

SIKKIM

A Guide and Handbook



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RAJESH VERMA

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SIKKIM

A GUIDE AND HANDBOOK

(with road, town and trekking maps)

L. P. 2013-14

Also includes a General Knowledge Quiz on Sikkim with many new questions



In memory of my mother Raj Rani Verma



RAJESH VERMA

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Gangtok six hour walking tour; Damthang Tendong; Rabongla -Maenam; Tashi View Point - Tinjure; Hiley-Varsey; Linzey-Tolung, Yoksum-Dzongri; HMI Base Camp-Boktak-Phalut-Chiwabhanjang; Lachen-Green Lake; Thangu-Muguthang; Zadong-Cholamu; Lhasar- Yumey Samdong; Namphu-Dechenphu Cave; Labdang-Larinimphu Cave; Pastanga-Khedi; Aritar - Richila & Assam Lingzey-Khedi

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PREFACE

Long sequestered in the laps of the Himalayas, Sikkim has evolved into a favourite destination with new tourist attractions being added every year. This book has been written keeping in mind the increased requirement for information on Sikkim.

My earlier job of installing radio-communication equipment for the Police Department took me to the remotest corners - some involving days of walking through lush green valleys and over high passes, bivoacing in caves - and enabled me to experience Sikkim's rustic splendour and village life and study the local way of living closely which has been described at many places in this book. I am grateful to many people - yakherders, porters, monks, villagers, police personnel and foresters posted in remote areas - who regaled me with stories of local beliefs and folklore during my travels and have indirectly contributed to this book by providing a wealth of information.

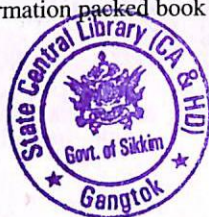
As a member of a local environment group "Green Circle", I was intensively involved in ecology related work in Sikkim - organising environment and afforestation camps, workshops, quiz programmes, cleaning up fragile areas like the Tsomgo lake of garbage and implementing the AUSAID funded Litter and Spit Free Zone on M.G. Marg. As a part of our advocacy programme we took initiatives like getting the authorities to agree to make it compulsory for all vehicles plying to Alpine areas to carry small garbage bags so that passengers do not throw out wrappers and vitiate the landscape. Thanks to my "Green Circle" friends with whom I enjoyed working.

My association with the Syari Government Employees Welfare Association gave me an opportunity to use innovative methods to resolve parking problems in the locality. Door to door collection of garbage was initiated by me. These initiatives resulted in creation of jobs: parking attendants and garbage collectors. By viewing parking and garbage not as problems but opportunity and resource we opened up whole of avenues. As Vice President of National Association for the Blind, Sikkim Branch and also member of various other organisations dealing in disabilities, I was involved in use of Information Technology tools to make the disabled acquire skills that would make them employable and not reliant on compassion and charity. The outcome of my experiences with these associations gave me an insight on various issues dogging Sikkim and have been reflected in the book. It also prompted me to add a chapter on NGOs and Community Initiatives this edition. Thanks to all those with whom I was associated.

And finally, I am grateful to my wife Sunila and daughter Vernica for their immense patience and bearing with my rather irregular routine while I was preparing the manuscript. Thanks also to Ashish Pradhan who has helped me with the maps.

They say even the height of Mount Kanchendzonga is increasing a couple of centimeters every year. Therefore in order to keep abreast with the changes, I endeavour to take out an edition every year so that all the facts and figures are updated. Twice or thrice every year when I realise that the only exercise that I am getting is pushing files from the IN tray to the OUT tray in the office, I put on my trekking shoes and go out exploring and this enables me to add new trekking routes to the book. This edition particularly has many new maps and sketches.

I am sure this information packed book will be found useful by the readers.

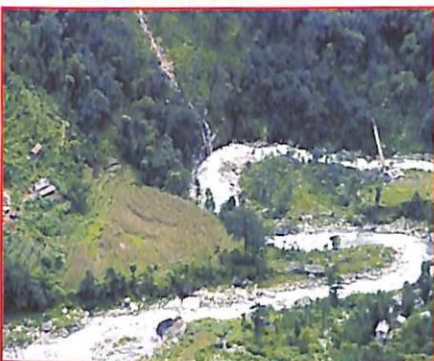


Rajesh Verma

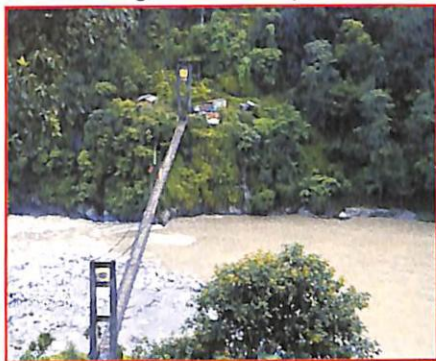
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The source of the Tista river: the Tista Khanste glacier on the plateau



