahari* high castes and to the Hindu Nepal; worse of all, it conveys lax sexual morals... The closer to the Tibetan style, more directly people seems to enjoy living; the closer to the Hindu style, the more highly ascetic, puritanical, and restrictive values are seen to have been interjected". (Bharati, 1976).

While dwelling upon the political culture and political dynamics in Sikkim, the present author identified three political processess operative in Sikkim. Firstly, the basic foundation

of community life in Sikkim is tribalism. Individuals are identified for the significant roles on the basis of their tribal and ethnic affiliations (Sinha, 1975 : 52). Secondly, the Buddhist (or Lamaist) social structure was based on a three-tier system consisting of the clergy, the aristocracy and commoners. Family life was organized around the institution of polyandry and their approach to social relationship within their community was egalitarian. Thirdly, the Nepalese Hindus had their caste structure based on social distance and ritual hierarchy. Basically, monogamous, the Nepalese were organized in accordance with the concept of purity, pollution and untouchability. Eating of beef was taboo for the clean caste Nepalese. This innate sentiment of the Nepalese ritual superiority over the "polyandrous and beef eating Lamaist" provided a sense of ritual solidarity among the Nepalese against the tribals represented "the little tradition" of their localised and diverse ethnic affiliations. The Lamaists consider themselves as the parts of the Great Tibetan Bhuddist tradition under the patronage of the Dalia Lama. The Hindus draw inspiration from their sacred centres in India and Nepal.

The Himalaya was said to be the meeting point of the three empires of Czarist Russia, Manchu China and British India in the nineteenth century. In the changed geo-political structure of Asia in 1990's the Himalayas have turned out to be the meeting point of the eight states of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Chinese People's Republic, the Socialist Republic of Burma, the Royal Government of Bhutan, the Royal Government of Nepal, the Indian Union, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Revolutionary Government of Afghanistan. In case one decides to divide the Asian heartland into viable regions, can there be something like the Himalayan community of nations? Bharati has raised this issue: "We regard South Asia with Pakistan, India and Ceylon as a cultural area, south East Asia as another and China Region a third; would the Himalayan region be a culture area if the same criteria of inclusion and delimitation were adopted? (Bharati, 1976 : 100). The above proposal apparently does not seem convincing because Bharati has based his regional division of the Himalayas strictly on political boundaries prevalent only

on southern Himalaya for understanding the cultural processes. Kafiristan (Afghanistan), Azerbaijan (USSR), Turkestan and Tibet (China) are inseparable parts of the Himalayan cultural community. In the absence of the northern and north-western slope lands of the great mountain, the above suggestion appears to be restrictive. However, from entirely academic considerations, the Himalayan ethnography suggests a fourfold division of her people and cultures : (i) the Muslim-Persian Pamir-Kashmir Himalaya in the west; (ii) the Hindu-Indian southern slope of of the Himalaya; (iii) the Lamaist traditionalism of Tibet from Leh to Tawang on the Greater Himalaya and its northern slope, and (iv) predominantly tribal world of the eastern Himalaya.

The Himalayan region may also profitably be divided into a number of sub-regions; north-western (in Baluchistan) and trans Sindhu (Indus) from Gwadar (Arabin coast) upto the syntaxial bend at the Nanga Parbat in Kashmir, the Great Himalayan arc (between the Indus and the Brahmaputra bends (upto Namcha Barwa off Arunachal frontier), and the north-eastern wing (from Namcha Barwa to Mizo hills merging itself into Arakan hills). The Great Himalayan arc has again been divided into three sectors : the western, central and the eastern. The Sutlej-Jamuna and the Koshi-Tista water divides carve out the central Himalayan sector as necessarily in the watershed of river Ganga, distinct from the western and eastern Indo-Nepalese border to Namcha Barwa in Arunachal Pradesh turning it necessarily into the Brahmaputra encatchment area. The great Himalayan arc has further been divided into three almost parallel zones from north to south : the Greater Himalaya, the Inner or the lesser Himalaya nad the foothills-variously known as *Bhabar*, *Morung*, *Terai* and *Duar*.

