



# ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

Volume VII **Sikkim**

H M BAREH

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# Sikkim

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## Preface

North Eastern region of India comprising the eight states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura is endowed with vast natural resources and has enormous potential for development. The economic structure of North East India is similar to the general economic structure of India as a whole. But because of its topography as well as social and political conditions it has a relatively backward economy.

The strategic importance of the region along with its sensitive geopolitical location extremely diverse nature of its population with different cultural, linguistic, religious and historical background make this region characteristically different from the rest of the country. In fact its diversity is so profound that the region may be rightly called a 'mini' India. Its topography and historical factors have not only contributed to the heterogeneous character of the region but also prevented the emergence of a homogenous culture. The tribals living in the hills have century old tradition of self-rule and a strong sense of suspicion of the people from the plains, aroused by the latter's superiority complex which generated in them the fear of losing their cultural and linguistic identities. Foreign Christian pseudo-missionaries in the initial stages of independence took full advantage of this situation and succeeded in creating a feeling of alienation and secession among the hill tribes. The awareness

among the people and the forces working in this part of the region along with the emergence of the new states opened new vistas of opportunities to develop and remould their lives.

The region is landlocked and rich in natural resources. Lack of transport and communication facilities has been responsible for the economic backwardness and social neglect of the region. The Council has undertaken a regional survey to study the transport needs of the region for the next fifteen years. The whole country is watching eagerly the developments in the region. The Council has not only to play a pivotal role in making its member units self-reliant but even to justify its institutional viability as well. The Council must also act as a forum for evolving a homogeneous culture in this region which was marked by political rivalry and cultural insularity till recently. In these new roles, the Council must make greater efforts to seek the cooperation and trust of its various units and also endeavour to create a climate of mutual respect, and goodwill among the different sections of the society inhabiting the region. The Council can perform the new role with the attitudinal change in the political forces operating in the region. The trend so far is encouraging and there is need to give due encouragement and correct direction to its efforts. Increased awareness of the changing role of the Council is essential and beneficial for all.

The people of the northeastern region have been provided an opportunity to act as torchbearers in regional planning and cooperation and show the path of self-reliance to the smaller states of the Union. This in itself is a commendable task for which the northeastern region may feel proud.

*Editor*



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## Introduction

Sikkim is bounded on the north and north-east by Tibet, on the east by Bhutan, on the west by Nepal and on the south by the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. It has an area of 7096 sq. km. The whole state is divided into four administrative zones, North, South, East and West Districts with their headquarters at Mangan, Namchi, Gangtok and Gyalshing respectively. As a part of the inner ranges of the Himalayan Mountains, it is wholly a hilly state with varied elevations. The land area can be grouped as Lower hills, Higher hills, Alpine zone and Snow land. Owing to such variations in elevation, the climate of Sikkim varies from sub-tropical to alpine. Accordingly the vegetation can be classified into three major types, viz., tropical, temperate and alpine.

The two most important rivers of Sikkim are Teesta and Rangit which flow from the north to the south. About two-thirds of the state consists of very lofty mountains which remain perpetually snow-covered. Mountain Khanchendzonga lies on the north-western side of Sikkim bordering Nepal. Among the mountain ranges on the eastern flank lie the strategic passes of Nathula and Jalepla.

The history of the emergence of the kingdom of

Sikkim can be traced back to 1642, when Phuntshog Namgyal was consecrated as the first king of Sikkim by three monks at Yoksom in Western Sikkim. These three monks Lhatsun Chhenpo, Nga-Dag Lama and Kathog Lama conferred on him the title of Dharam-Raja (Chogyal). The Dalai Lama recognized the new king as the ruler of Sikkim and sent him a silk scarf, the mitre of Guru Rimpochey and the most precious sand image of the Guru as a 'present'. Sikkim's boundary, at that time, extended as far as Limbuwan in the west, Chumbi valley and parts of western Bhutan; westward it extended up to Titaliya and included the whole of Darjeeling district. However, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, the country had to face numerous invasions from its neighbouring countries, Bhutan and Nepal.

Consequently, a large portion of its land was annexed by these countries. The Nepalese conquered the lower Teesta including the present day Kalimpong sub-division and Tibet took over Chumbi valley; and thus made the Chola and Jalepla ranges its northern and eastern boundary.

The Anglo-Gorklia war and the signing of the Treaty of Sugauli between Nepal and the East India Company and signing of the Treaty of Titaliya between the East India Company and Sikkim introduced a new phase in the history of Sikkim. By the Treaty of Sugauli (Art. VI) the Raja of Nepal agreed never to molest or disturb the Raja of Sikkim, and in case of any difference between the state of Nepal and the Raja of Sikkim, the difference would be referred, to the arbitration of the British Government.

Under this treaty, Nepal surrendered to the Company, all the hilly regions situated to the east of the Mechi river and to the westward of Teesta river, which was originally a part of Sikkim but had been annexed by

Nepal in 1788-90. By the Treaty of Titaliya (Art. I) the East India Company restored to Sikkim the above. Besides, the British secured the right of arbitration in case of dispute between Sikkim and Nepal or any other neighbouring state.

The Treaty of Titaliya marked the beginning of the British influence in Sikkim. By the Treaty of Tumlong, the British could gain a foothold in Sikkim. The British activities in Sikkim gained momentum with the establishment of its Residency at Gangtok and the appointment of the first political officer. The British protectorateship over Sikkim was recognized by China in 1890. Under the British protectorateship the power of the Maharaja of Sikkim was considerably reduced and he had no role in the administration of the country. It was during the reign of the Maharaja Tashi Namgyal that full power was restored.

The period following the departure of the British from India was marked with a radical change in the political scene of Sikkim. On the one hand independent India signed a standstill agreement with Sikkim in 1948, in order to retain their respective rights and obligations evolved through earlier treaties and conventions; on the other, the educated elites of the state, while drawing inspiration from the freedom movement in India, started various political parties.

