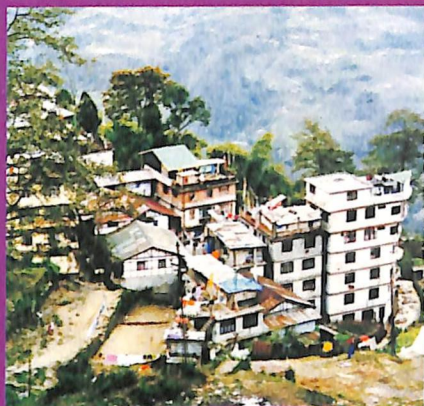
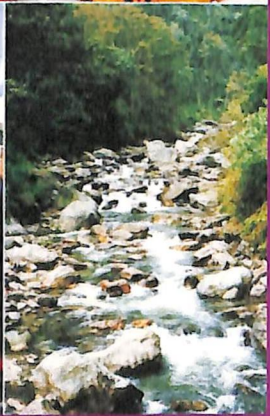


Glimpses of
Sikkim



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Latika Sigh



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Preface

Situated in mountain terrain, and located on the lap of mount Kanchenjunga, world's third highest mountain, the state of Sikkim has unparalleled beauty and very friendly as well as hospitable people are its competitive and comparative advantages. Sikkim is famous for its lush green vegetation, verdant forests, scenic valleys and majestic mountains and a range of rich and magnificent cultural heritage all of which provide a safe-haven for tourists for long. The state also draws thousands of pilgrims to its holyshrines and monasteries. Magnificent natural resources and scenic beauty have transformed Sikkim into a nature lover's paradise. Sikkim's comparative advantage lies in tourism sector. If comprehensively developed, tourism could be the key source of both income and employment in the state.

Most of the area of Sikkim consists of mountainous terrain, interspersed with ravines and green valleys. The main rivers are Teesta and Rongpo both of which originate in the serene glaciers of the Himalays. For many decades, because of poor planning, tourism could never pick up despite unparalleled advantages. However, since last decade the state government has taken up aggressive marketing strategy in India and abroad towards promoting Sikkim as a brand name and the

'ultimate tourist destination'. In addition, looking to huge market for adventure tourism, the state government has identified and promoted adventure sports like trekking, mountaineering, rafting, mountain biking, hang gliding, etc.

"Glimpses of Sikkim" is an attempt to bring before the readers many facets of state's geography, people, arts, culture, economy, language, festivals, tourist destinations, etc. In addition, the book makes lucid presentation on history, climate, fauna and flora, districts and towns, agriculture, rural development, infrastructure development, growth of industry, trade and commerce, social welfare activities, environment and forest management. The book also makes beautiful description on tourism, places of interest, wildlife, trekking, monoasteries and adventure sports.

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Latika Singh

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1

Historical Overview

Introduction

The most widely accepted origin of the name Sikkim is that it is a combination of two words in the Limbu *Su*, which means 'new', and *Khyim*, which means 'palace' or house, in reference to the palace built by the state's first ruler, Phuntsok Namgyal. The Tibetan name for Sikkim is Denjong, which means the 'valley of rice'.

The earliest recorded event related to Sikkim is the passage of the Buddhist saint Guru Rinpoche through the land in the 8th century. The Guru is reported to have blessed the land, introduced Buddhism to Sikkim, and foretold the era of monarchy in the state that would arrive centuries later. In the 14th century, according to legend, Khye Bumsa, a prince from the Minyak House in Kham in Eastern Tibet, had a divine revelation one night instructing him to travel south to seek his fortunes. His descendants were later to form the royal family of Sikkim. In 1642, the fifth generation descendant of Khye Bumsa, Phuntsog Namgyal, was consecrated as the first Chogyal (king) of Sikkim by the three venerated Lamas who

came from the north, west and south to Yuksom, marking the beginning of the monarchy. Phuntsog Namgyal was succeeded in 1670 by his son, Tensung Namgyal, who moved the capital from Yuksom to Rabdentse.

In 1700, Sikkim was invaded by the Bhutanese with the help of the half-sister of the Chogyal, who had been denied the throne. The Bhutanese were driven away by the Tibetans, who restored the throne to the Chogyal ten years later. Between 1717 and 1733, the kingdom faced many raids by the Nepalese in the west and Bhutanese in the east, culminating with the destruction of the capital Rabdentse by the Nepalese. In 1791, China sent troops to support Sikkim and defend Tibet against the Gurkhas. Following Nepal's subsequent defeat, Sikkim became a suzerainty of Qing Dynasty. Following the arrival of the British Raj in neighbouring India, Sikkim allied with them against their common enemy, Nepal.