The Roro chu river below Gangtok



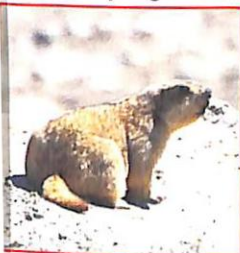
A bridge over the river Tista



A jeep wades through the Meyong chu waterfall



The author at Donkiala pass, 18400 ft overlooking the Cholamu lake and the Tibetan plateau



Marmot



Rhubarb plant



Kiangs - the rare Tibetan wild ass

SIKKIM - INTRODUCTION AND PHYSICAL FEATURES

Sandwiched between the kingdoms of Nepal in the west and Bhutan in the east lies a small stretch of rugged land just 115 kilometres by 65 kilometres - the Indian state of Sikkim. On its northern border towers the plateau of Tibet whereas it shares its southern border with West Bengal which is another state of India. On the world map it is just a speck with an approximate latitude of 27 degrees North and longitude of 88 degrees East but its small size of 7096 sq km belies its richness of culture, customs, heritage, flora and fauna all telescoped into one. By travelling a few hours within Sikkim one can traverse from sultry tropical to temperate and then to alpine climates-and from almost sea level to 18000ft. Although Mount Kachendzonga at about 28000 ft is the highest point in Sikkim, there are places like Melli at 1100 ft which have a lower altitude than say Hyderabad (1700 ft) and Jaipur (1400 ft). A couple of hours of travel can take you from the almost the rainiest region on earth to a cold desert where clouds do not dare to venture and where it hardly rains. No wonder Sikkim is a bio-diversity hotspot - Sikkim has only 0.2percent of the area of India but has 26 percent of its biodiversity- species of flora and fauna -wild animals like marmots and the red panda, a wide range of flora from primulas to orchids. The pristine and unspoilt natural beauty includes alpine landscapes and thick luxuriant tropical forests, rivers in torrents and peaceful lakes - a true Shangrila and a veritable kaledioscope.

By travelling a few kilometers, one can leave a city like Gangtok with all modern amenities and reach a quaint village that seems anachronistically from a different age and having names like Bringbong and Passingdon.

Sikkim is a nice place to be in. It is not dogged with the social problems and economic problems like discrimination against women being faced by other states. Crime is negligible and the state is not troubled by insurgency. There are hardly strikes and bandhs in the state. Even when there is an All India Strike, life in Sikkim goes on as normal. Sikkim also has been the first state to ban the use of plastic carry bags and use of fertilizers and pesticides as a step towards becoming an organic state. With a literacy of 82%, the Government has also launched a Total Computer literacy programme.

Sikkim was earlier a protectorate of India with a monarchy government but in 1975 it metamorphosed as the Twenty Second state of the Indian Union. The population of the whole state is only 5,40,000 as per the last census-less than a populated colony of Delhi. It is well connected to the rest of the country by rail and air through Siliguri about a 100 kms away from Gangtok.

Surrounded by three countries, Sikkim has a 220 kilometres long border with Tibet, 100 kilometres with Nepal, 30 kilometres with Bhutan and 80 kilometres with West Bengal. Because of absence of habitations on both sides of the international border there is hardly any infiltration.

Within the state there is a good road network and more roads are being constructed at a frenzied pace. It is possible to reach Gangtok from places as

far flung as Lachen and Okhrey within four hours making hardly any place in Sikkim remote. There is a good and reliable shared Taxi- Jeep facility from all places in Sikkim to and from Gangtok. Language communication for outsiders also poses no problems. Although Nepali is the most widely spoken language in Sikkim, everyone seems to know Hindi and English. In spite of rapid development, Sikkim continues to be a small place and everything about it is simple including the names of its four Districts: North, South, East and West. Everyone seems to know everyone.

Sikkim is located in the eastern part of India and therefore the time seems to be slightly skewed as Indian Standard Time(IST) is infact the local time of Allahabad. . It dawns early (as early as 3.30 am in June) and also becomes dark early (as early as 4.30 pm in winter)

PHYSICAL FEATURES

Sikkim may have a small size, but this is amply compensated by formidable physical features. It are the physical features like the rivers and mountains that define the boundaries of the state with its neighbours. The edge of the Tibetan plateau more or less demarcates the northern border of Sikkim with Tibet. The eastern boundary with Tibet is represented by the Chola range whereas the border with Bhutan is constituted by the Pangolia range. In the west the Singelila range forms the watershed as well as the border between Nepal and Sikkim. Parts of the rivers Rangit, Tista, Ramam and Rangpo-chu combine to define the border of Sikkim with West Bengal. The terrain of Sikkim is so rugged that from the air it looks as though a giant plough had been carelessly run through it. Because of the relatively low latitude of Sikkim (27 degrees north) and its proximity to the Tropic of Cancer, the snow line above which permanent snow is found is about 20,000ft. Habitations are found till altitudes of 17,000 ft. This is in sharp contrast to Eurpoe where the Alps at a latitude of approximately 45 degrees north comparatively are tiny tots and the highest Mt. Blanc at an altitude of 15,000 ft remains perenially under snow.