The main political parties formed in the late forties were Sikkim Praja Sammelan, Praja Mandal, Praja Sudharak Samiti. In December 1947, these parties merged to form a new political party, namely the Sikkim State Congress. The Sikkim State Congress made a threefold demand on the Government: (1) abolition of landlordism, (2) establishment of a responsible government and (3) accession of Sikkim to India. To press its demands for reforms the Sikkim State Congress, besides organizing



mass demonstrations, started a 'No Rent' campaign, leading on to a political impasse. Consequently, the Indian Government took over the administration and appointed J S Lall as the Dewan of Sikkim. During his term as the Dewan, house tax and forced labour were abolished in order to facilitate the withdrawal of the 'No Rent' campaign.

The Indo-Sikkim Treaty was signed to give definite shape to Indo-Sikkimese relations. The 1950 treaty was an important landmark in the political development of Sikkim, for with this the Government of India revoked all the previous treaties (Art. I) and affirmed the protectorate status of the state under independent India (Art. II). Defence, external affairs, customs and communications of Sikkim became India's responsibility. The 1950 treaty affirmed India's authority over Sikkim.

The period between 1950 and 1973 was marked by several important events in Sikkim, like the-emergence of various political parties, formation of the State Assembly, introduction of franchise on the basis of party formula.

### People

Sikkim has three main ethnic groups: the Lepchas who were the original inhabitants of the state; the Bhutias who migrated from Tibet in the seventeenth century; and the Nepalese whose migration from Nepal started in the nineteenth century.

Within a decade, there was a significant rise in the population of Sikkim. This was mainly due to the influx of population from other parts of the country after the merger of Sikkim with India.

Although the North District represents 59.56 per cent of the total area of Sikkim, two-third of the region is covered either with perpetual snow or thick forests. It is the most thinly populated district of the state, with only

six persons per sq. km as against 145 persons per sq. km in the East District.

### Dress

The traditional dress of the Lepcha men is called *gada*. It consists of a long, beautiful striped cloth loosely worn down to the knee leaving one or both arms free. The trousers which reaches up to the calf only is called the *phomu*. Women wear the *dumdyan*, a full length robe, held at the shoulders by a pair of brooches and fastened at the waist by a girdle of silver chains or simple hand-woven strip of cloth, known as the *namrek*. Over the *dumdyan* a loose coat called the *pago* is worn. A scarf (*thorough*) is tied round the head. Shoes for both men and women are called *hlom* (pronounced *lhom*).

The Bhutia costume for both sexes is called the *kho*. The *kho* worn by the male is called the *po-kho*, whereas that worn by a woman is called the *mo-kho*. Underneath the *kho*, a man wears a double-breasted, high-necked shirt, the *tsen-ta-ti*, and pants (*gya-ton*). A woman wears a long, loose-sleeved blouse (*honju*) underneath the *kho*.

A married woman ties a striped apron (*pangden*) over the *kho* at the waist. The quality of the clothes worn both by men and women vary according to the economic status of the person ranging from simple cotton to Chinese brocade and silk. The *kho* is fastened at the waist by a long piece of cloth (*kera*).

The traditional costume of Nepali men consists of the *daura* and the *suruwal*. The *daura* is a knee-length double-breasted shirt, fastened at four points across the body by a string of cloth called the *tuna*; the trousers is called the *suruwal*. A sleeveless coat over the *daura* and a cap called the *birkhe topi* complete a Nepali man's dress.

Nepali women wear the *choubandi*, a double-breasted blouse held at four points across the body by the *tuna*

and the *phariya* or the *gunui*, which is worn at the waist and reaches down to the ankle with tiny pleats in front. It is held at the waist by a long strip of cotton cloth (*patuka*). They cover the head with a triangular or rectangular piece of cloth (*majetro*) and tie a cloth around the bust down to the hips (*hembari*).

Lepcha men do not wear any jewellery except amulets given by the monks. Bhutia women wear necklaces of various designs called the *khou*, the *ka-chung*, the *zuri*. The *chyap-chyap* is worn with the *khou* as a brooch. The Bhutia names for different items of ornaments are the *ten-dab* (ear ring), the *zuku* (ring), the *deu* (bracelet). All the ornaments are made of gold studded with various precious stones like *yea*, *dhow* and *zi*. The *zi* is considered to be the most sacred and precious stone.

Nepali women wear mostly gold and silver ornaments. The traditional ornaments are ear rings (*chyaptusun*, *godavari*), necklaces (*tilharl kantha*), and bracelets (*chura*), nose rings (*mundri*, *dungri*, *bulaki*) and anklets (*kalli*). *Kallis* are made of silver.

The different names for the ornaments represent the different designs of the items. At the time of marriage the bridegroom ties around the neck of the bride strings of green tiny beads (*potty*), that serve for a sign for the married Nepali woman. Nepali men do not wear any jewellery except the ring (*aunthi*).

#### *Agricultural implements*

People are yet to make use of improved and mechanized implements in agriculture mainly because of the nature of the terrain. All the three communities use identical implements like the wooden plough, commonly known as the *halo*, which is widely used. The *kanta*, a spade-like tool with sharp teeth, is used for digging the soil. Other



tools widely used include the sickle, called the *hasiyan* by the Nepalis and the *nga-tso* by the Bhutias; the sickle with a row of sharp teeth called the *kachiyen* by the Nepalis and the *nga-ra-tso* by the Bhutias, the bullock-driven ground-leveller, called the *dante* by the Nepalis and *chhyi-ri* by the Bhutias.

For cutting wood and splitting bamboos or for such other work, Nepalis use the *khukri*, whereas the Bhutias and the Lepchas use the *bentok* and the *bamphok* respectively.

### Food

The staple food of the Lepchas is rice. These days they sometimes take *chapatis* too. They also take roasted or boiled maize. They are non-vegetarian and eat all kinds of meat, fish and birds. It is said that earlier they would take the meat of monkeys and snakes. The present generation tends to keep away from these. They eat various types of tubers and vegetables.