The Nepalese attacked Sikkim, overrunning most of the region including the Terai. This prompted the British East India Company to attack Nepal, resulting in the Gurkha War of 1814. Treaties signed between Sikkim and Nepal—the Sugauli Treaty—and Sikkim and British India—Titalia Treaty—returned the territory annexed by the Nepalese to Sikkim in 1817. Ties between Sikkim and the British administrators of India grew sour, however, with the beginning of British taxation of the Morang region. In 1849 two British doctors, Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker and Dr. Archibald Campbell, the latter being in charge of relations between the British and Sikkim Government, ventured into the mountains of Sikkim unannounced and unauthorised. The doctors were detained by the Sikkim Government, leading to a punitive British expedition against the Himalayan kingdom, after which the Darjeeling district and Morang were annexed to India in 1835. The invasion led to the Chogyal's becoming a puppet king under the directive of the British Governor.

In 1947, a popular vote rejected Sikkim's joining the Indian Union and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru agreed to a special protectorate status for Sikkim. Sikkim was to be a tributary of India, in which India controlled its external defence, diplomacy and communication. A state council was established in 1955 to allow for constitutional government for the Chogyal. Meanwhile trouble was brewing in the state after the Sikkim National Congress demanded fresh elections and greater representation for the Nepalese. In 1973, riots in front of the palace led to a formal request for protection from India. The Chogyal was proving to be extremely unpopular with the people. Sikkim was closed and little was known until American climber Caril Ridley happened into Gangtok and was able to smuggle photos and legal documentation out. When confirmed by China, India's actions were brought into the spotlight of world awareness.

However, history had already been written and matters came to a head in 1975, when the Kazi (Prime Minister) appealed to the Indian Parliament for representation and change of Sikkim's status to a state of India. In April, the Indian Army moved in Sikkim, seizing the city of Gangtok, disarming the Palace Guards. Within two days the entire nation was in Indian hands. A referendum was held in which 97.5 per cent of the people voted to join the Indian Union. A few weeks later on May 16, 1975, Sikkim officially became the 22nd state of the Indian Union, and monarchy was abolished.

In 2000, in a major embarrassment for China, the seventeenth Karmapa Ugyen Trinley Dorje, who had been proclaimed a Lama by China, made a dramatic escape from Tibet to the Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim. Chinese officials were in a quandary on this issue as any protests to India on the issue would mean an explicit endorsement of India's governance of Sikkim, which the Chinese still regarded as an independent state occupied by India. China eventually recognised Sikkim as an Indian state in 2003, which led to a

thaw in Sino-Indian relations. In return, India announced its official recognition of Tibet as an integrated part of China. As part of a significant pact between India and China signed by the prime ministers of the two countries, Manmohan Singh and Wen Jiabao, China released an official map clearly showing Sikkim as part of the Republic of India. On July 6, 2006 the Himalayan pass of Nathula was opened to cross-border trade, a further evidence of improving sentiment over the region.

Ancient History

Not much is known about Sikkim's ancient history, except for the fact that the first inhabitants were the Lepchas or Rong (ravine folk). They were later encompassed and absorbed by the The earliest known fact about Sikkim was that the Buddhist saint Guru Rinpoche passed through the land in the 9th century. The Guru blessed the land, introduced Buddhism to Sikkim and also foretold the era of the monarchy in the state, which would arrive centuries later. In the 13th century, Guru Tashi, a prince from the Mi-nyak House in Kham in Eastern Tibet, had a divine revelation one night instructing him to travel south to seek his fortunes. Guru Tashi settled down in the Chumbi Valley in Sikkim. The Sikkim Coronation Book describes Guru Tashi as the "first ruler of Sikkim who paved way for a regular monarchy". His descendants assimilated with the local culture, with his grandson becoming a chieftain and their clan enjoying good relations with the autochthonous Lepchas clan.

Kingdom of Sikkim

In 1642, the fifth generation descendant of Guru Tashi, Phuntsog Namgyal was consecrated as the first Denjong Gyalpo or the Chogyal (king) of Sikkim by the three great Lamas who came from the north, west and south to Yuksom Norbugang in West Sikkim. The event, Naljor Chezhi, was as

predicted by Guru Rinpoche some eight hundred years before. This historical gathering of the three virtuous lamas is called Yuksom, which in Lepcha means the 'Three Superior Ones'. The Chogyal, along with the three lamas proselytised the Lepcha tribes into Buddhism and annexed the Chumbi Valley, the present day Darjeeling district and parts of today's eastern Nepal.

