

# POLITICS OF SIKKIM



AWADHESH COOMAR SINHA

## Politics of Sikkim

The recent amendment to Indian Constitution, merging Sikkim with India and giving it the status of the twenty-second Indian State, comes as a result of a long-drawn political unrest in Sikkim. While the Chogyal and his followers were making efforts to strengthen the bonds of the theocratic monarchy on the subjects, the politically awakened elite were aspiring and struggling to lead Sikkim towards constitutional democracy. This book provides the background story, the analysis and evaluation of the actors involved in this political struggle.

The book is divided into three parts: part one gives the background history of various social forces in Sikkim; part two identifies the elite leading and controlling various social forces, giving a direction to the politics of Sikkim; and part three evaluates the political development after 1947, leading to the realization of the Sikkimese people's aspiration of merger with India.

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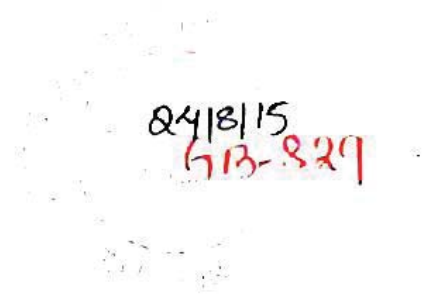


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# Politics of Sikkim

A Sociological Study



**Awadhesh Coomar Sinha**



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*Dedicated to*

✦ *The Kazini Elisa-Maria Dorji-Khangsarpa of Chaklung*

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*Prof. A. C. Sinha*

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## Preface

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**F**OR a long period, Sikkim had been on the two horns of a dilemma between the theocratic monarchy and constitutional democracy. The recent amendment to the Indian Constitution, merging Sikkim with India and granting it the status of an Indian State, has once for all resolved the above dilemma. This study provides an analysis of this political development in Sikkim. It has been divided into three parts: Part I deals with historical evolution and evaluation of the significant social forces active in Sikkim. It also discusses how an indigenous tribal ethos accommodated a complex Lamaist tradition of the Tibetan feudal origin giving the rulership of Sikkim a unique character of its own.

Part II of this book identifies different sets of the elite, the patrician Kazis, the neo-rich plebeians, the ambitious pro-palace bureaucrats, the Nepalese political leaders and the Youth Congress leaders who are leading and directing various social forces in action. This section analyses personal and social background, social and economic status, political affiliation and perception of the various elite in Sikkim. Part III evaluates the political development in Sikkim in the post-1947 period in terms of institutional accomplishments.

It appears that the process of tribalism, though it represents the strongest primordial attachments, is weak enough to provide a model for the Sikkimese identification. The Ruler, the clergy, the Kazis, the Lamaists and the pro-palace bureaucrats favour the Lamaist traditionalism, which, in the final analysis, is identified as the hand-maiden of the minority with the vested interests. The Hindus, the Nepalese, the democrats and the commoners disfavour the theocratic political structure and opt for democratic participation in the decision-making process. In this way, the book delineates the sequence through which, with the given processes, sets of the elite

## PREFACE

and the kinds of institutions, Sikkim acquired the status of an Indian State.

The book is a revised version of the dissertation submitted for the Ph.D. degree at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (India) in 1972, for which a field study was carried out in Sikkim from April 1970 to March 1972. Soon after the dissertation was submitted for the award of the degree, wheel of the events in Sikkim took a dramatic turn. Serious sedition charges were levelled; the last election for the Sikkim State Council and the first election for the Sikkim State Assembly were held; a series of political agitations were organized between April 1973 and 1975; thus a serious constitutional confrontation between the Chogyal and the leaders of the Sikkim Congress ensued. All these resulted in the eclipse of the Namgyal dynasty as the Rulers of Sikkim. These events necessitated a considerable revision of the book to include the post-1972 developments in Sikkim. As a result of the revision and additions, the book now provides the readers with a complete study of the political events in Sikkim leading it to its present status.

