

THE ANTHROPOLOGY AND MYTHOLOGY OF HUMAN MIGRATION IN HIMALAYAS

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Abstract

The Himalaya is an Asian mountain range whose name means “abode of the snows” in Sanskrit. Here the gods reside on mountains and the mountains are gods. This is “the Sacred Landscape of the Himalayas”. The spirituality here defines how the beauty of Himalayas is an inseparable aspect of the Lord, whose attributes are Satyam, Shivam, and Sundaram—truth, eternity, and beauty. This is the land of ‘Devis and Devtas’.

Though the Himalayas were already established as a geographical habitat and protector, it was the great human races who migrated and assimilated here identified, realised, established and personified the Himalayas as an important inseparable religious, spiritual, cultural, geographical, economic and social Himalayan way of life and livelihood. In recent times, the Himalayas have started losing these unique values from the lives of Himalayan communities which is evident from their large scale out migration towards south¹.

The Himalayas and its communities are in a state of crisis today since the cycles of economic development have encroached upon holy mountains at a rate beyond the fastest rate of regeneration on Earth. The Himalayan communities were and are the bearers and protectors of Himalayas because only they have realised the importance of Himalayas in Human lives in the past and present and this awareness and realisation is neither made available nor can be developed by the present models of development. Hence, it becomes primarily important to rejuvenate the sustainable ‘Himalayan way of life’ by acknowledging the resentment among Himalayan communities which forces them to migrate from the Himalayas and, to do so, it becomes imperative to understand how the different races, civilizations, ethnic communities, flora and fauna adapted and assimilated here and evolved their sustainable and prosperous way of life and livelihood. Realising the above fact and belonging to the Sacred and Holy Himalayas, this article is a beginning to understand the origin of first wave of Human migration and settlement into the Himalayan region as a preface to understand the present huge rate out migration from the Indian Himalayan region.

The Anthropological History of Human Settlements explains the reason for mix of races and culture in the Himalayas and also elucidates the significance of Himalayas as a smelting pot of cultures, identities and lifestyles. The Anthropological History of Human Settlements also explains the migration of Great Races into

¹ The southward direction is an expression used to denote the direction of human migration towards plains from the hills.

the Northern parts of India owing to its geography and climate which is suitable to support large population as compared to the hot and dry climate of Middle East (probably from this route the first Human races migrated to India) however the anthropologists also claim that the climate and soil of India is such that it can quickly destroy (relative to other continents) all human remains from the early times and is a reason for failing to find any earliest Human remains in India. This is a juncture where the Indian mythology which stirs the imagination of all, while matching exactly with the real world panorama seems to fill the literature gap between the anthropological history and the ancient historical past of India and the Indian Himalayan region. Therefore, it seems justifiable that the first wave of migration into the Himalayan region has to be primarily studied under the Anthropological purview first and where it lacks, it is important to acknowledge the Hindu mythology² as well.

To deal with the burning issue of out migration from the Indian Himalayan region it is foremost important to elucidate, analyze and understand the origin and reasons for Human migration into the Indian Himalayan region and the fact, how Himalayas turned into a basket of races, religion, cultures, tradition and nurtured a unique 'Himalayan way of Life'.

Introduction

Few places on Earth can match the breathtaking splendour of the Himalayas. Its towering peaks and secluded valleys have inspired naturalists, adventure seekers and spiritualists for centuries. The Himalayas, is an Asian mountain range whose name means "abode of the snows" in Sanskrit. It is the region where the snow never melts. Here the gods reside on mountains and where the mountains can be gods. This is "the Sacred Landscape of the Himalayas", however such ethnic, spiritual, religious, sacred, holy description of Himalayas is and can only be found truly in the hidden rich cultural and spiritual heritage of India because India is the land that has this unique power to stir imagination. This ancient and rich tradition still exists in India today as these unique mountains continue to whisper their spiritual glory to all. Here the ancient world yet lives on in the daily lives of men. Customs, cults, and ideas that have perished from the memory of the rest of the human race are here in full force. Here, The Himalayas are not merely the home of snow, but are also a stronghold of yogic wisdom and spirituality for millions of people, regardless of their religious beliefs. The Himalayas remain replete with mysteries for poets, artists, musicians, and travellers, but they reveal their most important message only to those who are prepared for it. Mystics alone can unveil the real secrets of these wondrous and mythical Himalayas. The spirituality here defines how the beauty of Himalayas is an inseparable aspect of the Lord, whose attributes are Satyam, Shivam, and Sundaram—truth, eternity, and beauty. This is the land of 'Devis and Devtas'.