Phuntsog Namgyal was succeeded by his son, Tensung Namgyal in 1670. The reign of the chogyal was peaceful and saw the capital being shifted from Yuksom to Rabdentse. Chadok Namgyal, the king's second wife's son took over the throne from him in 1700. This outraged his elder half-sister Pentiongmu and ousted him with the help of the Bhutanese. Chadok fled to Tibet where he remained in exile for ten years before returning and reclaiming his lost territory with the help of the Tibetans. His son Gurmed Namgyal succeeded him in 1717. Gurmed's reign saw many skirmishes between the Nepalese and Sikkimese. Phunstok Namgyal, the illegitimate child of Gurmed, succeeded his father in 1733. His reign was tumultuous and faced with attacks by the Bhutanese and the Nepalese who managed to capture the capital Rabdentse.

Tenzing Namgyal, the next ruler of Sikkim was a weak ruler, and his sovereignty saw most of Sikkim being appropriated by Nepal. The Chogyal was forced to flee to Lhasa where he died in 1780. Tshudpud Namgyal, his son returned to Sikkim in 1793 to reclaim the throne with the help of China. Finding Rabdentse too close to the Nepalese border, he shifted the capital to Tumlong.

British Arrival

With the arrival of the British in neighbouring India, Sikkim allied itself with them as they had a common enemy – Nepal. The infuriated Nepalese attacked Sikkim with vengeance overrunning most of the region including the Terai. This

prompted the British East India Company to attack Nepal resulting in the Gurkha War in 1814. Treaties signed between Sikkim and Nepal – the Sugauli Treaty and Sikkim and British India – Titalia Treaty, returned the territory annexed by the Nepalese to Sikkim in 1817.

Meanwhile, the British were looking for a route to establish trading links with Tibet. An offshoot of the ancient Silk Road through Sikkim meant that the kingdom was ideal as a transit route. A secondary reason for the establishment of links was to quell the growing Russian influence in Tibet. However, ties between Sikkim and India grew sour with the taxation of area of Morang by the British. In 1835, Sikkim was forced to cede the town of Darjeeling to the British on the condition that a compensation of Rs. 35,000 be paid to him.

Puppet State

In 1849, a pair of British doctors Campbell and Hooker ventured into the mountains of Sikkim unannounced and unauthorised by the Chogyal of Sikkim. The doctors were detained by the Sikkim government, which led to a punitive British expedition against the Himalayan kingdom in which the whole of Darjeeling district and Morang were annexed in 1861, although the kingdom continued to exist as an independent rump state centred around the capital at Gangtok. The old Chogyal was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Sidekong Namgyal in 1863.

The Chogyals of Sikkim endeavoured to modernise their state in the succeeding decades, along with their army. A state visit to Darjeeling by the new, Sidekong's half brother, Chogyal Thutob Namgyal in 1873 failed to yield such results, and he returned to Tumlong disappointed. In 1886, the British, interested in trade with Tibet, launched a brief expedition into Sikkim. The Tibetans occupied several of Sikkim's northern border forts, and the Chogyal and his wife were

held prisoner by the British when they came to negotiate at Calcutta. In 1888, the Tibetans were defeated and northern Sikkim came under the rule of British India. The British established new landholdings in Sikkim, but released the Chogyal only to have him captured again in 1891. In 1894, the capital was shifted to Gangtok.

In 1895, the Chogyal was released, but the British governors in India reneged on an agreement—the Ten Clauses Agreement—which returned sovereignty to Sikkim. The governor of British India, Claude White, refused to return any sovereignty, and only let the Chogyal retain the judiciary of Sikkim.

In 1905, the Prince of Wales—the future King George V—arrived in Calcutta on a state visit during which he met the Chogyal. The two made an excellent acquaintance and the Crown Prince of Sikkim, Sidkeong Tulku was sent to study at Oxford University. When Sidkeong came to power, he arranged widened sovereignty for Sikkim from King George's government and endorsed sweeping reforms in his short rule as Chogyal, which ended in 1914. In 1918, Sikkim's independence in all domestic affairs was restored, and in the next decade she embarked on a policy to end social ills, outlawing gambling, child labour, and indentured service.

Independent Monarchy

Sikkim had retained guarantees of independence from Britain when she became independent, and such guarantees were transferred to the Indian Government when it gained independence in 1947. A popular vote for Sikkim to join the Indian Union failed and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru agreed to a special protectorate status for Sikkim. Sikkim was to be a tributary of India, in which India controlled its external defence, diplomacy and communication. A state council was established in 1955 to allow for constitutional government for the Chogyal, which was sustained until 1973.

