

Ecology and Culture of the Bhutias of North Sikkim

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ABSTRACT This paper gives an account of the changes that have occurred in the Bhutias of North Sikkim especially after the Tibetan border was closed in 1962. Taking cultural ecology as the analytical method, this paper shows how the Bhutia life interacts with the environment. Although no reserve was created for them, as was the case with the Lepchas of Sikkim, they did have some degree of seclusion reinforced by political and ecological factors. Before the closure of the border, the Bhutias combined pastoralism with trading, but after 1962, their economy received a setback and underwent a number of changes, bringing them to work as labourers and looking for alternative occupations. In their ecological milieu, it is found that 'sharing' scores over the value of composition. In spite of these changes, the Bhutias have been able to maintain an identity in their cultural and social life.