I am obliged to Dr Leo E. Rose, Department of Political Science, California University, Berkeley, for his exhaustive comments on the dissertation which helped me in revision of this manuscript. Dr Ali Ashraf, supervisor of the dissertation and presently Professor of Political Behaviour, A.N.S. Institute of Social Studies, Patna, Dr L.P. Vidyarthi, Professor of Anthropology, University of Ranchi and Nirmal C. Sinha, formerly director, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, inspired and helped me in preparing the manuscript for publication. I offer my sincere thanks to them. Chandradas Rai, L.D. Kazi, Kazini Elisa Maria Dorji, L.B. Basnet and Parasmani Pradhan (Kalimpong) had been instrumental in getting me acquainted with the elite, institutions and traditions of Sikkim. I profusely thank them for that and for providing me shelters in their homes, many a time quite inconvenient to them, during my stay in Sikkim.

My thanks are also due to all the respondents, informants and many friends in Sikkim and Darjeeling for their co-operation and caring for my personal conveniences.

I must thank the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) for the financial support given by it for the research and publication of this book. However, the responsibility for the facts



**PREFACE**

stated, opinions expressed, or conclusions reached here is entirely mine and not that of the ICSSR in any way.

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28 June, 1975*

A.C. Sinha



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## Introduction

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EVER since India gained her independence, the Himalayan feudal states have been increasingly exposed to winds of change. One such change has been the emergence of a new sense of political identity coupled with strong nationalistic aspirations in the consciousness of the people. Such new aspirations generate a new pattern of political dynamics and call for new institutions to cope with the task of nation-building. Such a polity is the most meaningful unit of study for understanding the ramifications of this process of nation-building. Within the polity, one can explore the establishment and evolution of political institutions and analyse the forces and forms of political development. The analysis of the politics of nation-building calls for an understanding of the institutional articulation of a polity and of the changes that occur in the organization and leadership of political institutions. In this process of political articulation and institutionalization, it is the elite who play the crucial role of the prime movers and models of the society at large.

Sikkim was politically a theocracy<sup>1</sup> till the other day. Her social structure is based on social status ascribed by or inherited through tribal affiliations. Her economic organization is basically a feudal one. However, the socio-political scene of Sikkim has witnessed the abolition of landlordism, feudal privileges and private courts as well as the strengthening of a bureaucracy and the emergence of a competitive party system in the recent past. These changes reflect a new orientation of the Sikkimese power structure. This study analyses the power structure of Sikkim, social foundation of the political institutions, the characteristics and role of the elite and the bearing of these phenomena on the efforts of nation-building and search for political identity.

The study has three major themes of enquiry : (i) the social,

## INTRODUCTION

religious and ethnic forces that make up the polity of Sikkim; (ii) the elite and their role-performance; and (iii) the viability of nation-building efforts and Sikkim's search for her identity. The analysis of these themes should provide us a picture of the Sikkimese political system which is undergoing a strenuous process of transition.

The contemporary Sikkimese polity is passing through a process of integration of tribalism, the Lamaist traditionalism and liberal democracy. While the process of tribalism is identified with the ethnic institutions, the Lamaist traditionalism is the product of the theocratic practices of Tibetan origin; and the process of liberal democracy stems from the intrusion of some aspects of the world-wide secular democratic culture into the Sikkimese political structure.

The book has been divided into three parts. In part one of the book while delineating the background of the Sikkimese political culture we propose to explicate the social forces as important and specialized social interests which are to be identified with religious, social, economic and political institutions. The political power and influence of various social forces may vary in accordance with the type and stage of social and economic development. A traditional society may be characterised by a simple stratification and there may be only one class to dominate the entire spectrum of society. In a society with a complex and heterogeneous organization of social forces, power is exercised through a variety of political institutions. In this way, the multiple social forces, as we come across in the present study, provide a pluralistic basis to political power.

In part two of the book our objective is to identify the Sikkimese elite who may be conceived of as small and organized social groups occupying positions of leadership, power and influence, and claiming the right to exercise, legitimately or otherwise, the authority to enforce and to maintain their roles of command. The distribution of roles of command, wielded by the elite, tends to determine the structure, formation and development of the larger society. The traditional elite of Sikkim are identified with the ethnic, religious and feudal social forces whereas the emergent elite derive their legitimacy from positions in bureaucracy, political parties, professions or voluntary organizations.