One of the most important items in the Lepcha diet is *chi*, home-brewed millet alcohol. A Lepcha who does not drink the *chi* is hard to find. The traditional staple food of the Bhutias includes the *tsampa*, the *thukpa* and the *momo*. These days they also take rice and sometimes *chapatis*. They are non-vegetarian and eat egg, fish, chicken, mutton, pork and beef and sometimes buffalo meat. Dried beef is a delicacy for them. They also eat various types of tubers and vegetables.

During festivals they make several kinds of sweets and salted refreshments called the *khapse* and the *fongui amcho*. They are very fond of drinking the home-brewed alcohol called *chhang*.

The staple diet of the Nepalis is rice and pulses and sometimes *chapatis*, or the oil-fried small *chapatis* (*puri*). The various groups of Nepalis have different dietary



patterns with regard to meat and drinking alcohol. The *Bahun*s or *Brahmans* are vegetarian and do not drink alcohol; instead they eat different types of tubers, vegetables and are very fond of drinking milk and curd. People of the Chhettri, Thakuri and Majhi groups are non-vegetarian but eat only egg, fish, chicken and mutton, and do not eat pork and beef. The Yakhas, Damais, Mangars, Gurungs, Kamis, Sarkis and Bhujels take egg, fish, chicken, mutton and pork food, but do not take beef and buffalo. The Newars eat egg, fish, chicken, mutton and buffalo but do not eat pork and beef whereas the Kagates, Limbus, Sherpas, Tamangs take egg, fish, chicken, mutton, pork, beef and sometimes buffalo. Some of the sub-castes among the Tamangs and Gurungs do not eat pork or beef. All the communities mentioned above take tubers and vegetables which are either locally grown or bought at the market.

Except the Brahmans, all other groups among the Nepalese take home-brewed millet or rice alcohol (*janr*, *rakshi*). Among the Nepali Hindus, there are followers of various sects like Kabir Panthis, Pranamis, Raidas. These people are strictly vegetarian and some do not take even garlic and onion.

The festival delicacies of the Nepalis include *chel roli*, *phuraulo*. On the Maghe Sankranti day, various kinds of boiled tubers and roots and *phuraulo* are taken, and *chel roli* is made especially during Tihar or for a marriage or any other ceremony except the death ceremony.

### Religion

Two important religions professed by the people of Sikkim are Mahayana Buddhism and Hinduism. The introduction of Buddhism in Sikkim coincides with the establishment of a political institution in Sikkim in the seventeenth century. The three monks who had come to Sikkim from Tibet started propagating the religion and

constructing monasteries. Mahayana Buddhism was the state religion till the abolition of the system of hereditary monarchy in 1975. The two sects of Mahayana Buddhism in which the majority of the Buddhists in Sikkim are organized are the Nyingmapa and the Karma-Kadgupa.

A majority of the Bhutias and the Lepchas are Buddhists. There are *some Buddhists among the* Nepalese like the, Tamangs, but the majority of them are Hindus, worshipping various Hindu gods and goddesses. One of the striking features of the religious practices of the Nepalese is, the worship of the family deity (*Kul-Devata*). Those who worship the *Kul-Devata* have a separate altar to which only close family relations have access. Generally the rites and rituals are performed by priests of the same caste. Besides the Buddhists and Hindus, there are a few Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Jains.

There are about seventy-five monasteries in Sikkim. The oldest monastery at Dubdi in Western Sikkim was constructed soon after the consecration of Phuntshog Namgyal. The monasteries of Tashiding, Rinchangpong, Sangacholling and Pemayangtse were constructed in the latter half of the seventeenth century or in the early eighteenth century.

A few important monasteries of the Nyingmapa sect in Sikkim are Pemayangtse, Tashiding, Sangacholling, Enchey and Tsuk-la-Khang. The first monastery of Karma-Kadgupa was constructed in 1730 at Ralang by the fourth Chogyal of Sikkim, Gyurmed Namgyal, in pursuance of a promise given by him to the twelfth incarnation of Gyalwa Karmapa at Tsurphung monastery in Tibet. Other important monasteries of this sect are at Phodong and Rumtek.

The Thakurbari at Gangtok was established in 1935. Besides this there are about fifty temples scattered all

over the state. There are four churches at Gangtok and six others in other parts of Sikkim. The lone mosque in Sikkim is located at Gangtok.

### Languages

The three major languages spoken in Sikkim are Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha. Due to the overwhelming presence of the Nepalese, Nepali has since long become the lingua franca of the state. The Bhutia and Lepcha languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman group, while Nepali is an Indo-Aryan language.

There are four official languages of the state, viz. Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepali and Limbu, which are taught in the schools also. Besides these languages, the several dialects prevalent within the different Nepali castes include Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Mangar, Newar etc. However, these dialects are very rarely spoken even within the same community. Speakers of these dialects usually speak the standard Nepali.

### Settlement pattern

Ever since Sikkim was exposed to outside influence it has been the meeting place of two diverse cultures brought in by the two immigrant communities, viz., the Bhutias and the Nepalese. While Bhutias brought with them a part of Tibetan cultural life including the language, religion and an economic system which was a combination of pastoralism and semi-settled agriculture, the Nepalese brought with them a part of Nepal's cultural life including the Nepali language, Hinduism and settled cultivation especially terraced cultivation.

While the cultural influence of the Bhutias on the Lepchas, especially the conversion of the Lepchas into the fold of Buddhism, prevailed the Nepalese retained a distinct identity. Initially, the Bhutias coming from the cold and dry climate of Tibet were resistant to the



warmer regions. As a result, their habitation came to be concentrated in the higher regions. Consequently the Lepchas retreated to the remote valleys and forest-clad mountains. The Nepalese began to occupy the warmer regions. The Limbus were mostly scattered in the western part of Sikkim. In course of time, however, the settlement pattern became more dispersed.

All communities are scattered over all parts of Sikkim. The two pockets of Sikkim where one can find the dominance of one ethnic group are Dzongu and the two valleys of Lachen and Lachung in north Sikkim.

The two valleys of Lachen and Lachung in northern Sikkim are inhabited by Bhutias, who call themselves People of Lachen (*Lachenpa*) and People of Lachung (*Lachungpa*). The People of the valleys are essentially herdsmen and traders. Till the closure of the border with Tibet, they had been mainly engaged in trans-border trade. The people are now mostly engaged in agriculture including horticulture.