The Bhutanese¹ Ecological Uniqueness

The eastern Himalayan zone consists of Sikkim, Darjeeling, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. Present Bhutan, centrally located in the eastern Himalayan zone, is located in the encatchment areas of Torsa, Raidak, Sankosh and Manas, which drain themselves in the river Brahmaputra. It lies between

latitude $26^{\circ} 45'$ and $28^{\circ} 30'$ North and longitude $88^{\circ} 45'$ and $92^{\circ} 10'$ East. It is about 200 air miles in length and about 100 air miles in breadth and occupies approximately an area of 18,000 square miles (*Kuensel*, Vol. vi (12) p. 12 November, 14 1971). It is bounded by Tibet region of China from north and north-west and from India in west, south and east. Bhutan's undemarcated northern boundary with Tibet is based on traditional usages, recognized by history. For the most part it follows the crest of the Great Himalayan range. Between the Chomo Lhari and Kaula Kangri peaks it follows approximately the line of watershed.

The western slopes of the Khung-dugang mountain and Merug La separate Bhutan from the Chumbi valley of Tibet. To the north of Merug La the Torsa river (Amo-Chu) cuts across the international boundary. To the east of Kaula Kangri group of high peaks, the traditional border cuts across the Lhobrak drainage basin and runs northwards to the high peak of Kharchu (16,500'). From this point it runs south-east, then turns south and joins the border between Tibet region of China and Arunachal Pradesh of India. There are five important border passes leading into Tibet, which have influenced the settlement and trade. Needless to add that rivalry among tribal chiefs for the control of trade flowing through these passes has had significant impact on the historical development of Bhutan. China has disputed parts of its border with Bhutan and shown some 300 square miles of the Bhutanese territories as her own, a point of negotiation between the two.

The southern border of Bhutan with India lies close to the Himalayan foothills in the *Duar*. Annexation of the Assam Duar in 1841 led to the establishment of Bhutan Assam boundary. Between 1837 and 1864 a number of raids were committed by the Bhutanese on the Bengal Duar along the border of Bhutan and Bengal. Then the British envoy, Ashley Eden, was coerced into signing a treaty favourable to Bhutan in 1863 at Punakha. As a punishment to this act of outrage, the British annexed the Bhutanese territory of Ambari-Falla Katta (present Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling district.). "In November, 1964, the British troops attacked and occupied Duar, forcing

the Bhutanese to sue for peace. Under the terms of a treaty signed in 1865 at Sinchula near the Indian border, Bhutan assented to the formal cession of the Duar area to British India in return for an annual subsidy (of Rs. 50,000, which was to be increased to Rs. 1,00,000 and, in fact, was fixed at Rs. 5,00,000) to be paid from the revenue of the territory. These annexations fixed the present southern boundary between Bhutan and Bengal (India)" (Karan, 1967 : 11). However, as a gesture of friendship in 1949, India returned to the government of Bhutan 32 square miles of territory in the Dewangiri area on the Assam-Bhutan border in the eastern Bhutan.

After reporting that Bhutan is drained from west to east by Amo-Chu (Torsa), Wangchu (Raidak), Mo-Chu (Sankosh) and Manas rivers, J.C. White describes a series of parallel ranges in a general direction from north to south (White, 1974 : 3-5). These were enumerated as (i) the Singillila forming the border between Sikkim, Chumbi and Bhutan, (ii) the Cholarange forming the watershed between the Tista and Amo-Chu, (iii) the Massong Chung-jong range from Chome-Lhri to Buxa separating Amo-Chu from Wang-Chu, (iv) The Dokyong-la ranges dividing the water system of Wang Chu and Mo-Chu; (v) the Black Mountains, separating not only Sankosh from Manash water-shed but also dividing Bhutan into two almost equal halves, and (vi) the Tawang ranges forming the eastern boundary of Bhutan.