Because of the feudal structure of the socio-political system, there appears to be a limited accountability of the elite, but they nevertheless occupy strategic positions in bodies responsible for shaping the



## INTRODUCTION

destiny of the community. These strategic elite control the dynamics of political changes and are recognized as the prime movers of the society. These elite are confronted with the task of fostering the development of their society which is not only feudal but fragmented. Thus certain questions pertaining to these elite become relevant: Who are the most important leaders? What are the important bases of their power? Is the pattern of political power oligarchic or democratic?

There arise a lot of more questions while one tries to analyse the efforts of the Sikkimese at institutional-integration and nation-building. Our analysis of these included in part three of the book is largely by way of answering the following questions: What is the pattern of elite recruitment in the community? How far have the diverse social entities such as religious, ethnic and tribal combinations been integrated with the core of the political structure? With the acknowledgedly separate entity of various tribal communities, what are the efforts made by the elite of Sikkim to integrate the various social aggregates into a "national" political culture? Are the institutions being evolved and integrated into a comprehensive Sikkimese political entity? How far have the processes of the Sikkimese political culture such as tribalism, Lamaist traditionalism and liberal democracy been able to provide a foundation for the emergence of the Sikkimese "national" political identity? How was the dilemma of diverse political identities been solved in Sikkim?

With a view to collecting data we tapped indirect sources first. We explicated the significant social forces of ethnic, religious, social, economic and political institutions by going through the publications, government and semi-government records and manuscripts. Informal interviews, field observations and collection of biographical data also helped in understanding the implications of various social forces. Secondly, a field study was undertaken to collect first-hand data concerning the elite's social background, their attitudes and perceptions of the Sikkimese system. Besides informal interviews, collection of biographies, case-studies and geneologies, a schedule was administered to the elite. Activities of the elite and their way of life were observed at their residence, in their offices, and at public places. Formal and informal meetings, political and ritual processions, social parties, religious rituals, community festivals, state functions and sessions of law-making bodies were attended to



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to gain an insight into the Sikkimese system.

This study required two sets of data: first, the data on the personal and social background and secondly, those on the elite's attitudes towards their perceptions of the political process in Sikkim. A preliminary field study for a month was undertaken in March-April 1970, which also coincided with the period when Sikkim went to the polls for her fourth General Election. We utilized this opportunity to establish contacts with leaders and administrators as well as to observe the electioneering of the individual political elite and the parties. This also afforded a unique opportunity for touring almost the whole of Sikkim and knowing the elite of all walks of life from close quarters.

At the stage of the field study, we framed an interview guide designed to elicit details and also a questionnaire to be addressed to the elite individually. Next a final list of the elite was prepared, keeping in view the individual categories of the elite. Then, the individuals were approached, and a synopsis of the research proposal and a copy of the questionnaire were given to them. The purpose of the study was explained and convenient time for interviews was sought. The questionnaire included questions so structured as to bring out in-depth details of the points of research as well as informal enquiries about the genealogy, background and biographical details of the respondents. Most of the interviews were conducted at the interviewees' residence, some at the author's hotel, and only a few in the offices of the elite in the public services. The over-all response of the informants in the initial stage was very cordial and helpful. They helped us understand the various social forces and to identify the individual elite representing them. At the second stage, we encountered some concerted opposition to our study from a small section of the Sikkimese bureaucrats. Perhaps because of the close association which the higher officials had with a section of the ethnic elite some public men also began to evade the researcher. But this could not stop his persevering attempts to approach the elite individually. At the third stage, the researcher approached the unresponsive elite with a new attitude. He told them that since he had covered most of the individual elite in his interviews, it was upto the remaining ones to cooperate or face non-representation of their own views on the society and politics of Sikkim. This produced some positive response, and thus some of the most valuable data were

## INTRODUCTION

eventually collected.

The process of elite formation and development addresses itself to the question: Who wields the power and what is the basis of such a power? The most obvious answer to the above question can be found in the social and economic changes largely accounting for the rise and fall of the elite. Such changes in the social and economic structure necessitate alteration in the recruitment-pattern and the role performance of the elite. They also require the creation of new structures and roles which imply an increased specialization among those who hold positions of power. By studying the Sikkimese elite since 1947, we should be able to show the pattern and viability of the forces emerging as the social bases of political power. ✓

Like other developing political systems, Sikkim is in a state of transition. She has a social structure which may be designated as traditional. But internal developments and exposure to the wider world have tended to bring about some forms of social and political changes. These changes and the growing consciousness of an autonomous political identity constitute the matrix of political development in Sikkim. Such development invariably includes the efforts made for the formation of a "nation" and of institutions such as a national party system, a national economy, a national army, a national legal system, and a national administrative structure as appropriate to a "national" society. However, there has been another trend to identify the Sikkimese ultimate fate with that of the Indian Union. This acceptance of a common destiny has led to the need of re-structuring the entire socio-political complexities in Sikkim. And thus Sikkim has become an integral part of Indian Union. The study is, therefore, expected to make a contribution to an understanding of the formation and role of elite in the context of such a social change and political development.

