

# Who Will Apologise to the 'Himalayans'?

**Traditional practices and ethnic diversity in the Himalayan region are increasingly marginalised in favour of profit-driven initiatives. Like the Nordics, Himalayan communities face climate-induced disasters and centuries of resource exploitation, yet their struggles remain largely unacknowledged.**

**This presentation explores the parallels between Nordic indigenous communities and Himalayan peoples, examining historical injustices, ongoing challenges, and the urgent need for recognition and reconciliation.**



**by OJAANK IAS**





# Norway's Formal Apology

## 1 Acknowledgment of Assimilation Policies

Norway's Parliament recently issued a formal apology for its assimilation policies targeting the Sami, Kven, and Forest Finn peoples between the 1850s and 1960s, known as Norwegianisation.

## 2 Suppression of Indigenous Cultures

These policies were specifically designed to suppress indigenous languages and cultures, forcing assimilation into mainstream Norwegian society.

## 3 Proposed Remedial Measures

The government proposed measures to address ongoing discrimination, including protecting indigenous languages and monitoring inclusion efforts starting in 2027.



# Ongoing Challenges for Nordic Indigenous Peoples

## **Symbolic Rights vs. Reality**

**Despite establishing symbolic rights such as a Sami Parliament and repealing discriminatory laws, significant challenges persist for indigenous communities in Norway.**

## **Endangered Languages**

**Sami languages remain endangered despite official recognition, threatening the cultural continuity of indigenous communities.**

## **Systemic Inequities**

**Indigenous groups continue to face inequities in healthcare, education, and land rights, highlighting the gap between formal apologies and substantive change.**





# The Himalayan Region: An Overview



## Vast Geographic Expanse

The Himalayan region spans 2,500 kilometres from Afghanistan to northeast India and contains the world's largest ice reserves after the two poles.



## Rich Cultural Diversity

Home to 52 million people from various tribes, clans, ethnicities, and religions, creating a tapestry of cultural practices and traditions.



## Climate Vulnerability

Like the Nordics, Himalayan communities face climate-induced disasters and centuries of resource exploitation that threaten their way of life.



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# Diverse Ethnic Communities of the Himalayas

## Himachal Pradesh

Home to the Gaddis and Kinnauras tribes, who have maintained distinct cultural identities despite external pressures.

## Sikkim and Ladakh

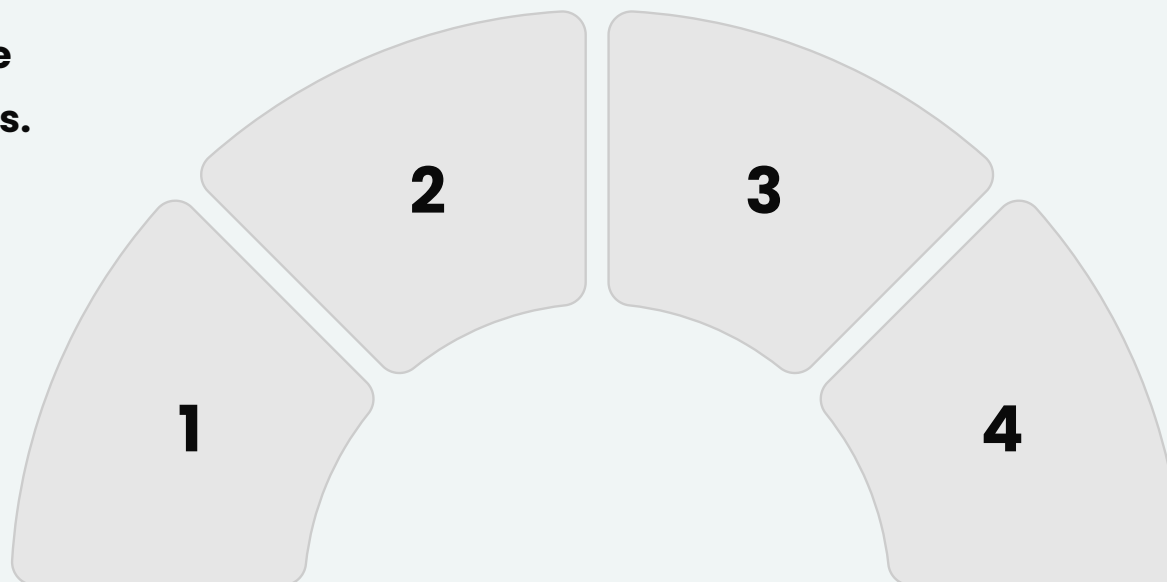
The Lepchas, Bhutiyas, and Mons have inhabited these regions for centuries, developing unique adaptations to high-altitude environments.