Among all the six mountain systems mentioned above the Black Mountain ranges, midway between Punakha and Tongsa, extending from the great Himalaya to the foothill zone is typical of the Inner Himalays. These ranges, which almost divide Bhutan climatically, ethnographically and geographically into two distinct regions are traversed by only the pe-le-La (pass). Writing some eighty five year back, J.C. White informs us that the people to the east (of these ranges)... are directly under the jurisdiction of the Tongsa Penlop, while on the west they are of almost pure Tibetan origin and under the jurisdiction of the Thimboo (Thimphu) Jongpen and Paro Penlop" (White, 1974 : 5). Again, To the east of the range the people have greater affinity with the population of the Assam hills, with

a smaller, darker stature; and, to the west, they remain more of Tibeto-Mongloid features. The Black Mountains range also allows the deeper penetration of the monsoon currents into the north of the country and, consequently, the wet zone in the east extends as far as the snow line, while in the west it stops in the valley". (Coelho, 1971 : 58).

Physically, Bhutan can be divided into three lateral zones from north to south and each having a quite different ecology : the Great Himalaya, the Inner Himalaya or the middle range and the sub-Himalayan outermost ranges. The Great Himalayan ranges along the border of Tibet extend from 18,000 feet to more than 24,000 feet in some places. The peak of Chomo Lhari (23,997 feet), known as the mountain goddess Dolma, worshipped in Bhutan and Chumbi Valley, is located in the north west corner of the country. The highest peak of the country, Kula Kangri (24,740 feet), considered to represent the Kuvera, the King of the Tibetan mountain demons, is lodged in almost the centre of the north. The ranges separating Tibet from Bhutan are pierced at six major passes and among them only on one place by a south-flowing river, Lhobrak, "North of the Great Himalaya are several "marginal" mountains of the Tibetan plateau. These mountains are lower in elevation than the Great Himalaya;... (They) separate the complicated structure of the Himalaya from the flate or undulating table land of Tibet. Dry climate dominates the landscape north of the Great Himalaya, and in consequence there are no large valley glaciers in the Tibetan marginal mountains... Long undisturbed in their ways, Bhutanese traders carried out cloth, species, and grains across the mountain passes into Tibet and brought back salt, wool and sometimes herds of yaks" (Karan, 1963 : 28-29).

"These (regions or northern frontier passes) are inhabited by groups of pastoralists known to the western Bhutanese as 'bzloop' and to other groups in the east as [brokpa], both forms clearly deriving from Tibetan 'drokpa' (brog-pa). In addition to the herding of yaks these people also cultivate a few grain crops and potatoes. They are heavily dependent on barter trade with the south to supplement their own produce.

Particularly interesting are the communities of the Gling-bzhi La-yag area who live north east of the Great peak of Jo-mo Lh-yi (Chomo Lhari) and preserve a very distinctive language and dress of their own" (Aris, 1980 : xiii). On the southern slopes of the Great Himalayan ranges, where alpine vegetation occurs, winters are very cold and the summers short and cool. Plants are adapted to extreme cold and short growing season; they are short and stunted. This region along with the northern part of the Inner Himalaya is as if "the last retreat of the native Bhutanese, (and) is characterised by primitive frontier settlements that maintain themselves by herding yak and sheep and raising potato and barley."

The Inner or the middle Himalayan ranges may conveniently be located just south of the Great Himalaya at an elevation of 5,000 feet and above. Generally, these ranges run from north west to south east in western Bhutan and roughly north east to south west in eastern Bhutan. In such a situation the land level is narrow with valleys such as Paro and Thimphu. The Black mountain located north to south, divides Bhutan into two parts, both administratively and ethnographically. Again, while eastern Bhutan is most humid and receives a high precipitation, the western part is dry, cold and devoid of vegetation for want of sub-soil and rainfall. Naturally, the western part along with the Great Himalayan region is the area of dry pasture economy based on transhumance. Central Bhutan e.g., Inner Himalaya is made up of several fertile valleys drained by Torsa, Raidak, Sankosh and Manas and their tributaries. Some of the valleys such as Paro and Punakha are broad, flat, populated and well cultivated. In such a situation, cropping pattern keep on changing. Again while the southern section produces rice, banana, orange and other tropical products, the cold northern one is known for its barley, potato and dairy products.