The Sikkimese political system, based on the Lamaist theocracy, had many features of the colonial feudalism. Sikkim was a small and distant Himalayan principality within the British India, ruled in principle by the Maharaja though actual power at the highest level was exercised by the Resident, i.e., the Political Officer. The administration was dominated by the Buddhist Lamas and the aristocratic Kazis. At the end of the British sovereignty over India, there was little evidence in Sikkim of aspirations towards "national" independence. With the British withdrawal from India in 1947,



## INTRODUCTION

the Sikkimese administration sought to become a welfare 'nation'-state. This gave birth to a small but assertive group of elite who aspired for Sikkimese "nationhood". For this purpose, they endeavoured to encourage, sustain and nurse the Sikkimese "national" traditions. There had been mild efforts to provide institutional bases for this emerging "nationhood". This study, therefore, presents a case study of political development in which a tribal and theocratic feudal community was engaged in transforming itself into becoming a part of a "nation-state", which could not be achieved.



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## Chapter 1

# Sikkim : A Profile

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अस्त्युत्तरस्यां दिशि देवतात्मा हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः ।  
पूर्वापरौ तोयनिधी वगाह्य स्थितः पृथिव्या इव मानदण्डः ॥

**T**HERE is to the north a king of mountains called 'Himalaya', which in reality is a god and which, with its two ends dipped in the eastern and western seas, lies like a yardstick measuring the earth.

Thus poet Kalidas describes the Himalayas, and true to these words of the immortal bard, the mighty Himalayas have for centuries stood guard over the people living in the vast expanse of their lap. The impact of the Himalayas on the culture and personality of the people of the Himalayan kingdoms has been profound and massive.

Physically, this mountainous mass has three parallel zones: the Great Himalayas, the Inner or Lesser Himalayas and the sub-Himalayan foothills. The Great Himalayas, with a number of high peaks skirting southern border of the Tibetan plateau, rises to more than 29,000 feet and maintains an average height of 20,000 feet above sea level. These peaks are criss-crossed with passes through which caravans of traders travel to trans-Himalayan countries. This 15-mile-wide region is dissected into a series of north-south mountain blocks by river systems such as the Manas, the Tista and the Kosi. These river valleys with extremely cold winters and short growing seasons are occupied by small, clustered settlements.

The Inner Himalayas, with an average width of 50 miles, possesses remarkable uniformity of height ranging between 6,000 and 10,000 feet. Though not as inaccessible as the Great Himalayas, forest-clad ranges of the Inner Himalayas have isolated the intervening fertile valleys of the Himalayan kingdoms from those of the Gangetic plains.

## SIKKIM: THE BACKGROUND

The difficult terrain, numerous gorges and network of river systems make communication a difficult task. In this region lie some of the most populated Himalayan valleys such as Paro, Gangtok, Kathmandu and Pokhra. The Himalayan foothills constitute the dense forest areas between the Inner Himalayan and the Ganga-Brahmputra plains. Stretching from east to west, these foothills are known as the Duars, the Morang and the Tarai.

On the basis of general spatial differentiation of associated geographic elements and broad pattern of human occupation, Karan divides the Himalayas into three major realms: (1) Western Himalayas, (2) Central Himalayas, and (3) Eastern Himalayas.<sup>1</sup> These realms possess some unifying physical and cultural traits, with certain measure of geographical homogeneity. Sikkim constitutes the western-most part of the Eastern Himalayan realm within the Great and the Inner Himalayan regions. Forty miles wide, it is enclosed between the Singalila ridges and the Donkhya range, which are 80 to 90 miles long. While the former constitute the Sikkimese border with Nepal and include the highest Sikkimese summit, the Kanchenzunga (28,150 ft.), the latter separates north-east Sikkim from Tibet. The southern border of Sikkim is formed by the Darjeeling ridges, through which the Tista has carved a deep and narrow gorge.

