

Buddhism as a Prime Mover in Social Transition: A Study of the Pre-Colonial Period in Sikkim

Pinkey K Yadav*

Abstract

Buddhism serves as a prime mover in the social transition of the Himalayan Sikkim, particularly for the two tribes, the Lepcha and Bhutia (Lhopo). Over the centuries, this small state has undergone a significant transformation in its political structures, social organizations, economic life, and customs. Culture, rooted in shared history and traditions, continuously adapts to changing circumstances by incorporating new elements and modifying the existing ones. It is a dynamic process that blends novelties with traditions through change and memory. Historically, there has always been cultural exchanges, interactions, and influences between neighbouring societies which is evident in Sikkim's cultural evolution as well. This article explores the role of Buddhism in the social transition of the Lepchas and Bhutias of Sikkim during the pre-colonial period. It examines the socio-cultural changes that these two tribes underwent as they transitioned from pre-Buddhist to Buddhist societies in Sikkim, highlighting the interplay between cultural tradition and social transformation.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, Transition, Tibetanization, Boongthism, Shamanism, Sikkim