The humidity in Sikkim is relatively higher because of its proximity to the Bay of Bengal and also due to the rich rain forest coverage. Therefore a temperature of 25 degrees celcius at Gangtok is considered terribly hot whereas the same temperature at Delhi is considered mild and pleasant.

With the change in seasons, the mountains and rivers change colours like a chameleon: the mountains are dark green in summer and brown in winter and the rivers muddy brown in summer and green torquoise blue in winter.

Mountains, Glaciers and Passes

Sikkim has a very rugged and formidable topography and flat lands are difficult to come by- from the air Sikkim looks as though someone has run a giant plough thurgh the land. The towering mountains that define this paradise of nature also create a barrier to efficient agriculture. It are these mountains that fall directly in the path of the monsoon clouds making the state one of the wettest in the country. In some areas the peaks are as jagged as primitive spearpoints and in others they look like the top of icecones. There are even mountains that have the shapes of huge canyons.

Most of the peaks above 6100 metres (20000 ft) lie towards the western border of Sikkim. On the western border lies the third highest mountain of the world- the Kanchendzonga, 8588 metres (28168 ft) high- the very name suggests majesty and challenge. It is a huge mass that straddles Nepal and Sikkim but its summit lies in Sikkim. Other peaks that stand at altitudes of above 6100 metres (20000 ft) are Kabru, which is also the second highest mountain in the state, Siniolchu, Pandim, Rathong, Kokthang, Talung, Kanglakhang, Simvo and Jonsang. On the eastern border the most imposing peak is Paunhri, at an altitude of about 6700 metres (22000 ft). The other imposing mountains that are slightly less than 6100 metres (20000 ft) are Masthonangye, Yabukjakchen, Narsing and Lamaongden.

Viewed from different locations, the mountains adopt various shapes. For instance Mount Siniolchu from Gangtok has a shapeless ugly profile. But from the Green Lake area this very mountain is an epitome of perfection and is completely symmetrical. Similarly Mount Kanchendzonga from Gangtok looks like a volcano, but from Pelling it looks very different.

Through the centre of Sikkim runs another mountain ridge in the north to south direction. This mountain ridge separates the Tista and Rangit Valley and ends at the confluence of the two rivers. The peaks of this ridge are Tendong at 2640 metres (8660 ft) and Maenam at 3235 metres (10612 ft). Most of the peaks of Sikkim have remained unscaled because the Sikkimese consider them sacred and feel that they will lose their sanctity if climbed. From the Sikkim side, Kanchendzonga has been scaled a few times but the climbers have returned back a few feet from the summit in deference to the religious feelings of the Sikkimese. Kanchendzonga itself means Houses of the Five Treasures and it is believed that holy treasures have been kept by the Gods on the summit. The gnarled topography tends, however to smoothen out in the upper reaches of the Tista river in the Lachen Valley where the Tibetan Plateau juts into Sikkim. The Tibetan plateau gets hot during the summers and as a result an area of pressure exists over it that draws monsoon clouds over the plains of India resulting in their fertility but sometimes being the cause of floods.

A glacier, simply put, is a slow moving river of ice. It flows from high mountain peaks through rocky valleys, carrying off unmelted snow that has compacted over many years into a solid, creeping ice stream. Glaciers also carry with them rocks and these are deposited in the form of small mountains called moraines. There are many glaciers in Sikkim but the most important ones are the Zemu Glacier, Rathong Glacier and the Lonak Glacier. Of late the shrinking glaciers because of climate change has been making news. The status of glaciers has become a sort of barometer for measuring climate change.

The mountain ranges are interspersed with passes which can be used to cross from one side to another. On the eastern Chola range the most important passes are the Nathula at 4242 metres (14140 ft) and Jelepala at 4305 metres (14350 ft) and Bhutan la at an altitude of about 4509 metres (15030 ft) - the first two lead to the Chumbi valley in Tibet and the third to Bhutan. Another important pass on this range that also leads to the Chumbi valley is the Chola pass. On the

west between the border of Sikkim and Nepal, the most important pass is Chiwabhanjang which has an altitude of 3090 metres (10300 ft). The other pass on the west is Kang la. In the north the important passes are Chorten Nyimala, which at 5730 metres (19100 ft) is also the highest usable pass in Sikkim, and Kongra-la. Lungnala connects the Lachen valley to the Lonak valley in North Sikkim. Donkiala pass is another pass in North Sikkim that links up the Lachen valley to the Lachung valley.