In 1962, India and the People's Republic of China went to war. Although Sikkim was an independent country, skirmishes occurred at the Nathula Pass between Indian border guards and the Chinese soldiers. Following India's subsequent defeat, the ancient Pass was shut down, until quite recently (July 6, 2006).

The old ruler Tashi Namgyal died in 1963 after suffering from cancer. The last hereditary ruler, the Chogyal, Palden Thondup Namgyal ascended to the throne in 1965. Meanwhile, trouble was brewing in the state after the Sikkim National Congress demanded fresh elections and greater representation for the Nepalese. In 1973, riots in front of the palace led to a formal request for protection from India. The Chogyal was proving to be extremely unpopular with the people and was considered to be aloof, especially after his marriage to an US citizen, Hope Cooke.

Frosty relations between the chogyal the elected Kazi (Prime Minister) Lendup Dorji, witnessed the attempting of the blocking the meeting of the Legislature. The Kazi was elected by the Council of Ministers which was unanimous in its opposition to the retention of the Monarchy. Matters came to a head in 1975 when the Kazi appealed to the Indian Parliament for representation and change of status to statehood. On April 14, 1975, a referendum merged Sikkim with the union of India. Sikkim became the 22nd Indian State on April 26, 1975. On May 16, 1975, Sikkim was officially a state of the Indian Union. This was promptly recognised by the United Nations and all countries except China.

The position of Chogyal was thus abolished, ending the monarchy. In 1982, Palden Thondup succumbed to cancer in the United States.

State of India

The 1979 assembly election saw Nar Bahadur Bhandari being elected as the Chief Minister of Sikkim. Bhandhuri held on to

win the 1984 and 1989. In 1994 assembly election Pawan Kumar Chamling became the Chief Minister of Sikkim. In the 1999 and 2004 Chamling consolidated his position to sweep the polls. In 2000, relations turned cold after the 17th Karmapa fled to the Rumtek Monastery near Gangtok. The Chinese government was in a quandary as any protest to India would mean an explicit endorsement of the ascension of Sikkim (which China considered as an independent state) as a state of India.

In 2003, with the thawing of ties between the two nations, Sikkim was finally recognised to be a part of India by China. The two governments also proposed to open the Nathula and Jelep Passes in 2005.

Kings of Sikkim

Phuntsog Namgyal

Phuntsog Namgyal (1604–70) was the first chogyal (monarch) of Sikkim, now an Indian state. He consecrated in 1642 at the age of 38. Phuntsog was a fifth generation descendant of Guru Tashi, a 13th century prince from the Mi-nyak House in Kham in Eastern Tibet.

According to legend, Guru Rinpoche, a 9th century Buddhist saint had foretold the event that a Phuntsog from the east would be the next chogyal of Sikkim. In 1642, three lamas, from the north, west, and south went in search for the chosen person. Near present day Gangtok, they found a man churning milk. He offered them some refreshments and gave them shelter. So impressed were they by his deeds that they realised that he was a chosen one and immediately crowned him king. The crowning took place Norbughang near Yuksom on a stone slab in a pine covered hill, and he was anointed by sprinkling water from a sacred urn.

Phuntsog, along with the lamas, then converted the local Lepcha tribes to Buddhism and set about expanding his

kingdom up to the Chumbi Valley in Tibet, parts of modern day Darjeeling in the south, and parts of eastern Nepal.

Phuntsog moved his capital to Yuksam and instituted the first centralised administration. The kingdom was divided into twelve Dzongs, or districts under a Lepcha Dzongpon (governor) who headed a council of twelve ministers. During his reign Buddhism was consolidated as the established religion in Sikkim. He was succeeded by his son, Tensun Namgyal in 1670.

Tensung Namgyal

Tensung Namgyal (1644-1700) was the second chogyal (monarch) of Sikkim. He succeeded his father Phuntsog Namgyal in 1670. He moved the capital from Yuksom to Rabdentse near Geyzing in 1670. He had three wives and was succeeded by his son Chakdor Namgyal, borne by his second wife in 1700.

Tshudpud Namgyal

Tshudpud Namgyal (1785-1863) was king of Sikkim from 1793-1863. He gained independence from Nepal in 1815 and ruled under a British protectorate from 1861.

