

History of Dukpas and Their Present Situation in the Darjeeling Hills and the Buxaduar Region and their Social-Customs and Practices

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1. Brief- History

The **DRUGPAS** also called as **Dukpa's** are one of the oldest Buddhist Tribal Community living in the hill areas of Darjeeling inhabiting majorly the hilly terrain of North Bengal as well as Bhutan and Sikkim. The Dukpa Tribe has been defined as a group of indigenous people having a common name, language and territory tied by kinship bonds, practicing endogamy, having distinct customs, rituals and beliefs etc.

The Dukpas are genetically descendants of the Mongoloid race and with the coming of the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa; the spiritual head of the kurma kagyu order of Buddhism, a large number of Bhutanese migrated to Sikkim in the early 1960's. The Bhutanese addressed themselves as Drugpa or residents of the Dragon land where "**Drug**" meaning "**Dragon**" and "**Pa**" meaning "**resident**". The majority of Drugpas came from different parts of Bhutan while a few of them came from the Kalimpong-Darjeeling areas. In Darjeeling the Bhutias or Bhotey's as they are called are either immigrants from Tibet or immigrants from various parts of Tibet, actually Bhutia like Gorkha is a umbrella term because under Bhutia there are the Ladaki Bhutias, Arunachali Bhutias, Bhutanese Bhutias (Dukpa or Drugpa's), the Sikkimese Bhutias (**Denzongpa or Lachungpa**) and the Tibetan Refugees who have come in large numbers especially after 1959. The Bhutias started infiltrating in Darjeeling and Sikkim areas from the 13th century so it can be said the Drugpa's too started making their move over to Darjeeling during the 13th century and it was in the year 1950 on a promulgation of a Presidential Notification, certain castes and tribes were included in the list of Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal namely the Lepchas, Bhutias including Drugpas, Sherpa's, Yolmo/Kagatay and the Toto's. The Drugpas or Dukpa's as they are commonly known in Darjeeling are very less in population compared to the other Tribal Communities and they are mainly found in areas like "**Lamahatta**", "**Ghoom- Jorebuglow**" area as well as remote areas of "**Reshihart**" and "**Barbatey**" areas in Darjeeling. In North Bengal however, the areas inhabited by the community is a hilly terrain covered with a thin forest of "**Buxaduar**", "**Chunabhati**", "**Tasigaon**", "**Lepchokha**" and "**Adma**" which are all high altitude villages (more than 20000ft). In making a comparison of the Dukpa community living in Darjeeling they are in a better socio-economic position/condition with regard to availability of social-benefits like Health, Education etc locally as well as administratively when compared to their counterparts in the

Buxaduar region. The Dukpa Community of the Buxaduar region and their present condition thus alarms a bell for the whole Dukpa community of the Darjeeling region that something concrete and profound must be done from the local as well as the administrative side immediately about it as the community living there in a verge of extinction or in other words the Dukpa community as a whole is in a verge of getting vanished and extinct as well as their traditions and customs forever.

2. Social -Customs and Practices of the Drugpas

- a) **Economy**- Most of the Drugpas are engaged in the agrarian exertion, producing crops like rice, gin cardamom, maize and millets. Almost every traditional Drugpa Family owns land controlled by the family head which serve as their primary source. The secondary occupation of the community includes small-scale animal husbandry and animals like pig, goat and fowl are found almost in every household.
- b) **Family**- The family type of the Drugpas are Patriarchal in nature but the mothers also play a significant role however women's status in social religious rituals is not very good and they are usually engaged in household responsibilities.
- c) **Traditional ethnic dress of the drugpas** -The traditional attire for men among the Da's is called "**GHO**" which resembles the Scottish kilt and the women folk wear a long robe called "**KIRA**" which is wrapped around the body covering the neck from the down to the back, however according to the Drugpa tradition and customs, whenever women and men go to the monasteries or government offices to attend official functions they must wear a "**KAMNEY**" for the women it is known as "**RACHU**" a scarf decorated with various designs.
- d) **Practices during the birth of a child**- During the birth of a child among the Drugpa community a religious ceremony is performed on the third day after the birth of the child, the important component of this religious ceremony consists of an astrologer who is the lama or Rimpoche writing the horoscope clearly indicating all the good and bad events that will occur in his/her life and suggesting the remedial measures that needs to be taken by them.
- e) **Marriage customs prevlant among the drugpas** - The Drugpas strictly follow the system of arranged marriages, negotiated by the couple's parents however nowadays love marriages are also very common. In both cases a