Lakes

On the face of it, one would not expect to find lakes on such a rugged terrain. But surprisingly, Sikkim does have lakes though not very large in size. These lakes are both spring fed as well as river fed. They also form the source of many rivers. On the highway between Gangtok and Nathu-la, 34 kilometres from Gangtok lies the serene Changu (Tsomgo) Lake at an altitude of about 3693 metres (12310 ft). Two other lakes nearby are the Bidang cho and the Menmecho. Kechopari lake is another well-known lake that lies on a bifurcation of the route between Gyalshing and Yoksum. The highest concentration of lakes is on the Western border north of Chiwabhanjang towards the Base Camp. Laxmipokhari, Lampokhari, Majurpokhari, twin lakes of Ram-Laxman are a few of the lakes in this area. Dud Pokhari and Samiti Lake are two other lakes situated in this area. Gurudogmar, which is the largest in Sikkim and Cholamu are some other beautiful lakes and are in North Sikkim.

Rivers

The river that flows right across the length of Sikkim is the Tista snaking through the deep gorges taking tributaries as it goes. Its major tributary is the Rangit which originates from the Rathong Glacier and meets it at the border between Sikkim and West Bengal. The river Ramam a tributary of Rangit, a part of the river Rangit itself and Rangpo chu a tributary of Tista define the Southern border between Sikkim and West Bengal. Tista originates from the Lake Cholamu where it is hardly a stream. No one can imagine that this innocuous looking stream would transform into a thundering mighty river less than a hundred kilometres downstream. From an altitude of almost 5400 metres (18000 ft), the Tista plummets down in less than 80 kilometres to 1620 metres (5500 ft) at Chungthang - a veritable waterfall. From Chungthang onwards till the border with West Bengal the Tista descends just another 900 metres (3000 ft) over a course of about a 100 kilometres. The other smaller tributaries of the Tista river are Zemu chu, Lonak chu, Lachung chu, Talung chu, Bakcha chu. While the river Tista flows in the North-South direction its tributaries tend to flow in the South West or South East directions.

Fed by runoff from glaciers and copious snow and rain, Sikkim's rivers flow fast and furious - a tempting source of hydropower. Because of their natural steep gradient, these perennial rivers have a potential of generating thousands of megawatts of electricity. Many hydroprojects have come up in the state which are selling power to the neighbouring states bringing much needed revenue to Sikkim.

Hot springs

Sikkim has many hot-springs known for their medicinal and therapeutic value. The most important are the ones located at Phurchachu (Reshi), Yumthang, Borang, Ralang, Taram-chu and Yumey Samdong. All these hot springs have high sulphur content and are located near the river banks. The average temperature of the water in these hot springs is 50 °C

CLIMATE

Temperatures

The temperatures that a particular place experiences varies considerably with altitude. At places of low altitude, like Singtam, Rangpo and Jorethang, the temperatures vary between 4 °C to 35 °C. Places like Gangtok with moderate altitudes of about 1800 metres (6000ft) experience temperatures between 1 °C and 25 °C whereas at altitudes above 4000 metres (13100 ft), the temperature never rises above 15 °C and remains much below the freezing point during the winters and great part of the spring and autumn. At higher altitudes, temperatures can change for instance from + 25 °C to -25 °C within minutes

Rainfall

Sikkim is one of the rainiest regions in India. Because of the proximity of Sikkim to the Bay of Bengal and the fact that the mountains of the state come directly in the path of the monsoon clouds, most parts of Sikkim experience torrential rains during summers. So much so that even a small depression over the Bay of Bengal triggers off a downpour in Sikkim. Even during spring and autumn moisture laden clouds formed due to local evaporation, continue to batter a greater part of Sikkim. It is only during October to March that there is hardly any rain and the weather remains more or less clear.

Rainfall however varies considerably from place to place because of the hill features. The northern border of Sikkim experiences comparatively low rainfall because the monsoon clouds dry out by the time they hit the northern barrier. For the sake of comparison, Gangtok registers an average of 325 cm rainfall per annum whereas Muguthang in the extreme north experiences an average rainfall of only 60 cm per annum. Most of Sikkim does not experience high intensity winds. However, at many hill tops and passes, winds and blizzards having high speeds blow. Given below is the average maximum-minimum temperature and average rainfall over the last ten years at Gangtok and the probability of seeing clear skies.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Max	13.5	11.9	16.6	20.7	22.3	21.5	22.5	22.5	21.8	19.9	16.1	13.0
Min	2.0	3.6	10.0	12.1	15.0	17.4	17.7	17.7	16.9	13.0	9.4	6.7
Rainfall cm	2.7	6.5	10.3	30.4	54.0	57.0	66.0	57.0	49.8	13.7	4.7	2.7
Chance of clear skies	90%	90%	75%	40%	30%	10%	1%	2%	5%	50%	98%	98%

Although the figures above pertain to Gangtok which is at an altitude of about 2000 metres it could be considered representative of the whole area after you make corrections based on the altitude. The rainfall would decrease at higher altitudes and so would the maximum-minimum temperature.