This region may conveniently be termed as Bhutan proper in the sense that what is known as the Bhutanese is identified with it. Again "this is the economic and cultural heart of the country and is bounded on the east and west by two corridors of what used to be Tibetan territory which cut across the

ethnic divisions : the valley of Chumbi in the west and Mon-yul corridor to the east, now part of Arunachal Pradesh. ... Between these corridors lie the principal Bhutanese valleys" (Aris, 1980 : xiv). One of the unique features of distinct Bhutanese landscape is that of the practice of building *rDzong*. On commanding landscape such as Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Wangdi-Phodrang, Tongsa etc., such *rDzongs* are the monasteries, seminaries, administrative centres, regional banks, royal treasuries, pay offices, departmental stores, defensive forts etcetra all together.

The sub-Himalayan or outer most ranges consist of the narrow foothills rising gently from the Duar to about 2,000 feet, and then steep rise upto more than 5000 feet. This is a thin strip of land about 10 miles in width cut into deep gorges by fast flowing rivers. The core of these ranges consists of clay and fine grained gray stones. Further northwards sandstones become coarser and then pebbly. A humid sub-tropical climate like that of the Assam-Bengal plains prevails upto 5,000 feet in the foot-hills. The annual rainfall ranging upto 200 inches provides not only luxuriant vegetation of banana, tropical forests full of wild life, but also a hot, steamy and an unhealthy tract. In the past these 'negative areas' functioned to the isolation of the Inner Himalayan valleys. This was the area where "the rain forests and malarial swamps, inhabited by such wild animals as the tiger, elephant, rhinoceros, and wild bear, serve as barrier to easy access".

The "*Duars* may roughly be divided into northern and southern portions. The southern portion, is covered mostly with heavy banana grass and bamboo jungle. In certain areas the banana grass land has been cleared for rice-cultivation. The northern portion of the Duars, or that immediately bordering marked by spur project into the plains from the more lofty mountains on the north. Deep valleys and open area are, in some instances, found amongst these sub-ordinate ranges" (Karan, 1963 : 30-31). Another aspect of southern Bhutan is the famous *Duars* cut into the foothills by the numerous river streams. There were eighteen such *Duars*-eleven on the Bengal and seven on the Assam frontiers bordering with Bhutan. The

British Indian rulers and the Bhutanese authorities spent major part from 1770's to 1860's in settling down the issues of the ownership of the *Duars*. Ultimately, Bhutan lost all the 18 *Duars* in the plains as per provisions of the *Sinchula Treaty* signed in 1865. For nearly a hundred years, she shrunk her activities upto the Inner Himalayan regions. However, from 1960's the things are changing fast. The *Duars* are no more negative land barriers. In fact, Inner Bhutan is being linked through modern means of transportation through these foothills with that of the Indian plains. With this ends the isolation of the *Brak-yul* from the rest of the world. These foothills, once covered by dense tropical impregnable forests, are now inhabited by industrious Nepalese settlers, who are turning this erstwhile no man's land into a thriving land of peasantry.

The Bhutanese Cultural Zones

The two Tibetan cultural corridors at the western and the eastern extremities of Bhutan may be identified with that of the Chumbi valley and Tawang (Mon-Yul) respectively. Because of its proximity with the monastery towns such as Gyantse, Singatse, Tashilhumpo, Gartok, Phari, etc., Chumbi Valley is an inseparable part of the religio-cultural and political structure of Tibet. Western Bhutan has intimate links with the valley in terms of trade and commerce, social intercourse, political affiliation, religion and culture. This region is also ethnologically Tibetan in origin; it is known for its dry land and pasture economy, dairy farming and herdsmanhip, and practice of transhumance. Western Bhutan again provides the cultural base to the nation because this is the region where the important cultural-political centres such as Paro, Punakha, Tashichho Dzong (Thimphu) and Wangdi Phodrang are located. The region, traditionally under the *paro Penlop*, may broadly be identified with that of the strong Tibetan sphere of influence. In fact, a recent study has shown that this region was an inseparable part of the Tibetan culture even more than a thousand years back (Aris, 1980 : 411).