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wedding ceremony held by a lama is essential in which the couple must take an oath to remain faithful to each other throughout their lives, at this occasion all relatives and friends gather together to rejoice, at the same time ceremonial scarves and wedding presents are offered to the married couple and according to the Drugpa practice there is no hard and fast rule that the bride goes to the groom's house after marriage.

- f) **Death rituals practised among the drugpas**- The death rituals among the Drugpas are also significant as Drugpas are Buddhists and believe in the theory of rebirth, which is based on one's good or bad deeds (karma), immediately after a person's death, monks are invited to sit beside the corpse and chant prayers then an astrologer is consulted to fix the date of the funeral and an appropriate time to take the dead body out of the house. The funeral is attended by the relatives and friends, where a group of monks headed by a chief monk perform special prayers for the departed soul, after the funeral, the ashes are collected and thrown into a river or a stream however, some relics, especially the skull and the bones are collected and kept as a mark of respect towards the departed soul.
- g) **Traditional festivals and sports of the drugpas** -The festivals celebrated by the Drugpas are the reflections of who they are, so their festivals are colourful, their socio-economic characteristics which are based on traditions promote discipline among the community their costumes, religious practices, dance habits are quite unique and different from other tribal communities, these festivals are celebrated with happiness and prosperity and they are i) the descending day of lord Buddha from heaven ii) the blessed rainy day iii) the birth of Guru Padmasabhava, who is popularly known as Guru Rimpoche and iv) "LASSUNG" which happens to be the new year, the traditional sports of the Drugpas are "DATSEY" (archery) and "DEGO" (a game of stones normally played by monks who had to refrain from playing archery, other games include "SOSOM"(Javelin), "PUNGDO" (Shot-put),"THONJU" (Long jump) and "KESHEY"(Wrestling), however, nowadays they play modern games like football, volleyball, cricket etc but among the Drugpas of Darjeeling its only in the villages that the traditional sports are being played but in towns and urban areas of Darjeeling there is no such practice so this means that the traditional festivals of the Drugpas are losing their importance and it could be due to lack of knowledge about the sports and festivals or there is no consciousness among the people to follow their traditions and customs.
- h) **Music and dance performed by the drugpas**- The another important part of their culture is the music and dance of the which Drugpas are normally based on religious and folk themes according to the Drugpa traditions there are two types of music i)Religious and ii)Traditional folk music . The religious music is a combination of trumpets, conch shells, symbols, gong, flutes and drums which is normally played during religious festivals and celebrations including annual worship in individual homes whereas the traditional folk music is again a combination of "DAM-NGEY"(Guitar), "PHIWAN" (Violin) and "LIM"(Flute) which is normally played during festivals and special occasions.

