



## Bhutias of Sikkim

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**ABSTRACT** For the Bhutias of Sikkim, animal husbandry alone was not sufficient to sustain the population, so they indulged in marginal trading activities with the Tibetan across the borders. The barter of timber wood, dyestuffs and dairy products of that region for Tibetan salt and wool formed the basis of this trade. Bhutias of Sikkim (Lachung and Lachen) pursued it as an occupation intimately interwoven with pastoral activities. Thus, the trade, as long as unhampered by political restrictions, enabled them to remain economically independent. However, with the closing of the borders in 1962, social life changed for these people. Political events beyond their control have led to the transformation of their traditional economic system, forcing them to reorient it. They lost large herds of yaks and sheep, when they were on the seasonal migration under the ancient transborder pasture usage agreements. They could no longer use pastureland in Tibet, causing heavy losses of their herds due to lack of alternative pasture area. Bhutias started to shift from a pastoral and trading economy to a more settled agricultural and small-scale horticulture and wage earning economy. The seasonal migration emerges as an activity organised by family and community structure. The Bhutias of Sikkim have adapted culturally to diverse natural landscapes and have established settlement patterns and production activities tailored to the limitation imposed by the region.