#### House pattern

Most of the houses of the Bhutias and the Lepchas are two-storeyed rectangular structures. The ground floor is partially enclosed where domestic animals especially cattle are kept. The houses are made of bamboo splits plastered with mud. The roof is thatched with reed, straw and bamboo. The Nepalese usually build their houses right on the ground as they keep their domestic animals in a different shelter. They also use bamboo splits and mud. Some of the houses are also made of wooden planks. Presently corrugated tin roof's are replacing the thatched roof's of the Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali houses. In most of the urban and semi-urban areas, R.C.C. buildings are a common sight.

Most of the houses consist of two or more than two



rooms depending upon the economic condition of the family. In every traditional house there is a separate room for an altar which also serves as a store room for the grains.

### *Festivals*

The festivals of Sikkim can be said to belong to two cultural streams based on religion, the Nepali culture and the Bhutia-Lepcha culture. Two important festivals of the Nepalese, the Dasain and the Tihar, are known as the Dussehra and Diwali respectively in other parts of India.

Dasain is celebrated during the months of September-October (*Ashwin* in the Nepali calendar). During Dasain, the goddess Durga is worshipped, whereas Vijaya Dashami is celebrated with much merry-making. On this day, elders of the family, i.e. the grand-parents, parents and others, put *tika* (a mixture of curd and rice, known as *achata*, and vermillion) on the foreheads of the younger people with their blessings. Coloured *tika* is not put on the forehead of a widow, instead it should be of white colour. The *tika* celebration continues for five more days, and comes to an end on the full-moon day.

Tihar falls in the month of *Kartik* by the Nepali calendar. It is celebrated for five days. On the first day is the *Kag Tihar* which literally means 'the festival of the crow' (*kag*). On this day delicacies are prepared and given to the crow. The second day is the *Kukoora Tihar*. On this day, special attention is given to the dogs. Flower garlands are put around the necks of dogs who are given special food, consisting of meat and cooked rice. The third day is the *Gal Tihar*. On this day, cows are worshipped and given special food. In the evening each household worships the goddess Lakshmi. The houses are decorated with marigold garlands and rows of lights are lit in the evening. After this, groups of girls visit the

houses and sing the special song known as the *bhailo*. Such singing groups are called the *bhailinis*. The next day is the celebration of *Goru (ox) Tihar*, and on the following day is the *Bhai-tika*. On this day, a sister (*cheli*) puts a multicoloured *tika*, usually of three or four colours, on the forehead of her brother (*maiti*). On the two days of *Goru Tihar* and *Bhai-tika* groups of boys visit houses singing traditional songs (*dewsi*) normally accompanied on the drum (*madal*).

Another important festival of the Nepalese is the Maghe Sankranti which falls usually in the middle of January. On this occasion prayers are offered at the confluence of rivers and people take a dip in the river. The special food items taken on this day comprise various types of boiled roots and tubers and *phuraulo*. All the Hindu Nepalese irrespective of caste observe these festivals. Interestingly, the Tamangs, who are Buddhist Nepalese, observe these festivals with equal fervour.

The important festivals of the Buddhists of Sikkim are the Tibetan New Year, the Sagadawa, the Pang-Lhabsol, the Losoong, and the Lhabab-Duchen.

The Tibetan New Year which is known as the Lossar marks the preaching of Dharma by Lord Buddha to the devil, and is usually celebrated in the months of February-March for seven days with much merry-making.

Sagadawa is an auspicious month for the Sikkimese Buddhists. Prayers are held throughout the month in various monasteries. On the full moon of the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar is the main celebration. This religious festival is considered the most sacred, because it signifies the birth of Lord Buddha, his enlightenment and attainment of *Nirvana*. A colourful procession of monks with geylings and rabdungs go

around the major thoroughfares of the town carrying the Kangyur texts on their heads.

Pang-Lhabsol is a festival to worship Mt. Khanchendzonga, the guardian deity of Sikkim. It is held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the Tibetan calendar. Losoong, called Namsoong by the Lepchas, is also known as Sonam Losoong. It is essentially the festival of the harvest. On this day, newly harvested paddy and fruits are offered to the gods. It is celebrated on the first four days of the eleventh month of the Tibetan calendar. Lhabab-Duchen is another important festival of the Buddhists of Sikkim, celebrating the descent of Lord Buddha from the thirty-third heaven.

#### Socio-political institutions

The social organization of the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese present three distinct patterns. While the kinship and clan association give a Lepcha a sense of social and territorial belonging, this is absolutely absent in the case of the Bhutia. A Bhutia seldom uses his clan name as he does not possess a strict social organization of clan.

Many Bhutia clan names are associated with a locality but there is no sense of a genealogical identity involved. They do not regard the clan members as descendants from a common ancestor as in the case of the Lepcha. In the Nepali society the caste names do not provide any sense of territorial belonging. It is also characterized by caste hierarchy and the practice of untouchability, which however is now on the wane.

The chief function of caste is in the regulation of marriage. The Lepchas did not have any social organization. In the past, the *mandal* who was the collector of revenue used to function as the advisor to the villagers in case of any necessity. The post of *mandal* was



hereditary and still continues to be so. However, of late, the constitution of statutory panchayats has considerably minimized the social function of a *mandal*.

The *Kyi-dug* constitutes the social organization of the Bhutias. Generally the *Kyi-dug* is identified with one territorial clan, like Thomorva, the Ardowa or the Khampa. The main function of the *Kyi-dug* is to help its clan members at times of need; for instance, if any death occurs, every family is expected to send a member to help in cremation; if a family fails to do so, the *Kyi-dug* would impose a fine on the erring member. Its office-bearers are elected by the members from amongst themselves.

The Lachenpa and Lachungpa of north Sikkim have the *Zumsha* organization in existence from very early times. J C White described the *Zumsha* as being 'very unusual and almost a communistic government', where everything from carrying of load for visiting government officers to allotment of land to different members was decided upon by the whole population of the village.