The Drugpa dances are also divided into three groups i)Religious dance ii)Ritual dance and iii)Folk dance .The Religious dances are normally performed by monks during special prayers for the destruction of the demons/enemies of Buddhism and for bringing peace to the general public, The different Religious dances are as follows : i)Zhana Chham (Black hat dance) ii)Degyed Chham (Spiritual dance) iii) Shinje Chham (Dance of Yamaraja) iv)Le-gon Chham (Dance of Protectivity) v) Lhamo Tsokhar Chham (Dance of Mahakali) vi)Serdang berk or (Procession dance) vii) Gonpo Mang Chham (Dance of Mahakala viii) Dudag Chham (Dance of Sarmasan Lord) ix) Tun Nga Chham (Wrathful dance) x) Guru Tshen Gye (Dance of the eight manifested forms of Guru Padmasabhava) . The ritual dances are performed during festivals by laymen known as Byo Chham, these dances depict their ancient and medieval traditions and they are as follows i) Dam- Ngey Chhoje (Ritual dance with guitar like instrument) ii) Ragsha Chham (Dance of Yamaraja) iii) Dramitse Nga Chham (Dance drum of Dramitse) iv) Shawa Shachhi (Dance of the Stag and Hunting dog) v) Pa Chham (Hero Dance) vi) Sha Chham (Deer dance) vii) Chhung Chham (Garuda dance) viii) Gingda Tsholing (Religious dance of Padma Ling pa) ix)Peling Ging (Religious dance of Padma ling pa) x) Pholey Moley (Dance of handsome man and beautiful woman) xi) Atsara (Clown dance) and lastly the folk dances are performed by the young and the old and are based on the customs of different regions and areas, these dances are performed during festivals, special occasions and annual worship ceremonies.

3. Objectives Behind the Study

- 1) The study focuses to know about the drugpa history as well their social-customs and practices
- 2) The dukpa community is one of the oldest tribal communities living in the Darjeeling hills but they also are in huge numbers in the buxaduar region of north bengal, so what is the state or condition of the community in the buxaduar
- 3) The drugpa's are one of the oldest tribal buddhist communities in the Darjeeling hills but not much work has been conducted upon them so a study was required
- 4) To study about the history and culture of the drugpa community living in the north bengal areas of the Darjeeling hills
- 5) To study and explore about their traditional customs and practices
- 6) To assess and get an idea of the conditions of the dukpa community in the buxaduar region

4. Review of Literature

A.C. *Sinha* has conducted a study on Bhutan and tried to identify the nuances of the traditional Drugpa polity introduced by the Zhabsdrung in the 17th century. The delineation of the institutions of incarnations and functionaries such as rJeKhan-po, Deb Raja, Jongpens and Penlops introduced by the Zhabsdrung secondly he tried to analyse the factors which were instrumental in the emergence of the Wangchuk dynastic rule and the dominant themes behind the rules of the four kings as the foundation,

consolidation, nation building and the King symbolising the Dragon Kingdom . He gives a basic structure of the Bhutanese administration and tries to identify the course of institutional emergence which made the Drugpa polity a unique tradition and how these traditions confronted with the wind of change in course of time lead to a transition . The Transition according to him referred to the incorporation of dynastic rule, frontier management, immigration of the Nepalese and the introduction of modern education in the traditional Drugpa structure leading to transformation on the emergent political culture, ethnic conflict and the efforts to remove the ethnic stalemate furthermore he tried to portray the policy of ethnic integration initiated by the third Wangchuk ruler in 1958 who favoured an aggressive Drugpa traditionalism causing misery to the people and violence to human rights and lastly the king's decision to surrender his privileges to lead the administration in favour of elected council of ministers .

