

**Van Rawats – A Tribe in Peril.** Prasanna K. Samal, Yesh Pal S. Topal and Pushpa Pant. G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, Kosi-Katarmal, Almora 263 643. 2000. 132 pp. Price: Rs. 400.

Researchers from the G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development (GBPIHED), Almora have studied the numerically small, forest-dependent and recently settled tribe – the Rajis of the Central Himalayas, from a development perspective. The book claims to understand the reasons for declining growth rate, backwardness, impact of development interventions and acculturation of the Raji tribe and attempts to evolve a framework for its development based on existing resource base, ecology and culture.

The demographic data covering all 123 households of the tribe, reflect the shorter life span of the Raji females and of their declining sex ratio in the age group 51–60 years. Poverty, hard work, nomadic way of life, improper food intake and lack of maternity care have been highlighted as the reasons for the shorter life span. Besides, the population growth rate of the tribe has been very slow, which the authors attribute to the low level of development and quality of life.

The dependence of the Rajis on wage labour seems substantial, contributing to half of their total income. The authors have not discussed the nature of wage labour and the places where they undertake this work. It would have been appropriate if there was more focus on the wage labour aspect, since it could be a starting point of development intervention. The remaining income of the Rajis comes from forests, which contribute up to 27% of the total income and 12% from agriculture, in spite of the fact that 88% of the households own land. On the expenditure front, the Rajis spend 74% and 11% of their total income on food and clothing, respectively, indicating their status of existence.

The crude literacy rate of the Rajis is about 27%, out of which only 2% have passed high school. Non-customized textbooks and learning through Hindi are highlighted as the reasons for low literacy, since the language of the Rajis belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group. Lack of a resource base for support of higher

education for the children is identified as a major social handicap. The authors speak about the higher degree of discipline required from parents and children regarding attendance in schools. A value-loaded statement is made by the authors, 'lifestyles based on generations experience of pleasure principle', which is unfortunate, coming from a group of social scientists addressing development issues.

The section on apathy of development agents to the development of the Rajis is well focused. For example, livestock is a priority for economic development, while markets for their products are not, a fact that has been overlooked. Similarly, the book laments at the lack of investment in carpentry, in spite of the fact that the Rajis are good craftspersons. In addition, the authors identify tailoring units and bee keeping that should have been given priority.

The book repeatedly mentions about wooden implements and utensils that were made by the Rajis and bartered for rice, clothes and essentials, but fails to describe or detail this aspect anywhere. This is so because if the Rajis had such a practice, it would be a nice starting point for development, based on their skills and knowledge. A possibility of marketing some of their products as tourist articles through governmental and non-governmental agencies exists.

The authors have not done justice to the section on the economy of the Rajis. The chapter claims that the Rajis depend on the forests for their livelihoods, but fails to substantiate the importance of collection of forest products. This is in the light of numerous studies on non-wood forest produce (NWFP), from fields and fallows. The authors mention that forest laws were responsible for the loss of livelihood of the Rajis, but fall short to capture the manner in which it affected them. The link between forest laws and loss of livelihood is unclear. The book does not capture the changes in the lifestyle of the Rajis after the Indo-Chinese war of 1962, which led to the large-scale physical infrastructure development, especially roads in the region. The problem of sedentarization of a nomadic tribe and its consequences to life-styles coupled with acculturation with other social groups leading to elaboration and increasing complexity of life cycle rituals is clearly brought out.

Finally, the book identifies development priorities for the Rajis within the framework of the Swarnjayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). The SGSY is held as the panacea for the development of the Rajis. Development problems and stakeholders are identified, course of action prescribed, which calls for the customization of SGSY to fit in their unique conditions of existence. Target areas for development interventions are agriculture, livestock, bee keeping, horticulture and wooden crafts clubbed with markets. The book also calls for restructuring of the local District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) on the lines of North Eastern Council (NEC) and the involvement of local democratic institutions for effective implementation of development programmes.

On the whole, the volume of material about the Rajis presented in the book is little, preference being given to other details. The book is written in an implicit form that lets the readers do a lot of reading between the lines and draw their own conclusions.

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**SEWANA (South Europe, West Asia and North Africa): Durum Research Network. Proceedings of the SEWANA Durum Network Workshop, 20–23 March 1995, ICARDA, Aleppo, Syria.** Nachit, M. M. *et al.* (eds). International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, P.O. Box 5466, Aleppo, Syria. 1998. 334 pp. Price not mentioned.

This book is a record of an important international meeting of Durum (*Triticum durum*) researchers primarily from South Europe, West Asia, North Africa