THE PEOPLE

Communities, cultures, religions and customs of different hues intermingle freely here in Sikkim to constitute a homogeneous blend and present a kaleidoscopic picture. Hindu temples coexist with Buddhist monasteries and there are even a few Christian churches, Muslim mosques and Sikh Gurdwaras. Although the Buddhists with monasteries all over the state are the most conspicuous religious group, they are in fact a minority constituting only 28% of the population. The majority, 68% profess Hinduism. The predominant communities are the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalis. In urban areas many plainsmen- Marwaris, Biharis, Bengalis, South Indians, Punjabis- have also settled and they are mostly engaged in business and government service. Because of development and construction activities in the state, a small part of the population consists of migrant labourers from the plains and from Nepal: plumbers, masons and carpenters from Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal and Sherpas who are hired by the army to maintain the roads at high altitudes. There are also a few thousand Tibetan Refugees settled in Sikkim. Many locals have names that are indistinguishable from those of Hindi speaking states in India: Singhs, Sharmas, Bhandaris, Pradhan etc. The communities celebrate an eclectic range of festivals which mean a lot to rural folks who normally do not have any other means of recreation.

Of the violent invasions that Sikkim had to face over the centuries from Nepal and Bhutan, there is hardly any trace today; but a quieter invasion is taking place; that of cultures from outside at the cross roads of Gangtok and other towns of Sikkim. Cultural and economic forces are reshaping the way of life of the Sikkimese. This can be seen by taking a walk down the M.G. Marg of Gangtok: boys and girls sporting the latest fashions probably picked up from a new Hindi movie or BBC's Clothes Show gaily tromp up and down. An open Jeep carrying jubilant footballers who have won a match passes by - they are singing Daler Mehndi's popular Punjabi song "Ho Jaygi Balle Balle" at the top of their voices.

The cable TV is definitely attempting to remould the cultural landscape of Sikkim. You should not be surprised if you come across a village girl somewhere in the wilderness dressed in a Punjabi Kurta Pajama singing a Hindi number "Didi tera dewar diwana" while tending to her herd of cattle. In spite of such powerful external influences, Sikkimese have proved to be resilient accepting the benefits of progress while retaining their ethnic identity.

In Sikkim, women are not confined to home and the hearth. You purchase your vegetables from a lady puffing away at her bidi (local made cigarette). And in the small local restaurant you go to, you are greeted by a burly woman behind the sale counter lined with bottles of beer who asks you in Nepali "Ke Khanu Honcha?" (What would you like to eat?). At a busy traffic intersection a smartly turned out woman police constable is busy regulating the traffic while another is issuing a ticket to an errant woman driver. On construction sites, women work side by side with men, carrying material in wicker baskets

Foods and Drinks

The discovery of a new dish does more for the happiness of mankind than the discovery of a star - Althem



Sikkimese are essentially rice-eaters. Alcoholic drinks are popular both amongst men and women. Beef eating is common amongst the Bhutias. It is not uncommon to see Marwari plainsmen gulping down Momos and Thukpa and Bhutias partaking to Indian dishes like Puris and Dosas - a true sign of national integration. A typical diet of a working Sikkimese consists of dal bhat (lentils and rice) with meat for breakfast; a light lunch of momos; and an early dinner consisting of noodles. Some of the local cuisines are:

Momo

Momo is a very popular Tibetan delicacy in Sikkim. It is prepared by stuffing minced meat, vegetables or cheese in flour dough and then moulding them in the form of dumplings. These are then steamed for about half an hour in a three tiered utensil that has bone or tomato soup in the lowest compartment. Steam from the boiling soup rises through the perforations in the containers above and cooks the dumplings. Momos are taken along with soup and home made chilly sauce. It is available in most of the local restaurants.

Thukpa

It is noodle soup with vegetables. Thukpa is readily available in most of the local restaurants.

Phagshapa

Phagshapa is strips of pork fat stewed with radishes and dried chillies.

Sael Roti

This Nepali cuisine is prepared by grinding a mixture of rice and water into a paste. The paste is then poured into hot oil and deep fried. It is normally eaten with potato curry. Normally not available in restaurants but is widely prepared during parties.

Niguru with Churpi

Niguru is a local fiddlehead fern and its tendrils when light fried with churpi (cheese) forms an irresistible dish. Normally not available in restaurants but is prepared as a household dish.