Sushna Subba in her article "*Regional history and the Reconstruction of Limboo identity in Darjeeling*" has tried to show that there is an intimate link between the regional history and the reconstruction of an ethnic group or a tribal community. According to her a region sometimes refers to former historical units that in ancient past played the role of subject in political history thus a region here means a non-political unit which can be defined by historical myths and in the same way regional history is the history of a people belonging to a particular region having its own set of culture , society and polity thus in this paper she takes the example of the Limboos (also known as limbus) who are one of the prominent ethnic tribes of Darjeeling , learning about their region and regional history the article tries to highlight the regional history of the limboos with reference to the process of the reconstruction of their identity in Darjeeling. The urge or the need for the reconstruction of their identity goes back to history because Limboos are believed to have their own kingdom which was known as Limbuan but however the process of disintegration of the Limbuan country in 1641 and due to wars with Sikkim and the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty and their subjugation by Prithivinarayan shah in 1774 lead to many changes and ultimately to their identity-crisis however today the Limbus of Darjeeling like the other tribal communities of Darjeeling have become conscious of their situation and they are raising their voices for the development of the limbu tribal community as a whole. It is thus a fact that it is difficult to find a tribe which has all its members inhabiting the original homeland. The Limbu Tribals are living as a diaspora all over the world and factors like continuous wars and the continuous change of boundaries as well as migration to some extent effected socio-economic conditions of the limboos almost pushing their culture and identity to the verge of extinction .The limbus however themselves are also responsible for the shadowing of their identity because they allowed themselves to be assimilated and were busy adapting to the new situation though they were listed as the Scheduled Tribe of India in 2003 their situation more or less remains the same now they are marching ahead for Limbu Development board at present.

T. B.Subba (1999) "*Politics of Culture*" is a book of importance as it deals with an ethnographic study of the

three major communities of Eastern Nepal namely the Rai, Yakkha and the Limbu. The author's primary focus has been on the identity shift of these three ancient communities into a broader fold of identity known as the Gorkhas at the expense of the former's genuine cultural, linguistic, religious and economic identities . The book serves a major purpose in understanding how identities are created with the aid of historical facts mentioned in the book with a special weight on the conquest of East Nepal by Prithivinarayan Shah helps throw light upon the politics employed by him to vanquish the then undefeatable communities namely the Khambus, Yakhumbas and Yakkhas and subsequent conversion of their names into supreme titles such as Rai, Limbu, Dewan respectively. The book as such perpetuates the idea of unifying (imagined) enlivening the communities lost culture. The author has dealt with the in-depth study of the Kirata cultures, has linked how their cultures in the form of rituals, religion and kinship marriage alliance have bonded them into one unified community as ancient Kiratas and more primarily due to their shared history. The author also includes the definition of kirata politics as to preserve, revive and propagate their cultures.

Sara Shneiderman and Mark Turin in their article (2006) deals with the rise of the issue of the janajati groups and their struggle for recognition as tribal categories in the State of Sikkim and in the hill district of Darjeeling. The creation of the category Most Primitive Tribe (MPT) awarded to the Lepchas a group who had already gained the category of Scheduled Tribe and on the other hand the struggle of other janajati groups for gaining the status of Scheduled Tribes suggest that there is a need for achieving such a status for mere economic gains but the problem of balkanization of this category is indicated as a serious issue is encountered . The article also states how the political representatives of the Darjeeling hills lobby the political figures of Sikkim to ventilate the problems of the hills at the centre as in the hills the decisions rest in the majority of the Bengalis. The revivalism of traditional language is taken as a major tool in achieving their goals . The struggle for Tribalism is taking place due to the difference in facilities availed by the Scheduled Tribes which seem to be greater than of the OBC categories.

David Reigle in his writings June 2009 The Lepchas of Sikkim were ruled over by a dynasty of Rajahs originally from Lhasa, who had always been under the dominion of Tibet and of the Buddhist religion and Dukpa (Red cap) sect, here the Dukpa' s are equated with the Red cap orders in general but he says that Dugpa or Dukpa is Brugpa, the Kagyu sub-order that prevails in Bhutan, not in Sikkim that this is a separate order or a sect of Tibetan Buddhism according to him there are nine orders namely Nyigmapa, Urgyenpa, Kadampa, Sakyapa, Gelukpa, Kargyutpa, Karmapa, Brikungpa and Brugpa. The ninth and the last order who are the Brugpa's he says is the sect who has established the worship of the Dorje (Vajra or Thunderbolt) which descended from heaven and fell upon the earth at Sera in Eastern Tibet and they seem to be particularly addicted to the Tantrika Mysticism , in which the Dorje is considered as a very important and a powerful instrument thus David Reigle here looks at the origin of Drugpas in a theosophical

and a religious context and tries to separate them from the other Buddhist sects which were prevalent during that era.