### ETHNICITY

The relief and climate have imposed harsh living conditions, restricted population movement and difficulties of communication for the Sikkimese. With their typical population, idiosyncratic settlement patterns and unique economic system, the Sikkimese have been able to preserve their cultural individuality to a great extent, though the autochthonous Lepchas have been sandwiched between the more assertive Bhotias and Nepalese. The Bhotia immigrants, representing the Tibeto-Burman stock, brought from the north the Tibetan culture, the Tibetan language, the Lamaistic Buddhism, and a combination of pastoralism and semi-settled agricultural pattern. On the other hand, the Nepalese contributed the Indo-Aryan languages, Hinduism, and settled agricultural practices to the Sikkimese complexity. The State recognizes two broad ethnic groups: the Lepcha-Bhotia and the Nepalese.<sup>2</sup> A close scrutiny suggests that the former may be divided into two



## SIKKIM: A PROFILE

different tribes<sup>3</sup> with diverse traditions, the Lepchas and the Bhotias.

The Lepchas (the Nepali *Lap* (=vile)+*che* (=speakers), i.e. vile speakers, a contemptuous name because the Lepchas spoke their own dialect and refused to adopt the Nepali), "the Rong (the ravine folk) as they call themselves . . . are known to the Tibetans as 'Mon-ba' or 'Mon-rik', people of the Mon country — a general Tibetan name for the lower Himalayas, from Kashmir to Assam and Burma."<sup>4</sup> They inhabit the slopes of the hills in the central and western Sikkim. They are divided into a number of patrilineal clans (ptso), which are believed to have originated from supernatural and mythological ancestry. At present, the main function of these clans is to regularize marriages and prevent incest, through exogamy. The family relations of Lepchas show traces of matriarchy, according to which the children trace their descent through their mothers and not through their fathers. There is no ceremonial marriage.

The Lepchas as well as the Bhotias have an old tradition of polyandry. The Lepcha conversion to Lamaism paved the way for a social intercourse at the highest level with the Bhotia aristocracy around the monasteries. The new Bhotia rulers inveigled them into a ritual bond of blood-brotherhood.<sup>5</sup> That is how a new social class of the Kazis<sup>6</sup> emerged in Sikkim. The Lepcha commoners, driven to woods, led the life of hunters and collectors of wild roots. Even then they were well connected to the world outside, though their own custom of 'ingzong' (literal meaning 'like younger brother') i.e. ritual friendship of economic ties. Under the patronage of their guardian spirit (Komsithing) the Lepchas negotiated 'ingzong' with "the Nepalese for their pigs, with the plains Indians for their copper vessels, with the Bhutanese for their fine cloth, with the Tibetans for their rugs and with the Bhotias for their oxen."<sup>7</sup>

In contemporary Sikkim, it is difficult to locate an all-exclusive Lepcha settlement outside the Ruler's private estates of Dzongu and Dikchu. The Lepchas' affinities with the Bhotias exist mainly in the identity of their religion, around which their entire cultural life revolves. At the same time, Lepchas do not hide their solidarity with the Limbuan Lepchas (from eastern Nepal) and the Muglan Lepchas (from Darjeeling in India), even if they latter two are animists, Hindus or Christians. Christian churches of various denominations are working among the Sikkimese Lepchas. Relatively better-educated and more affluent, the Lepcha Christians have shown an urge for



## SIKKIM: THE BACKGROUND

the awareness of the Lepcha identity and a sense of assertion. They are numerically small, but have risen to many important positions in the administration. In spite of the Lepchas' conversion to Lamaism or Christianity, the core of their cultural life has remained animistic, since they have retained tribal practices in their Lamaist and Christian ways of life.