## Arunachal Pradesh

Diverse groups including the Abor, Aka, Apatani, and Mishmi maintain rich cultural traditions and ecological knowledge.

## Transnational Communities

The Khas, Kalash, and other ethnic groups span Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nepal, often divided by modern national boundaries.







# Colonial Impact on Himalayan Communities

## Trade Coercion

In the northeast, tribes were coerced into accepting colonial trade terms, involving goods such as tea, gold, silk, and opium, disrupting traditional economic systems.

1

## Forest Exploitation

In Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, forest laws were enacted to ensure timber supply for railway construction, leading to massive deforestation and displacement.

3

## Economic Devastation

Trade blockades devastated local economies. According to A.S.R. Foreign proceedings, 1881, cultural operations were suspended because communities couldn't procure iron, and marriages stopped as silk cloth supply was blocked.

2

# Post-Independence Policies



1

## Nehru's Humanistic Approach

After India's independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru advocated for respecting tribal ways of life, stating: "It is grossly presumptuous on our part to approach them with an air of superiority, or to tell them what to do or not to do."

2

## Policy Shift

This humanistic approach influenced policies for about 15 years. However, by the 5th and 6th Five-Year Plans, priorities changed dramatically.

3

## Resource Exploitation

Rapid resource exploitation in tribal regions began to disrupt local ecosystems and cultures, prioritizing national development over indigenous rights.



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# The 1990s Economic Shift

## Unique State Formation

Unlike other Indian States, Himalayan States emerged due to geographical and multi-ethnic considerations, lacking an industrial base.

## Fiscal Pressure

The 1990s introduced fiscal policies that pressured States to generate their own revenue, creating economic challenges for regions with limited industrial capacity.

## Tourism and Hydropower Focus

Tourism and hydropower became dominant economic activities, promoted as solutions but leading to extensive environmental degradation and cultural erosion.







## Hydropower: Development at What Cost?

**₹445...**

### Annual Revenue

In 2015, then-Chief Minister Nabam Tuki stated that just three hydropower projects would earn ₹445 crore annually for Arunachal Pradesh.

**40%**

### Power Contribution

Completion of all planned projects would meet 40% of India's power demand, potentially transforming Arunachal Pradesh's financial situation.

**52M**

### Affected Population

These developments impact the lives and livelihoods of 52 million people across the Himalayan region, often without adequate consultation.

Despite promises of economic benefits, hydropower projects often bypass local laws, undermining tribal land ownership governed by customary practices. This "hydro-criminality," as described by civil society groups, exemplifies the prioritisation of economic growth over cultural preservation.

# The Nexus of Exploitation



**Despite legal protections, a powerful nexus of bureaucrats, politicians, and corporations has facilitated large-scale land acquisition for development projects. This system prioritizes economic growth metrics over cultural preservation and environmental sustainability, systematically marginalizing traditional practices and ethnic diversity in the Himalayan region.**



# Lessons from Norway's Reconciliation



## Institutional Recognition

Norway established the Sami Parliament as a representative body for indigenous peoples, providing a platform for self-governance and cultural preservation that could serve as a model for Himalayan communities.



## Formal Acknowledgment

The formal apology by Norway's Parliament highlights the importance of acknowledging historical injustices as a first step toward healing and reconciliation, setting a precedent for other nations.



## Cultural Preservation

Efforts to protect indigenous languages and monitor inclusion demonstrate a commitment to ongoing reconciliation rather than a one-time symbolic gesture, offering important lessons for Himalayan governance.

# Who Will Apologise to the 'Himalayans'?

**1****Acknowledge Historical Injustices**

Recognition of past exploitation

**2****Reform Development Models**

Shift to sustainable approaches

**3****Empower Indigenous Communities**

Restore cultural autonomy

**4****Implement Reconciliation Measures**

Concrete actions for healing

**For the Himalayan region, an acknowledgment of historical and ongoing injustices is long overdue. The exploitation of natural resources and the erosion of cultural identities demand accountability and a shift toward sustainable, inclusive development that respects indigenous knowledge and rights.**

**While Norway's federal government has taken a step toward justice for its indigenous peoples, the question remains: who will apologise to the 'Himalayans'?**



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