² Hindu mythology is important because of the strong influence of Indo Aryan culture and civilization in the region evident from the majority of the Hindu(Brahman) population in Indian Himalayan province. It is also important because of the strong cultural belief in mythology of the inhabitants of this area.

The Geographical Origin of The Himalayas

Geographically, The Himalayas have their origin in a series of earth movements or powerful lateral thrusts acting from the direction of Tibet towards the old stable crystalline block of the Indian Peninsula in the south. The earth movements raised the deposits laid down in the shallow Tethys Sea to form the mountain mass from Kashmir to Assam. From the Indus in the northwest to the Brahamaputra in the east, the Himalayas form a broad continuous belt for nearly 1600 miles along the northern border of the Indian subcontinent³.

The Hindu Mythological origin of Himalaya⁴

Aesthetically and mythologically (Hindu) the early origin of the Himalayan region is found in the Puranas which are supposedly composed by the Indo-Aryans. Himalayas were regarded by them as the hub or centre of the universe. According to Puranas, the world was in a chaotic condition, and Lord Brahma, the creator of universe formed seven great continents, separated from each other by seas of salt water, sugar-cane juice, wine, ghee or clarified butter, curds, milk, and fresh water, respectively. The central continent was named Jambudweep, which was in the form of a lotus. This was the only one with which human beings are acquainted, the others indeed being declared to be illusory. In the midst of Jambudweep, which represents India and the countries to the north of it, there is a vast and glorious mountain called Meru, round in shape, and forming the centre of the world-lotus. To the south of Mount Meru there are three ranges of mountains, the southernmost being Himavat or the Himalaya, adjoining Bharat (India). To the north of it there are also three ranges, the northernmost bounding the country of the Uttara-Kurus, which is regarded as a kind of heaven. Four great lakes are also mentioned, described at length in the Vayu Purana These may be the lakes on the Tibetan tableland, north of Kumaon, the best known of which are the sacred Mansarovar and Rakshas Tal, or they may include the great lakes to the north-east of Kashmir.

The Anthropological and mythological origin of Human migration towards Himalaya

At some early stage, perhaps about 60000 years ago, the Negroids group (perhaps claimed as the oldest human races that originated on Earth and were present in Africa) divided into three subgroups. One remained in Africa, the second one migrated southward in the direction of Australia (referred as *Australoids*, because it includes the Australian aborigines.), while the other subgroup migrated eastward, and from there spread out into Europe, Central Asia, northern Asia, and other regions.

Eventually out of the main Negroid group those moving eastwards, some of them reached and settled in India (referred to as Mongloids who reached and settled in Asia), either by moving along the northern coast of the Indian Ocean, or by going through the Middle East and Iran, because of the fact that the Arabia and southern Iran found en-route during their migration were dry regions, and could not support a large population. However, when they reached India they found a fertile land, with abundant game and edible plants. They settled there, and in time their population expanded. They had probably occupied much of India by about 57 000 years ago, replacing any archaic *Homo sapiens* previously living there. When they first entered India,

³ Zurick, David, et al. Atlas of the Himalayas. Atlas. Kathmandu, Nepal: ICIMOD, 2005.

⁴ Oakley, E. Sherman. Holy Himalaya. London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1905.

their numbers were probably much smaller than those of the hominids who were there before them. However there was a special circumstance that enabled them to rapidly increase their numbers relative to the natives⁵. In the last ten thousand years, there have been major incursions of Caucasoids (race which settled in Europe) into India and the population of northwest India has a higher percentage of Caucasoid parentage. As a result, most of the present inhabitants of India are of mixed parentage, with the Caucasoid strain being predominant. Although virtually all living Indians have at least some Negroid group parentage, it is not clear that any individual is *primarily* of Negroid descent who migrated southward or eastward from the Africa.

By 6000 BC various Neolithic tribes (speaking Dravidian languages, and descended from Caucasoids living in the Middle East) entered what is now Pakistan from the west, and from there they gradually spread throughout India. To a large extent, these invaders displaced the earlier group of Negroid. However; there was some interbreeding between the two groups.

About 1500 BC, India was again invaded from the northwest. These new invaders, the *Aryans*, were Caucasoid tribesmen speaking Indo-European languages closely related to ancient Sanskrit. The invaders soon conquered the remnants of the Indus Valley civilization, and then gradually spread out over all of northern India. The Aryan invaders probably came from Afghanistan, or perhaps eastern Iran, and before that from Central Asia. Since the Aryans were rather light-skinned, the present inhabitants of northern India are, on average, considerably lighter than the inhabitants of southern India. As a result, most of the modern inhabitants of northern India speak related languages, each derived from Sanskrit. (Most inhabitants of southern India continue to speak Dravidian languages)⁶.