Gundruk

Gundruk are leaves of the mustard oil plant that have been allowed to decay for some days and then dried in the sun. These dried leaves are then cooked along with onions and tomatoes and forms a tasty dish.

Chang (Thomba)

Chang is a local beer which is made by fermenting millet using yeast. It is sipped from a bamboo receptacle using a bamboo pipe. The receptacle which has millet in it is topped with warm water a couple of times until the millet loses its potency. Chang can sometimes be strong and very intoxicating indeed.

Kinama

It is fermented soya beans. Quite popular in villages.

and pulverising stones. Women, even those belonging to the conservative Marwari community run many of the shops in town. In the Government Sector, more than fifteen percent of the employees are women.

Hindi movies are a craze with the locals here and Hindi music is invariably played at all functions here. Even the cultural shows held during the Buddhist festival week of Lossong (Sikkimese New Year) get eclipsed by the blare of Hindi songs.

The Lepchas

Lepchas are said to be one of the original inhabitants of Sikkim. It has not yet been established from where the Lepchas originally came to Sikkim. There are some theories which indicate that the Lepchas came from the border of Assam and Burma. Other theories speak of the Lepchas having migrated to Sikkim from Southern Tibet. No matter from where they have original roots, the fact that is clearly established is that they are of Mongoloid descent. The Lepchas are now predominantly Buddhists but many of them are also Christians having been converted to this faith by the missionaries.

Before adopting Buddhism or Christianity as their religion, the earliest Lepcha settlers were believers in the Bon faith or Mune faith. This faith was basically based on spirits, good and bad. Witchcraft and exorcism were very common. They worshipped spirits of mountains, rivers and forests which was but natural for a tribe that co-existed so harmoniously with the rich natural surroundings. The well-known deities of the Lepchas are Itbumoo, Rom, Itbu Debu Rom, Kongchen Konglo and Tamsang Thing, who is also said to have invented the Lepcha script. One major festival of the Lepchas is the Namsong which marks the beginning of the New Year. A highlight of this festival is the week long mela or fair held at Nampridam at the confluence of Tista and Tolung-chu near Mangan in North Sikkim. The Lepcha priests are known as Bomthing and they perform intricate ceremonies to invoke the blessings of the spirits.

The Lepcha (Dzongu) folklore is rich with stories. One of the very popular story has a parallel with the legend of the Tower of Babel. It describes that the Rongs or Lepchas once attempted to ascend to Rum or Heaven by building a tower of earthen pots. When Rum was about to be reached, God thought he must put an end to this venture. He made them speak in different tongues with the intention of creating confusion. The man at the top of the tower shouted "Kok vim yang tale" (Pass the pole with the hook) but the men at the bottom heard the words "Chek tala" (cut it down). The tower was hacked down and its remains are still found in Daramdin near Sombaria in Western Sikkim.

The Lepcha population is concentrated in the central part of Sikkim. This is the area that encompasses the confluence of Lachen and Lachung rivers and Dickchu. The terrain here is rugged and Lepcha dwellings are perched



IMPORTANT BUDDHIST FESTIVALS

After Buddha attained Nirvana, differences of opinion arose in the religion causing the formation of new sects. Finally in about 100 AD a split took place and caused the formation of two schools, which later became known as the Hinayana (Southern) and the Mahayana (Northern). The Hinayana adhered to more primitive Buddhism, which was primarily a philosophy with rules and ethics and emphasized on realisation of Nirvana (freedom from the cycle of birth and rebirth) only for oneself by directly worshipping the Buddha. The Mahayana schools believes in attaining Nirvana by worshipping the dieties called Bodhisattvas who do not want to attain Nirvana until they have freed all the humanity from suffering. The Mahayana has a wider base as it believes in attaining Nirvana for oneself as well as all suffering humanity.

The native religion of Tibet was called Bon which is said to be founded by Shenrab Mibo. This religion was fused and refined by Buddhism by Guru Padmasambva and this gave birth to the Red Hat Sect of Buddhism. The Red Hat sect was further reformed by Atisha and the Kadampa sect was established. Tsong-kha-pa modified the Kadampa and led to the formation of the Yellow Sect.

Tibetan Buddhism is therefore divided into the Red and Yellow Sects. The Red Sect comprises of the Nyingma, Kargyu and Sakya lineages and the Yellow Sect consists of the Gelugpa lineage. Whereas the Nyingma Sect is associated with Guru Padmasambva, the founders of Kargyu and Sakya are said to be Marpa and Khon Konechog Gyalpo respectively. The sects and the lineages are differentiated from each other by the rituals performed, monastic discipline and the founder. However the differences tend to blur with rituals of one lineage overlapping the other.