The present Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, traditionally known as the Tawang tract, is placed on the trade

route between Kham (eastern Tibet) and the Brahmaputra valley. Kameng is the abode of "the Sherdukpens of Rupa and Shergaon, the Northern Monpas of Darang Dzong in Dirangchu Valley, the southern Monpas of Kalakatang in the south, and the Eastern Monpas of But, Rahung, Kudam and Khona" (Mills, 1948). However, the reference we have of them is in the last century through Char Duar, Thebengia and Kuria Para Duar Bhutias. "The Char Duar Bhutias seem to have been the inhabitants of Rupa and Shergaon who later came to be known as the Sherdupens. The Thebenbia Bhutia seem to have lived in the village of Tembang, Konia and But, which were situated north of Rupa and a little east of Dirang Dzong... It seems the Eastern Monpas were probably called the Thebengia Bhutias... the Kuriapara Duar Bhutias seem to have been either of the two remaining groups-the southern Monpas of Kalaktang or the Northern Monpas, they seem to have been later known as the Sherdukpens who lived in Dirang Chu valley under the control of the Tawang Monastery" (Choudhury, 1978 : 3-6). Undoubtedly, this monastery was linked with that of the Drepung monastery of Lhasa.

Like the western corridor, upper portion of Kameng district in the upper and middle mountain ranges has pasture economy. The region was the link between Kham and 'U' provinces of Tibet and the Himalayan foothills and the Brahmaputra plains; but its contacts had been limited to religion and culture. There was also an amount of commercial transaction. However, social, political and even a higher level of economic interaction was very much limited. Possibly, high precipitation, dense forests and animist non-Tibetan population of the eastern Bhutan were important reasons for the limited contact between the two regions. The eastern Bhutan from the Pe-Le-La pass on the Black mountains to Kameng district is an extensive area, much bigger than that of its western counterpart. It receives more precipitation, is densely forested and populated by the communities similar to that of the non-Lamaists of Arunachal Pradesh. Though there are patches of pasture lands in the higher, colder and drier uphill, this region is known for rice terracing, rotational type of shifting cultivation and various wild animals as prey. The Tongsa Penlop, who had been by

tradition in the effective control of the region, extended his domain to the foothills, carving out a strong base for himself. Ultimately, he unified the three distinct regions into one and laid the foundation of monarchy in Bhutan.

Against the distinct zones of the eastern and the western Bhutan, there may be identified a third zone in the steep height of the Bhutanese foothills, and their sudden slope toward south. Numerous rivers, dense forests, wild beasts, hot, humid and unhealthy climate had turned it as an unwelcome and inhospitable zone for the highlander Bhutanese. However, there were a number of attractions in these areas. The region was inhabited by Koch, Mech, Kachari, Rajbansi and Toto tribesmen who could work and survive the vagaries of the *Duars* and could be made slaves for working in the rice terraced land in central Bhutan. The region provided the required amount of rice, tobacco, dried fish, areca and betel nuts for the highlanders. Because of its inhospitable climate, the region was also not under the effective control of rulers of the Brahmaputra valley. Consequently, it provided extra attraction to the Bhutia highlanders to raid the settled habitations to hit and withdraw style and extract tributes in kinds. We also know that the Bhutanese from the *Dharamraja* to down below the modest house holders had been engaged in trading. The southern foothills opening to more thickly populated Brahmaputra valley, provided good market for woollen, yak tails, dogs, horses, precious stones, dairy products, etc. Lastly, when Bhutan was emerging as an effective and organized Lamaist polity, with a whole-time ruling class, it needed a region which could produce surplus not only for the maintenance but also for the luxurious display of power and authority to those who occupied the positions of importance. We shall see, how the faction ridden Bhutanese functionaries were all united on their control on the Duar.