From earliest times, saints and sages found their way, to meditate in their solitudes among scenes of wild grandeur and beauty omnipresent in Himalayas. The Sanskrit Scriptures mentions many such Rishis and Munis, whose dwelling was among the mountains of Himavat, and whose names and memories still cling to peak and pool and river-bank. The Himalayas appear to have been especially favoured by Brahmanic settlers, and there is strong reason for believing that important colonies of Aryans were settled in the hills at an early period. It is probable that the first advance of the Aryans, after leaving the Indus region, was not down the course of the Ganges, but along the foot of the sub-Himalayan range, with diversions into the hilly tracts, which extend for a hundred miles from the snowy peaks to the plains. Thus the Vedic "Brahmana" Scriptures, most of which are of very old date, state that the sacred language (Sanskrit) was spoken in this part of the Himalayas with greater purity than anywhere else evident from the Kashmiri Pandits of far west as some of the finest specimens of the pure Indo-Aryan race⁷.

Today, looking at the blue-eyed Drokapas of Ladakh; the Shilpkars, Shaukas(Bhotiyas), Banrajis, Tharus and Bokshas of Uttarakhand; the Banrajis and Sherpas of Nepal; the Lepchas and Bhotias of Sikkim; the Brokupas of Bhutan, Arunachal and Tibet; the Khasas of many regions of the Himalaya; and the tribes of northeastern India, their presence speaks of a variety of human contacts and rich social engagements which became possible in the Indian Himalayan region. Here the migrants tried to absorb the different religious beliefs and

⁵ Hart, Michael H. Understanding Human history An analysis including the effects of geography and differential evolution. Augusta, USA: Washington Summit Publishers, 2007.

⁶ Upreti, Prabhat. Uttarakhand: Need for a comprehensive Eco-Strategy. Ed. R.P.Dhasmana. New Delhi: V.K. PUBLISHERS, 2008.

⁷ Banerji, Gargi and Mashqura Fareedi. "protection of cultural diversity in the Himalayas." Inclusive & Culturally Attuned Development for the Himalayas..

myths they encountered, which gave them a distinct identity in the form of folk traditions and nurtured a unique Himalayan way of Life⁸.

The Conclusion: A Preface to Human migration outwards Himalaya

The Himalayan region may be considered to be a cultural complex, a composite of several cultural cosmoses rolled into one, each little valley or plateau with its distinctive cultural forms. Their altitude changes create different agro climatic conditions and diverse ecosystems; their seclusion and remoteness has made them the last bastions of globally significant indigenous knowledge and cultural heterogeneity. The geographical and adaptation continuities have however helped to create and preserve some features that form a uniquely 'Himalayan way of life' common across the range. Every mountain slope is, from the anthrop-geographical standpoint, a complex phenomenon. It displays a whole range of cultural features/combinations- a variety of occupations from commercial cropping and agro processing to nomadic pastoralists, every degree of density from congestion to vacancy, every range of cultural development from industrialization to nomadism. The isolation bred by the high mountain ranges has helped nurture a multiplicity of tribes with unique cultures that include languages, social structures, and spiritual traditions. The settlement patterns, occupations and ways of life of populations in the Himalayas are a reflection of human interaction with and adaptation to climate, relief and ecology. The key differentiator is that of livelihoods practiced and associated way of life.

The cultural variations visible when moving laterally across the Himalayas stem from the waves of migration across the Himalayan ranges. Over the centuries, generations of people of different ethnic origins from its south, east, west and north, have migrated into the region and made it their home however the recent trends of the out migration towards southward direction is an alarming phenomenon. Though the waves of migration into the Himalaya and from the Himalaya was and is a natural phenomenon however it is unfortunate to witness such large scale outmigration from Indian Himalayan region which is turning this rich natural habitat into barren land. The Indian Himalayan region has always favoured life and lifestyles however with times the life and lifestyles in this region has suffered a serious blow which has catalysed the waves of migration southwards and in such large numbers that on one hand the southwards migrant settlements are witnessing a population explosion while on the other hand the Indian Himalayan region is witnessing the ghostly isolation. Hence, it becomes altogether important to acknowledge the challenging and dreadful trend of large scale out-migration from the Indian Himalayan region and the imperativeness to bring back into the life and lifestyle of Himalayas, the legendary, unique Himalayan way of life again with the holy attributes of Satyam (truth), Shivam (eternity) and Sundaram (beauty).

⁸ Pathak, Shekhar. "The Himalaya and our future." Occasional Publication 43. New Delhi: Indian International Centre, 5 Dec 2012.

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