The village headman (*pipon*) was elected by adult members drawn from each of the family for a term of two years. Besides the *Zumsha*, there was another body of village elders called the *Gyemmi*, for aiding and advising the *pipon* in functions involving the community as a whole. The functioning of the *Zumsha* in these two villages proved to be so useful that the Government of Sikkim allowed it to function as a rural self-government unit when the Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1965, and later the Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1982 were enacted.

Among the Nepalese there are various caste organisations generally known as *Samaj*, like the *Tamang Samaj*, the *Rai Samaj*, the *Kami Samaj* etc. These councils function as agencies of social control. Sikkim was under a system of hereditary monarchy till 1975. It was brought



under the British protectorateship after the Tumlong Treaty of 1861. The country was administered by the British political officer with the help of a council consisting of influential *Kazis* and representatives of the monastery. The full authority of the Maharaja was restored in 1917.

The first state council was constituted in 1953. It consisted of a president nominated and appointed by the Maharaja, twelve elected members of whom six belonged to the Lepcha-Bhutia and six to the Nepali communities, and five members nominated by the Maharaja. In 1958, the number of council members was raised to twenty with the introduction of one general and one reserved (*sangha*) seats, and addition of one more nominated member. In 1966 the number was raised to twenty-four with an addition to the number of Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepali seats and the introduction of it scheduled caste seat and a Tsong seat.

According to the Maharaja's proclamation of 23 March 1953 the Executive Council was constituted consisting of the *Dewan* 'by virtue of the office which he holds under the Maharaja' and 'such numbers of elected members of the state council as may be appointed by the Maharaja from time to time'. The members of the Executive Council were to hold office 'during the Maharaja's pleasure', and were to be 'responsible to him for the executive and administrative functions of the Government'. The departments placed under the Executive Council were education, public health, excise, press and publicity, transport, bazars, forests, public works.

The new Legislative Assembly consisted of 32 seats including two reserved seats, one each for the scheduled castes and the *sangha*. This maintained the parity between the two communities. In 1978, a presidential ordinance

laid down a new formula for the distribution of seats in the Assembly, abolishing the parity formula; seats were now reserved for the Bhutia, Lepcha, *sangha* and scheduled castes.

Elections to the first state council was held in mid-1953. Candidates for the council had to be at least 30 years of age and the eligible age for voting was 21. The two important participants in the election were the Sikkim State Congress and the National Party. The voters' list showed 50,000 eligible voters. Less than 30 per cent of the electorate cast their vote. All the Bhutia and Lepcha seats were won by the National Party, while the Sikkim State-Congress won all the six Nepali seats.

The second election to the state council was held in 1958. Some changes were then made in the election procedure. The system of primary election was modified and the winning candidate of one community was required to obtain a minimum of 15 per cent of votes of some other community in order to be elected.

Of the total electorate of 55,000 about 35 per cent participated in the election. The Sikkim State Congress won all the six Nepali seats and one Bhutia-Lepcha seat, the National Party won five Lepcha-Bhutia and one *sangha* seat. The next election for the state council was postponed as a state of emergency had been declared to cope with the Chinese attack on India. The third election was held in March 1967.

The main political parties contesting the election were the Sikkim State Congress, the National Party, and the Sikkim National Party. The last political party was formed in 1960, after the merger of the Swatantra Dal, the Praja Sammelan, the dissident wing of the Sikkim State Congress and a faction of the National Party. In this election the Sikkim National Congress won eight seats including one general seat, the Sikkim National Party five

seats and the Sikkim State Congress two seats. Candidates from the Tsong, Scheduled Caste and *sangha* constituencies joined the National Party in Council.

The fourth election was held in April 1970 in which the Sikkim National Party won eight seats, the Sikkim State Congress four and the Sikkim National Congress three.

Before the fifth election in 1973, a new political party, the Sikkim Janata Congress, was formed with the merger of the Sikkim State Congress and the Janata Party. The election of 1973 proved to be a turning point in Sikkim's history. The leaders of the Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim Janata Congress alleged that polling at one constituency had been rigged and demanded the arrest of the officials involved in the rigging. The failure of the *Durbar* to meet the demands of the agitating leaders resulted in the agitation of 1973 which had far-reaching repercussions on the political set-up of the state.

The 1974 election was held under the aegis of the Chief Election Commissioner of India. The members were elected on the 'basis of one man, one vote and universal adult suffrage,' doing away with the earlier 'communal voting system'. The election was held in April 1974. The Sikkim Congress contested all the thirty-two seats, the National Party contested five seats. The Sikkim Congress won thirty-one seats, and one seat went to a candidate of the National Party. After the merger of the state with the Indian Union, the same members continued in office till 1979.

The 1979 election was the first election held under the Constitution of India. This time, the party formula was not followed in the distribution of seats. The Sikkim Janata Parishad led by N B Bhandari formed the government.



The third election to the State Legislative Assembly was held in March 1985, in which Sikkim Sangram Parishad led by N B Bhandari won thirty-one seats.

#### **Economic development**

By the provisions of the Indo-Sikkim Treaty the Government of India had taken special responsibility in initiating planned economic development in the state. Accordingly, with financial assistance from India, a Seven-Year plan (1954-1961) was undertaken with a total outlay of Rs 324.00 lakhs, followed by three Five-Year Plans from 1961 to 1976. The total outlay for these plans were Rs 641.00 lakhs for 1961-66, Rs 972.00 lakhs for 1966-71 and Rs 1875.00 lakhs for 1971-76 plan periods.

In these plans special emphasis was laid on the development of infrastructures like road and communications for which about 48 per cent of the total outlay was allocated. Agricultural development did not receive much attention for which only 16 per cent was allocated during the second and fourth plans. In the third plan (1966-71) 44 per cent of the total outlay was allocated to the agriculture sector.