Ashley Eden, the British Envoy to Bhutan wrote about the Duars in 1865 as follows : "There is a narrow slip of land ranging in breadth from ten to twenty miles, which runs along the base of Bhutan hills from the Darjeeling District to the frontier of Assam. It extends from the Dhunseeree River on the east to the River Teesta or river Durlah, on the west. The

land comprised within these limits is by nature singularly rich and fertile; it is formed of the richest black vegetable mould, is washed by many rivers, and has a southern slope from 1,500 feet to the level of the plains of Bengal, so slight and gradual as scarcely to be perceptible.... Entering into this tract from the Hills are eighteen (or nineteen) passes; each pass is under the authority of a jungpon (Governor of a fort), or Soubhas, and under the administration of each Jungpon, is a certain division of territory which bears the name of the pass to which it is attached, and, thus, the whole locality came to be known as the *Athara Dooar* or eighteen passes. The Bhutanese were never able to obtain absolute possession of the Assam Dooars as they had of those of Bengal, but they had so harassed the Assam princes by frontier outrages and incursions that the Assamese were only too glad to purchase security by making over their seven Dooars to the Bhutanese in consideration of an annual payment of yak tails, ponies, musk, gold dust, blankets, and knives, of an estimated values of *Narrainee Ruppees* 4,785 and 4 annas, and agreement which has been aptly described as a mutual compromise between conscious weakness and barbarian cunning" (Eden, 1865 : 7-8).

The Assam *Duars* included Kuriapara, Koorea-Goomah, Kalling, Ghurkolla, Banska, Chappagoorie, Chappakhamar, and Bijni. The eleven Bengal Duras were Dalimcote (Darjeeling), Zumercote (Moinagoroo), Chamurchee (Samchee), Lucky, Buxa (Passakha), Bhulka, Bara, Goomer, Reepoo, Cherung and Bagh or Bijni. The Kariapara Duar was under the control of the Tawang Rajas divided among the Sat Rajas of Kariapara, Char Duar and Thebengia Bhutias. All the three stocks were made to surrender their claims in the Kariapara Duar in consideration of an annual amount of Rs. 7672/- (Rs 5,000 for the Kariapara Bhutias, Rs 2526 for the Char Duar Bhutias and Rs. 146 for the Thebengia Bhutias) between 1826 to 1844 (Allen B.C. 1905 :54-55). The point to be noted here is that Tawang Bhotias under the religious affiliation to Drepung monastery of Lhasa did control the Kariapara Duars; but had nothing to do with Bhutan. The other eighteen *Duars* played significant roles in the Indo-Bhutanese relations, and emergence of Bhutan as a

distinct and unified polity and reinforced the frontier characteristics in the Bhutanese national character. The issues associated with the Bhutanese *Duars* will be discussed in detail later in these pages.

At this stage only three points deserve to be noted. Firstly, it is amply proved that from religious, cultural, social, economic and political consideration the Western Bhutan is an extended frontier of the Tibetan cultural core. Secondly, the eastern Bhutan though loosely associated with Mon-yul on cultural and religious plane, opens a vista to the Arunachal non-Lamaist tribes. This represents a less explored, obscure, and unknown aspect of distant Bhutanese polity and exposes its affinity with that of the animist north-east. Thirdly, the southern foothills and the *Duars* belong to the frontier zone inhabited by small tribal communities, where the Lamaist core of the Lhasa valley and the Hindu core of the Brahmaputra valley interact at various levels.

¹There have been a number of speculations even about its proper name. For example, Ralph Flitch, a merchant from London, on a visit to Bengal in 1583, reported of a country four days journey from Cuch (Koch Behar) called Bootanter, the city, Booteach and the King, durmain (Dhurma Raja, the Zhabs drung). Cacella and Gabrel, the two Jesuit missionaries, the first Europeans to enter Bhutan in 1627, who spent time in the court of the zhabs-drung-Naga-Lbung rNam-rgyal, the founder of the present Bhutanese polity, referred to the land as Cambirasi, the first of those potents (the first Tibetan state from the Indian plains). Major James Rennell tried to survey some miles of Bhutan territories adjoining the Bengal presidency in 1766 at the instance of Lord Clive. Warren Hastings appointed George Bogle as his envoy to the court of 'Bhot' (mistaken of Bhutan) in 1774. Again, in the same year, the first Anglo-Bhutanese Treaty between the Honourable East India Company and the Deb Raja of Bhutan was signed. The various British envoys to the Bhutan courts such as Samuel Turner (1783), Kishen Kanta Bose (1815), R.B. Pemberton and W. Griffith (1837-38) and Ashley Eden (1864-65) wrote their reports on Bootan. However, by the turn of the nineteenth century, one finds John Claude White writing about his five visits to Bhutan. Since then the term Bhutan has been established as a standard one for the country it refers to and now the Bhutanese have accepted it as one of the official names of their country.