The Tibetan sacred books are called the Kanjur and the Tanjur. The Kanjur correspond to the original teachings of the Buddha and has three sections or Tripitakas whereas the Tanjurr are related to the teachings of the commentaries of the teachings. Each year or *lo* of the Buddhist calender is named after an animal these animals being: rat, bull, tiger, rabbit, garuda, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, hen dog and pig. Similarly each month of a year is named after an animal. These being: Tag (Tiger), the 11th month, Yeo (Hare) the 12th month, Druk (Dragon), the 1st month, Drul (snake), the 2nd month, Tah (Horse), the 3rd month, Lug (sheep), the 4th month, Trel (Monkey), the 5th month, Jya (Bird) the 6th month, Khye (Dog), the 7th month, Phag (Pig), the 8th month, Jewa (Mouse) the 9th month and Lang(Ox), the 10th month.

The count of the first month of the year according to astrological calculation begins from Tiger, the 11th month. The twelve months are grouped into four seasons of three months each. They are Chiyid-ka, the spring; Yar-ka, the summer, Ton-ka, the autumn and Gyun-ka, the winter.

FESTIVALS

Saga Dawa

This is the "Triple Blessed Festival" and is considered as the holiest of the holy Buddhist festivals. On this day in different years of his life, Lord Buddha took birth, achieved Enlightenment and passed away attaining Nirvana; three important events celebrated in the festival of Saga Dawa.

Lord Buddha was born in Lumbini in Nepal to King Sudhodhna and Queen Maha Maya of the Sakya Clan around 560 BC. He was named Siddhartha and his parents took all the pains to make his life comfortable and keep him ensconced from the miseries of the world. At the age of twenty-nine, realisation dawned upon Prince Siddhartha that all the worldly pleasures were transient and unreal and that the ultimate truth lay elsewhere. He renounced the world and after wandering for many years in search of the truth reached Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh (India), where he meditated under the Bodhi tree and attained Enlightenment at the age of thirty five. Buddha, the Enlightened One, left for his heavenly abode at the age of eighty-one at Kusinara on attaining Nirvana or deliverance into bliss.

At Gangtok, a highlight of Saga Dawa is the procession carrying the Holy books of the teachings of Buddha from the Tsuklakhang Monastery in the Palace around the town.

This festival is held on the full moon of the 4th month of the Buddhist calendar around the end of May and early June.

Drukpa Teshi

This festival celebrates Buddha's first preaching of the four Noble Truths to his first five disciples in a deer park at Sarnath. The first is the Noble Truth of suffering. The Second Noble Truth is the truth of the origin of suffering Karma and Delusion and their causes. The third Noble Truth is the cessation of the suffering or the attainment of Nirvana. The fourth Noble Truth is the truth of the Eight Fold Path leading to Nirvana. The eight fold paths are 1. Right Understanding 2. Right Thought 3. Right Speech 4. Right Actions 5. Right livelihood 6. Right Effort 7. Right Mindfulness 8. Right Concentration.

The day falls on the fourth day (Teshi) of the sixth Tibetan month (Drukpa) around August. At Gangtok, Drukpa Teshi is marked by prayers at the Deer Park and at a secluded place called Muguthang in extreme North Sikkim the festival is celebrated by holding a Yak race.

Guru Rinpoche's Trungkar Tsechu

The birth anniversary of Guru Padmasambava, also known as Guru Rinpoche, is celebrated in Sikkim with great pomp. A procession, which originates from the Chorten, carrying the statue of the Guru is taken out around the town of Gangtok. In the evening dramas and concerts depicting the life of the Guru are held.

Phang Lhabsol

This festival is quite unique to Sikkim. It was popularised by the third Chogyal of Sikkim, Chakdor Namgyal. In this festival the snowy range of Kachenzonga

What is the Lhasa Convention?

The treaty dictated by Younghusband on Tibet on 7th September 1904. is known as the Lhasa Convention. The treaty secured monopoly trading privileges in Tibet for the British. Tibet agreed to adhere by the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890 and to recognise the border between Sikkim and Tibet.

There is a memorial at Nathula pass to honour the approximately 100 Indian soldiers who died fighting a battle with the Chinese. When did this battle take place? *September 1967*

When was trade through Nathula restored after 44 years? *6th July 2006*

What does the Nehru stone at Nathula pass signify? *It signifies the visit of Pandit*

Jawaharlal Nehru to Nathula in 1958

What was real name of Pagla Dewan the minister of Maharaj Tsugphud Namgyal?

Dunyar Tokhang Namgyal

Name the Dewans of Sikkim in chronological order.

1. Harishdwar Dayal- He was political officer but later taken into administration as Dewan on 06.06.1941 but was again revereted as political officer.