Under his father Tenzing Namgyal, most of Sikkim was appropriated by Nepal. Tshudpud Namgyal returned to Sikkim in 1793 to reclaim the throne. Because the capital of Rabdentse was too close to the Nepalese border, he shifted the capital to Tumlong.

Sikkim allied itself with the British in India, who also considered Nepal an enemy. Nepal overran most of the region, sparking the Gurkha War in 1814 with the British East India Company. The Sugauli Treaty and Treaty of Titalia returned the annexed territory to Sikkim in 1817.

Gurkha War

The Gurkha War (1814-16), sometimes called the Gorkha War or the Anglo-Nepalese War, was fought between Nepal and

the British East India Company as a result of border tensions and ambitious expansionism. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816.

For centuries the three kingdoms of the Kathmandu valley—Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaon, (now Bhaktapur)—had quarrelled amongst themselves and were too concerned with internal rivalry to pay attention to any potential danger from without. This insularity however had by 1769, enabled Prithvi Narayan Shah the king of Gorkha to conquer the valley, forming the foundations for the modern Kingdom of Nepal.

In 1767, a request to the British for help by the traditional valley kings under threat from Gorkha expansion resulted in an ill-equipped and ill-prepared expedition numbering 2,500 lead by Captain Kinloch. The expedition was a disaster—the Gorkha army easily overpowered those who did not succumb to malaria or desertion. This ineffectual and token British force not only provided the Gorkhas with firearms but also filled them with suspicion, causing some to underestimate their future opponents.

This conquest of the Kathmandu valley was only the beginning of an explosion of Gorkha power throughout the region. The Gorkha armies had overrun all of eastern Nepal by 1773—by 1788 Gorkha forces had also annexed some western portions of Sikkim. In the west, all rulers as far as the Kali River had submitted or been replaced by 1790. Farther west still, the Kumaon region and its capital Almora, had also succumbed to the Gorkhas.

While the Gorkhas had been expanding its empire—Sikkim in the east, Kumaon and Garhwal in the west and into the British sphere of influence in Oudh in the south—the British East India Company had consolidated its position in India from its main bases of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. This British expansion had already been resisted in parts of India culminating in the Mahratta Wars, as well as in the

Punjab where Ranjit Singh had his own empire-building aspirations. It was therefore imperative to the British that the Gorkha war was quickly and successfully concluded.

The Gorkha prime minister realised the Nepalese had several advantages over the British including knowledge of the region and recent experience fighting in the mountainous terrain. However, the British had numerical superiority and far more modern weapons.

The ensuing Battle of Dionthal was the decisive moment in the campaign. Attempts by Amar Singh's most able lieutenant, Bhakti Thapa, to dislodge the British from the Dionthal ridge overlooking the Malaun fort, failed. Although Bhakti Thapa was killed in the action on 16 April, the fort held out for a while. However, when news arrived announcing that Almora had fallen to Colonel Jasper Nicolls' 2,000 strong force of regular sepoy on 26th April, Amar Singh Thapa realised the hopelessness of the situation and, threatened by the British guns, surrendered. In recognition of their heroic defences of their respective forts of Malaun and Jaithak, Ochterlony allowed Amar Singh and his son Ranjur (who had joined him at Malaun) to return home with their arms and men. During the campaign Ochterlony was promoted to major general.

After Ochterlony's successful campaign, the Kathmandu durbar failed to ratify the peace agreement signed on 28 November 1815. This reticence to sign soon led to the second campaign. Unsurprisingly, Lord Moira placed Ochterlony in command of the 20,000 strong invasion force of Nepal.

While General Ochterlony advanced towards Makwanpur, simultaneous operations by the chogyal, or king, of Sikkim would drive the Nepalese army from the east. Amar Singh Thapa would take no part in the campaign—he had retired to a temple, dying shortly after the war ended.

After the decisive Battle of Makwanpur on 28th February 1816 and the fall of the neighbouring fort of Hariharpur (after

Ranjur Singh ingloriously abandoned his post), the situation became very critical for Nepal. The British threat on the capital Kathmandu compelled the Nepalese to ratify the treaty without any further delay.

Silk Road

The Silk Road, or Silk Route, is an interconnected series of ancient trade routes through various regions of the Asian continent mainly connecting Chang'an (today's Xi'an) in China, with Asia Minor and the Mediterranean. It extends over 8,000 km (5,000 miles) on land and sea.

Trade on the Silk Route was a significant factor in the development of the great civilisations of China, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, and Rome, and helped to lay the foundations for the modern world.

Silk road is a translation from the German word. The first person who used the term was the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877.