The origin of the term Bhutan may be traced to the Indian sources. Tibet is known as (Bhot in Sanskrit, and accordingly, Bhutan may be placed at the end of Bhot' (*Bhota + ant*) indicating its geographical location (Waddell, 1891 : 55-56). A number of scholars appear to agree to this interpretation. However, Chakraborty objects to it on the ground that "in the early days when most of the people were nomadic cattle herders, the concept of the state with its definite territory and boundary does not fit in" (Chakraborty, 1979 :1). Again N. Singh and Chakraborty refer to the Sanskrit term 'Bhu' plus *uttan*' that is 'the risen land'. But this is found to be a very common feature all over Himalaya. Chakraborty would like to accept another sanskritik interpretation. *Bhotanam*, e.g., the country of the *Bhota*. There is another well-known proposition put forward by Dr. D.F. Rennie in 1866 : "the word *Bhotan* simply meaning the country of the *Bhots* or *Tibetians*. More correctly it should be spelt (*Bhotstan*-stand in the Persian and Arabic meaning place, as *intan* does in the Sanskrit" (Rennie, 1970 : 3). Nagendra Singh objects to it on the ground that the Persian and Arabic influence in Bhutan is seen no where. The aforesaid interpretation of Rennie seems to invite epithets which were unknown in that region to both the traveller and the contemporary writer as well as the inhabitants. However, Singh is insistent on his own interpretation to which most of the scholars agree : "What appears to be clear is that a Sanskrit derivation is more appropriate than a Persian or Arabic one in this particular case. If it is accepted, it would stand to reason that the Sanskrit derivative phrase, *Bhota-ant* is the proper derivative origin of Bhutan. Even if *Bhot* or *Bot* does not stand for Tibet as such, there can be no doubt about the existence of *Bhoteans* who were the inhabitants of the south-eastern region of Tibet. In the circumstances, *Bhot-ant* can still represent the geographical location of the land at the end of *Bhotean* inhabitation in Tibet". It looks most probable and after various forms of anglicization such as *Bhoutan*, *Bhotan*, *Bootan* etc., it came to be acceptable as *Bhutan*.

Bhutan is also known as *Menjong*, the land of medicine, which have also been identified with *Munjavan* or *Majavat* hills. "The *Bhutanese*, however, call their country *Brukyul* (*HBrug-yul*), the land of the *Druk* school of *Kagyapa* Buddhism of Tibet; they call themselves *Drupka*, i.e., the people belonging to the *Druk Gyalpo*. This is because the Bhutan belongs to the *Drupka Kagyapa*, which has been the state religion of Bhutan since 1616... The expression *druk*, which primarily means 'dragon' (the promulgator of absolute truth), the name of a small monastery in central Tibet from which

the Drugpa Kagyapa sprang" (Ram Rahul, 1971 : 3). The Tibetans refer to Bhutan as 'IHo', the south in general and IHo-Mon in particular. "The Bhutanese scholars call their country by the old and crucial term IHo-Mon Kha-bzhi (The southern mon country of Four approaches). This is uniquely and specifically applied to the area of Bhutan in the sense of a corporate entity, because the 'approaches' (*Kha*-lit 'mouths') are situated at its four extremities of (i) Kha-Clinga in the east, (ii) Chata-Kha, or Lpag-bsam-Kha, that is Cooch Behar or Buxa Duar in the south, (iii) Darling-Kha near Kalimpong in the west, and (iv) sTag-rtse-Kha on the northern border. As might be expected, the term finds most frequent mention in the text of the 17th century and later, that is to say after unification" (Aris, 1980 : XXV).