2. J.S. Lall 11.08.1949

3. Nari Kaikhosru Rustomji 1954.

4. Baleshwar Prasad 22.8.1959 was called the Principal Administrative Officer

5. R.N. Haldipur 1962 was called the Principal Administrative Officer

6. I.S. Chopra 1969 was called the Sidlon

Who was the first Lok Sabha member from Sikkim? *S.K. Rai*

Who was the first Rajya Sabha member from Sikkim? *L. S. Saring*

Who wrote and compiled the book " The Gazzetter of Sikkim" *H.H. Risley*

Where did the Gangtok Bazar exist before it was shifted to the present day M.G.

Marg? *The Ridge between the Palace Gate and White Hall. It was known as the Sadar Bazar.*

How many members constitute the Sikkim Legislative Assembly? *32*

What number constitutes simple majority in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly? *17*

What number constitutes two third majority in the Sikkim Assembly? *23*

How many members represent Sikkim in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha? *1 each*

When was Governor's rule imposed in Sikkim? *From 18th Aug 79 to 17 Oct. 79 and from 25th May 84 to 8th March 85*

List out the names of theGovernors of Sikkim

1. B.B. Lal (15th May 1975- 9th Sept.1981)

2. Homi J.H. Taleyar Khan (10th January 1981 - 17th June 1984)

3. Kona Prabhakara Rao (18th June 1984 - 30th May 1985)

4. Bishma Narayan Singh (31st May 1985 - 20th Nov. 1985)

5. T.V. Rajeshwar (21st Nov.1985 - 1st march 1989)

6. S.K. Bhatnagar (2nd March 1989- 7th Feb 1990)

7. Admiral R.H. Tahiliani (8th Feb 1990 - 20th Sept. 1994)

8. P. Shiva Shanker (21st Sept 1994- 11th Nov. 1995)

9. K.V. Raghunatha Reddy (12th Nov 1995 - 9th March 1996)

10. Chaudhari Randhir Singh (10th March 1996 - 17th May 2001)

11. Kidar Nath Sahani (18th May 2001 - 25.Oct .2002)

12. V. Rama Rao (26.10.2002-25.10.2007)

13.R.S. Gaval (13.7.2006-12.8.2006)

14.Sudharsan Agarwal (26.10.2007- 8.07.2007)

15. B.P. Singh (9.07.08-



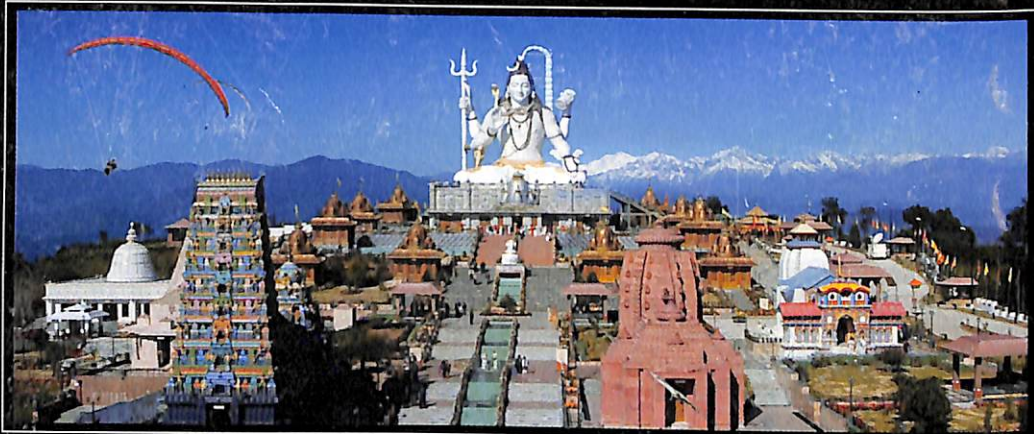
The best available and the most authoritative guidebook on Sikkim even referred to by the tourist guides and locals.

This book is useful for the following:

- Tourists, trekkers and mountaineers
- Scholars doing research on Sikkim
- Candidates appearing for exams
- Non Government Organisations (NGOs)
- Investors, Donor Agencies and Social workers

Highlights of this publication are:

- Detailed road, town and trekking route maps
- Information on places of interest
- Information on people, local customs, religion, history and culture
- Separate chapter on Buddhist festivals and dances
- Recommended itineraries with approximate tariffs to help plan the travel budget
- Information on permits and Survival tips for the tourists
- Updated telephone numbers of hotels, tourism, airline and railway offices
- Quiz on Sikkim



The author Rajesh Verma has extensively travelled and trekked in this area, photographing, researching and documenting all along. He has been mostly residing in Sikkim since birth and is presently Principal Director, Information Technology with the Government of Sikkim. A keen photographer, he has authored books on Ham Radio and Computers. His articles and photographs on travel have appeared in many publications and inflight airline magazines. Besides being associated with developing an internet website on Sikkim, he has also produced two interactive CD-ROMs titled "Sikkim - A Land Beyond the Far Horizon" and "Rhododendrons of the Sikkim Himalayas".