In the post-merger period there was a shift in the thrust of the plan, and agricultural development was given priority in the state development plans. During the fifth plan period the agriculture department was able to 'develop a basic infrastructure including establishment of Regional Centres, Regional Sub-Centres, V.L.W. Circles and specialized farms. Attention was also given to the development of a cadre of technically qualified personnel with a view to create the necessary environment for implementing plan programmes in the agricultural sector.'

The 1980-85 plan corresponding to the country's Sixth Five-Year Plan had an outlay of Rs 160 crores, out



of which Rs 4,540.00 lakhs were earmarked for agriculture and allied sectors and Rs 3,900.00 for road and communication.

The seventh Five-Year Plan has an outlay of Rs 230 crores. Planners have now focused on (1) improvement of agriculture and (2) development of the infrastructure particularly power, road and bridges. Accordingly 21.08 per cent of the total outlay has been allocated for agriculture and allied activities, 19.43 per cent for transport and 15.1 per cent for the energy sector.

The Department of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry was established in 1954 with the initiation of the Seven-Year Plan. The activities of the department increased considerably after 1975, with notable developments like the establishment of the nine regional centres, five regional sub-centres and establishment of one hundred V.L.W. circles in order to help the farmers adopt developed farming techniques.

Although 80 per cent of the total population are dependent on agriculture, only 13.54 per cent of the total geographical area is put to agricultural use. 36.15 per cent of the area is covered with forest and 10.28 per cent of the area constitutes permanent pastures and grazing land.

With this acute shortage of cultivable land in Sikkim, the aim of the agriculture department has been to increase the productivity of land, rather than bringing more land under cultivation. Its strategy has been to replace traditional farming with improved techniques like the use of improved seeds, fertilizers, effective plant protection and proper storage of farm produce. Efforts are being made to introduce multiple cropping so that the farmers make best use of their resources like land, manpower and natural sources. The main crops grown in Sikkim are maize, rice, millet, wheat, barley, buckwheat

etc. The most important cash crop is cardamom and the cash fruit is orange. The department is giving special attention to promote the cultivation of these two items.

Before 1975 there were only a few industries in Sikkim, the most notable ones being the Food Preservation Factory, the Sikkim Distilleries, the Sikkim jewels. Before 1974 the industrial activities were looked after by the Trade, Industries and Commerce Department. Soon after 1975 all the four districts were declared industrially backward and a Directorate of Industry was established in 1976 to take the overall responsibility of promotion and development of industries in the state.

Most of the industries that exist in Sikkim are either small scale or medium scale. About seventy-two registered units are functioning in the small scale sector. Special attention has been given to promote this sector of industry. Industrial development is mainly state-sponsored and an emerging class of entrepreneurs are being given assistance by the government. The establishment of the Sikkim Industrial Development and Investment Corporation in 1977 was a step towards this direction.

One important industry that has been drawing the attention of the government is the tea industry, established in 1965. Recently around 3.70 acres of land have been converted to tea plantation. In order to give a boost to this industry a programme for decentralized cultivation of tea in private lands has been taken up for implementation.

Health facilities have been expanded to cover the entire population. Social welfare and Nutrition programmes cover a large segment of the population. A massive programme to ensure availability of drinking water in the rural areas has been implemented and out of

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## Political Framework

Sikkim the erstwhile sovereign monarchical country became the 22nd state of the Indian Union in May, 1975 as a result of a referendum by the people of Sikkim and an agreement signed between Chogyal Palden Thendup Namgyal, the then Maharaja of Sikkim and Government of India.

The Constitutional status of Sikkim is made clear under article 371.F. of the Constitution of India and it runs as follow:

371.F. Special Provisions with respect to the State of Sikkim: "Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution:

- (a) The Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim shall consist of not less than thirty members;
- (b) As from the date of commencement of the Constitution (36th Amendment) Act, 1975 (hereinafter in this article referred to as the appointed day)
  - (i) The Assembly for Sikkim, formed as a result of the elections held in Sikkim in April, 1974, with thirtytwo members elected in the said elections (hereinafter referred to as the sitting members) shall be deemed to be the Legislative Assembly



of the State of Sikkim duly constituted under this Constitution;

- (ii) The sitting members shall be deemed to be the members of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim duly elected under this Constitution; and
  - (iii) The said Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim shall exercise the powers and perform the functions of a State under this Constitution.
- (c) In the case of the Assembly deemed to be the Legislative Assembly of the state of Sikkim under clause (b) the references to the period of five years' in clause (1) of article 172 shall be construed as references to a period of four years' and said period of four years' shall be deemed to commence from the appointed day;
- (d) Until other provisions are made by Parliament by law, these shall be allotted to the State of Sikkim one seat in the House of People and the State of Sikkim shall form one Parliamentary constituency called the Parliamentary Constituency of Sikkim;
- (e) The representative of the State of Sikkim in the House of People in existence on the appointed day shall be elected by the members of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim;
- (f) Parliament may, for the purpose of protecting the right and interests of the different sections of the population of Sikkim make provision for the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly for the State of Sikkim which may be filled by candidates belonging to such sections and for the delimitation of the assembly constituencies from which candidate belonging to such sections alone may stand for election to the Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim:

- (g) The Governor of Sikkim shall have special responsibility for peace and for equitable agreement for ensuring the social and economic advancement of different section of the population of Sikkim and in the discharge of his special responsibility under the clause, the Governor of Sikkim shall subject to such directions as the president may from time to time, deem fit to issue, act in his discretions;
- (h) All property and assets (whether within or outside the territories comprised in the State of Sikkim) which immediately before the appointed day were vested in the Government of Sikkim or in any other authority or in person for the purposes of the Government of Sikkim shall as from the appointed day vest in the Government of the State of Sikkim;
- (i) The High Court functioning as immediately before the appointed day in the territories comprised in the State of Sikkim, on and from the appointed day, be deemed to be the High Court of the State of Sikkim;
- j) All Courts of civil, criminal and revenue jurisdiction, all authorities and all officers judicial, executive and ministerial throughout the territory of the State of Sikkim shall continue on and from the appointed day to exercise their respective functions subject to provisions of this Constitution;
- (k) All laws in force immediately before the appointed day in the territories comprised in the State of Sikkim or any part thereof shall continue to be in force therein until amended/repealed by a competent Legislature or other competent authority;
- (l) For the purpose of facilitating the application of any such law as is referred to in clause (k) in relation to the administration of the State of Sikkim and for the purpose of bringing the provision of any such law in

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## Political Dynamics

The authoritarian rule of the hereditary monarch under the British superintendence, a feudal economic and social structure, lack of political consciousness, widespread illiteracy, want of articulate leadership, economic dependence of vast majority of the people upon the economically dominant class who were the beneficiaries of the feudal system, obedience of the faithful and superstitious people to the religious leaders, ethnic group loyalty, all stood in the way of political assertiveness of the people even during the early forties. But the changes which were ushering in the arena of Indian politics during the mid forties had their impact on Sikkim also.

