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ECONOMIC & CULTURAL LIFE OF THE FRONTIER REGION OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Kinnaur is located in the North-East of Himachal Pradesh and, because of its strategic position, it has special importance not only to Himachal but also to India as a whole. This region borders Tibet and western Uttar Pradesh. It is also an important place from the point of view of Buddhist religion and culture. Lotsawa-Rinchen-Zangpo of Radne, Guge, was the chief Lama who was responsible for spreading Buddhism in the Kinnaur region. It was mainly because of his efforts that about 108 stupas and vihara were built in the region extending from Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti to Ladakh.

The other important region of Himachal Pradesh is Lahoul and Spiti, including Ladakh, situated to the north of Lahoul. It is famous all over the world as an important Buddhist pilgrimage centre. Popular places of pilgrimage in the Lahoul valley are Dilburi and the marble statue of Avalokiteshvara at Triloknath. People in the Lahoul valley worship many other deities, particularly Gephang Maharaja. The practice of annual sacrifices to these deities is still prevalent. I am of the view that the young and up-coming generation should discourage this practice, because such cruel practices will not in any manner benefit us. The Buddha also spoke against such practices 2,500 years ago.

Although the caste system is a deplorable practice, it is still found in the society of Lahoul-Spiti and the Kinnaur valley. People of lower caste can not eat at the same table with the people of a higher caste. They can not even visit Gonpas. It is very regrettable that the caste division is also found in the traditional Buddhist societies of Kinnaur and Lahoul-Spiti. The Buddha fought against the caste system. It is because of this system that India strives unsuccessfully for real unity.

The Tibetan language is the only language in which the complete teachings of the Buddha are still preserved. Bhoti has been the traditional language of religion and culture in these frontier

regions. From ancient times to the modern age, these frontier regions have kept intact the Buddhist culture of India in Himachal Pradesh. Thus the culture of Kinnaur and Lahoul Spiti is of special importance.

Farming has been the mainstay of the economy of these regions. Animal rearing is the other important economic activity. Pack animals are a popular means of transporting goods from and to the neighbouring areas. However roads have now been built connecting these regions to the other parts of the country and because vehicular transportation is now easily available, the business activities of the people have also increased. With this, cultural interaction with the people of other states has been possible. Since the opening up of these regions to foreign tourists last year, in 1992, more employment opportunities have been made available in the tourism sector.