5. Research Method

The Research method applied for the study was with the help of a questionnaire along with semi-structured interviews. The Research was mainly Exploratory in nature and the research sample size included were twelve males and the areas selected for the purpose of data collection was Ghum and Lamahatta because majority of the Dukpa population are found in these two areas Firstly the researcher introduced himself to the respondents and explained to them the aim motive behind the research and Secondly the respondents were asked questions using a questionnaire as mentioned earlier and their replies were also recorded through the use of recording devices like mobile phones so that nothing could be missed, The respondents were also made clear that their answers need not be right or wrong and Thirdly it was also made clear that the respondents need not be afraid of answering the questions or disclosing any information because the research being done was for an Educational purpose and not any false purpose and Fourthly it came to be known that with each answer the respondents were communicating more freely and answering the questions in a proper manner and Lastly after the respondents had finished answering the questions the questionnaires were recollected and set aside for later analysis. The respondents were analysed not only through the answers they gave but also their body language and the verbal usage was taken under observation.

6. Analysis

The Field Survey for the study was conducted at “**Ghum**” and “**Lamahatta**”. Ghum is a small locality which comes under the Darjeeling district and is situated at an altitude of 2,258 metres (7,407ft) and is the highest railway station in India. The total number of respondents to be questioned were twelve out of which six were selected from Ghum and six from Lamahatta which is a small village where cattle farming and cattle rearing are done by the people as the main source of livelihood and it is at a distance of 23kms from Darjeeling. A questionnaire was prepared and used by the researcher to gather information from the respondents they were asked questions relating to their place of birth, customs, knowledge about their traditions as well as the Clan /Sept to which they belonged they were also asked questions with regard to the place where they came from or if they were migrants or original inhabitants of that particular place or area, they were also asked questions on their financial background and the kind of family they were living in (Nuclear or Joint). The other set of questions in the questionnaire dealt with their knowledge about their identity, language and culture. The study was mainly conducted in the two areas, keeping in mind the main argument of the study that is what is the state/position of the Dukpa community in the Darjeeling hills with regard to development, upliftment of their community and if they had any knowledge of their community counterparts living in the Buxaduar region who are not in a very good condition at present. The respondents some of them who were old were alarmed to know about it but the younger generations were

least bothered when asked about solutions to the problems, Some of the respondents were of the view that the local administration should take the responsibility for their upliftment and create awareness regarding Education, Health etc among the Dukpa community and some of the respondents who knew about Buxaduar enlightened us that a modicum of efforts and activities were being carried out which had yielded productive results for the development of the Dukpa's from either the government or the NGO's working on tribal communities and thus Buxa, with its flora and fauna was rapidly turning out to be a popular tourist destination as a result the Dukpa community could largely benefit from the tourist department as the members could easily find employment as guides and porters for tourists visiting the region but the main problem in the Buxa is the communication and the transport systems which needs to be improved and the forest department should take the initiative to develop the area because the land inhabited by the community is within the Buxa Tiger Reserve over which the forest department has its jurisdiction and the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) can also do its bit to adopt strategic actions and deliberative programmes and agendas to ensure the overall development of the area. Some of the respondents also gave positive responses that the central government as well as the state government, should immediately implement schemes and programmes for the development of the Dukpa's as the community is in a very poor condition and there is almost no means left for the poverty-stricken community and the future looks very bleak if the socio-economic conditions remains unaltered and they would definitely plunge into the abyss of extinction. The analysis gives a clear cut picture of the potential threat or danger to the Dukpa community especially in the Buxaduar region and if necessary steps are not taken the community could get vanished or extinct and in spite of the rich cultural-heritage and tradition they possess the community could get vanished forever or extinct in the Buxaduar region.

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