An advanced section of the commoners were observing the course of Indian struggle for freedom with interest. They were nursing the idea of emancipation from the yoke of feudalism and from the agonies of exploitation. It was no denying the fact that there was an accumulation of grievances of the downtrodden Bhutia, Lepcha and the Nepali people, "who have suffered untold miseries in the hands of a corrupt administration; who have been denied the most elementary justice as against their oppressors, the landlords; and whose conditions through unchecked exploitation and victimisation have become unbearable. But to whom the



people would pray for redress of their grievances? "His Highness, the Maharaja is of exceedingly pious and retiring nature, and although in the prime of life he leads a very secluded life.

The Maharaj Kumar, heir apparent, has started taking an interest in the administration but he is still young and inexperienced. Power is, therefore, concentrated in the hands of the leading landlords who are thoroughly committed to uphold the interest of all landlords as privileged class as against the interest of the ryots. Even then, during the later half of 1946, the ryots led several deputations to the authorities and they protested against the system of forced labour and against the omission and commission of individual landlords. They expressed their unwillingness to serve the landlords any more. But since the power was in the hands of the landlords, the ryots could secure no justice. In the meantime, the British imperial power was forced to give way to the aspirations of the Indian people for freedom and India achieved that in 1947.

The end of the British power in India inspired an articulate section of the subjects of Sikkim to sow the seeds in the political field with an eye to harvest the long cherished desires of the suffering mass. "Driven to a state of desperation, but encouraged by the public utterances of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders of the Indian National Congress, a large and fully representative section of the people of Sikkim have been roused to make an attempt on behalf of the masses to achieve their own salvation".

No sooner than India became independent, three political parties were organised in Sikkim. They were primarily welfare bodies being concerned with the reforms which they felt necessary for the promotion of welfare of the Bhutia-Lepcha and the Nepali subjects of

Sikkim. Of these organisations, Praja Sudharak Samaj was formed at Gangtok, Praja Sammelan was formed at Temi Tarku, and the Praja Mandal was formed at Chakung.

On the 9th October, 1947, in a meeting of the articulate and conscious leaders of the Bhutia-Lepcha and the Nepali subjects held in the house of Captain Dimik Singh Lepcha, it was decided to form an organisation to be called "Sikkim Praja Sudharak Samaj," for the welfare of the Bhutia-Lepcha and the Nepali people. It was felt that only Bhutia-Lepcha people's attempts to force the authority to work for reforms having failed to yield any fruit, the people of all the communities should work together for reforms. Majority of the persons who attended the meeting were Government servants.

Hence it was decided to entrust Babu Tashi Tsering, Babu Sonam Tsering and Babu Ragbubir Singh Basnet to carry on the activities. It was also decided that in a general meeting of the representatives of the ryots of Sikkim, a working committee would be formed. The Rajya Praja Sammelan was formed by Gobardhan Pradhan and Dhanbahadur Tewari in Temi Tarku. This party stood for accession of Sikkim to India and union of Gurkhas of Sikkim and North Bengal. The Praja Mandal was formed at Chakung under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa. This party was claimed to have been formed in 1945, much earlier than the other two parties. This party stood for the promotion of welfare of the ryots and protection of their rights. It also sought to promote communal harmony among the three ethnic groups, the Bhutia, the Lepcha and the Nepalese of Sikkim.

#### The Sikkim state congress

The Praja Sudharak Samaj had Tashi Tsering as its leader. *Tashi Tsering* was an educated and articulate man who from the core of his heart was a democrat and stood for

the unity of the Bhutia, Lepcha, and the Nepali ryots. "Tashi Tsering was looked upon as the guiding spirit of the whole people's movement. He was held in respect, not only by the people and his political colleagues but also by the highest in the land". It was under his leadership that a political movement, the first of its kind, was started in Sikkim in the wake of the Indian Independence. In December, 1947, the Praja Sudharak Samaj convened a public meeting in Gangtok where the two other parties were also invited.

On the day of the meeting, the three parties merged into one political organisation by the name of Sikkim State Congress. Tashi Tsering was elected the President and C.D. Rai was elected the General Secretary. The activities of the party started attracting the common people towards it. The Nepalese constituted the majority supporter of the party. But after the emergence of the National Party, which soon became primarily the party of the Bhutia-Lepcha people, the State Congress became predominantly a representative body of the Nepali community. The Congress Party submitted a memorandum to the ruler demanding abolition of landlordism, installation of an interim government leading in due course to full-fledged responsible Government and accession of Sikkim to India.

The Darbar agreed to the demand for abolition of landlordism, the process of which had already been started. It also agreed to appoint three nominees of the State Congress as Secretaries to the Government. The party selected in its meeting held on the 2nd and 3rd February, 1948, the names of Tashi Tsering, Sonam Tsering, and Raghubir Singh. Later, it was decided that Captain Dimik Singh Lepcha should replace Tashi Tsering. These three names were referred to and they were appointed secretaries. But soon a dissension developed within the party over the working of the



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## The Sikkim Communities

### Bhutia

The name Bhutia, sometimes spelt and pronounced as Bhotia, is derived from their original habitat 'Bhot' (Tibet). The Drukpas are people from Drukul/Bhutan (Thunder, Dragon); the Chumbipas, people from the Chumbi valley (eastern Tibet); the Dhophthapas, inhabitants of Dhoptha, a place in south Tibet; the Tromopas or Do-mu-pas, inhabitants of Do-mu; the Lachenpa, people of the Lachen valley in Sikkim, and the Lachungpa, the people of the Lachung valley in north Sikkim, are also Bhutias. They are also known as the Lhori, in Sikkimese. According to Chie Nakane, Bhutia migration seems to have started in the sixteenth century. According to the *History of Sikkim* by Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal and the Maharani Yeshay Dolma, the migration took place continuously in many ways and through different routes, from the northern and western passes of Sikkim.

The Bhutias are distributed in the four districts of Sikkim, but their main concentration is in north Sikkim. They live in hilly terrain, of high altitude and cold climate, where there is high rainfall with medium snowfall and high humidity with dense forests. Their

population figures are not available. They speak in their own language, Bhutia, among themselves, and the script used is Tibetan. A majority of them can speak Nepali, and the educated people speak English also. The identifying mark is the *kho*, a long-sleeved coat with a belt or *keṛa*, locally called the *boku* and worn by the males whereas women wear the sleeveless *kho* with the *honju*, a blouse with long sleeves. Male Bhutias wear the *tson-ta-ti*, a shirt underneath the *boku*. Constitutionally, they belong to the category of 'Scheduled Tribes' in Sikkim. No bio-anthropological information is available on them except serology and genetic. Both the data on ABO and MN are available for the Bhutias of Sikkim. The gene frequencies are as follows:

$$P = 23\%, \quad q = 21 \text{ to } 56\%, \quad m = 67\% \text{ and } n = 33\%.$$

The data on other genetic markers, mainly red-cell enzymes like glyoxalase (glo), Adenosine Aminase (Adi), Acid phosphates (ACP), Phosphoglucose isomerase 1 (PGM 1), Phosphoglucose isomerase (PHI) and 6 Phosphoglucose Dehydrogenase (PGD) are also available for the Bhutias of Sikkim. The Bhutias are non-vegetarian but prefer beef and pork to mutton. Their staple diet is rice (tho) with meat (shy). They take fruits like pear, jackfruit, naspati, peaches (*khambu*), apples (h), oranges (*chalum*), etc. and vegetables like potato, chilli (*akar*), radish (*lapup*), *rayo-sag* (*gnocho*), cabbages (*kobi*), etc. For mid-day refreshments, they take a dumpling meat ball (*momo*), fried maize, flat rice, *murai* and vegetable dumplings (*zino yenten*), *gyathuh* (noodles in soup), the *phakthuk* which is good for winter, the *khudi* made out of buckwheat powder, prepared like *dhosa* and Khuon bread. In villages, the medium of cooking is animal fat and butter, whereas in towns it is mustard oil. The Bhutias drink milk and tea. A local alcoholic drink (*chhang*) and wine (*arak*) prepared by them from millet, rice, fruits, etc. are taken by both adults and children.

Basically, they are nonsmokers. Smoking is against their religion, but the educated Bhutias have taken to smoking in a large way. They now take puri, parata, and other varieties of Indian dishes.

The Bhutias are divided into two groups: (1) Tondur-shi, within which they have 4 *rus*, viz. Chechu thapa, Shandarpa, Kachopa and Shengapa; and (2) Beb tsen gye which includes 8 *rus*, viz. Gansapa, Namchangopa, Chungiopa, Ithenpa, Phenchungpa, Phenpunadik, Namnakpa and Nachangpa. These *rus* are differentiated socially and also territorially. The Tondur-shi is superior to Beb tsen gye. Marriage was not permitted between these two *ru* clusters. But these codes are no longer strictly followed. The community's self-perception is high at the regional level. They are not aware of the *varna* system. The community's perception by other communities, at the regional level, is medium.

Before their migration from Tibet marriage was endogamous at the community level. In Sikkim, except among the Lepchas, the Sherpas, and the Tamangs, marriage is still endogamous at the community level-, but exogamous at the *ru* level. Sororate junior and levirate junior are also in practice. Marriage records show that adult marriage is in vogue and generally the wife is younger than the husband but there are many cases where the wives are older. Modes of acquiring mates are by negotiation and service. Now monogamy is the general practice, except in the North district, where fraternal polyandry is noticed. Till very recently there was polyandry on a wide scale in Lachung and Lachen but now the occurrence has declined; though there are some men who have more than one wife. The married Bhutia woman wears a striped apron called the *pangden* as a sign of the married state.

In older times, a token amount of two rupees was



given by the boy's side to the bride's father, without which no marriage could take place, but now there is a fixed rate as bride-price. Generally, after marriage the new couple live separately. Residence after marriage is patrilocal. Sometimes it is matrilocal, when the *mako* or *alo* or son-in-law servicing in the house of his parents-in-law (*makpa*) lives with the girl's parents. Divorce is permitted, though it is rare. Now, some are taking judicial approval too. Reasons for divorce include adultery, barrenness, maladjustment, impotency, chronic sickness, cruelty, insanity' etc. Either party can seek divorce. Compensation is given to the aggrieved party. The village elders decide the economic terms. Children are the liability of the father, but one observes cases where they are shared between them. Remarriage is common.

Widow, widower, male and female divorcee remarriages are permitted. Many customs and practices however are changing gradually. Marriage takes place between Lepchas and Bhutias also, but in most such cases, Bhutia boys are found marrying Lepcha girls. So far, there has not been many intermarriages with the Nepali community, but inter-caste marriages are increasing. There is a rise also in the age of marriage. Marriage signs are not used too strictly. There is no dowry system in Bhutia families. Now, most of the families are nuclear and vertically extended, though some carry remnants of the joint family also. Avoidance relationship exists between mother-in-law and son-in-law, daughter-in-law and father-in-law, sister-in-law (BW) and elder brother-in-law (H(e)B), etc. Joking relationship exists between sister-in-law (e) BW and brother-in-law H(y)B, with sister-in-law W(e)S and W(y)S with brother-in-law W(e)B and W(y)B, grand-parents with grandchildren, etc.



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