The Tibetan traders, farmers and the lamas were in search of new areas for colonization long before the 15th century. Sikkim at that time was very sparsely populated by the primitive tribes of the Lepchas and the Limbus. The Tibetan graziers and the missionary lamas were possibly the earliest immigrants to Sikkim in search of new pastures and potential converts to their religion. They were followed by the traders in their pursuit of battering their goods. And lastly, the Tibetan peasants came in search of rich rice fields. All these stocks found in Der-me-Dzong (Denzong—the valley of rice—a Tibetan term for Sikkim) a wide scope for expansion. During this period (the later half of the 15th century) an important Bhotia patriarch named Khye Bumsa from Phari (Chumbi Valley—Tibet) came to Sikkim, presented ceremonial offerings to the then Lepcha chief, Tho-Kung-Tek, and established a blood-brotherhood. Meanwhile his followers and kinsmen settled in Sikkim as pastoralists and traders. The Tibetan lamas of various sects had been trying to convert the animist tribes without much success. The Lamaist missionaries strongly felt the need for establishing a central authority to their liking, which might be instrumental in the Tibetization of Sikkim. They could discover such qualities of leadership in one of the Bhotia peasants — Phuntsoh Namgyal (Panche Namge)—in the sixth generation of Khye Bumsa.

A band of the Tibetan lamas installed the first Bhotia ruler of Sikkim in 1642 and thus marked the beginning of effective Bhotia control over the Sikkimese destiny. The appointment of the Lepcha 'Dzongpens' and the Bhotia 'Kalons' by the first ruler, in time led to the emergence of two parallel phenomena of feudalism and bureaucracy. Not only was the first ruler declared an incarnate lama and a sanction from the Dalai Lama<sup>9</sup> obtained, but the Lamaist Church of Tibet also undertook the role of the moral guardian of Sikkim.

The inter-marriage between the Bhotias and the Lepchas provided an opportunity for the warriors to bid for, and secure, a higher status in the social hierarchy. The social situation remained fluid in the



## SIKKIM: A PROFILE

early period of the Bhotia rulers because of constant strife. In such a situation, a proletarian Bhotia labourer who might have had some savings, could turn to be a trader, buy some cattle and land, get some people around him, marry a Lepcha chief's daughter and consequently be recognized as a Kazi.<sup>10</sup> The lamas commanded the respect of the commoners, and the favour of the ruler and the aristocracy. In this way the Bhotia immigrants became a stratified society with the Lamas (the clergy), the Kazis (the aristocracy) and the commoners enjoying a social status in the descending order. Since the British withdrawal in 1947, a new class of commoners of the neo-rich plebeians has emerged to challenge the status and authority of the erstwhile Kazi patricians.

The Nepalese community in Sikkim is inclusive of the three sub-cultural stocks: the Kiratis, the Newaris and the Gurkhas. The Kiratis, which include Limbus, Lepchas, Rais, Magars, Gurungs, Tamangs and a host of marginal tribal stocks, are the autochthonous inhabitants of Sikkim. The Limbu sources do not maintain much distinction between the Lepchas and the Limbus. They also had a tradition of inter-marriage. The Limbus call themselves Yakthamba (yak-herders or traders) and are divided into three 'septs': the Kashigotra, Bhuiphuta or Phedhap, and the Lhasa gotra (the Tsongs). While the former two are animistic and to some extent Hinduized tribals, the last sept follows Lamaism possibly because the tribal tradition maintains that they came from Tibetan provinces of 'U' (Lhasa) and Tsang (Tashilhumpo). They are addressed by the Nepalese as Limbus and as Tsongs (cattle or yak merchants and butchers in Sikkim) by the Bhotias and the Lepchas. The greatest contribution of the Limbus to Sikkim is the appellation 'Sikkim'<sup>11</sup> itself. With the growing assertion of the Bhotia rulers, the Limbus, the Magars, the Lepchas and other Kirati tribes were pushed westwards to Nepal and southwards to India. The Kirati tribes, with a stronger tribal ethos, may broadly be classified into three groups on the basis of their absorption into the larger civilizations: the animists (such as Gurungs, Magars, at least a part of Limbus, and the Hinduized Rais) and the Lamaists (Tsongs, Tamangs, Sherpas).

With the emergence of the Gurkha power in the form of Prithvinath Shah in Nepal, the Nepalese made numerous raids eastwards and clashed with the Bhotias as well as the Kiratis in the middle of the 18th century. Some Gurkhalis like the Khas (the Basnet), the

## SIKKIM: THE BACKGROUND

Thakuris and the Chhetris came to settle down in Sikkim during this period. With the changing fortunes of their patrons, they were established and then uprooted many a time. Yet, the Gurkhas remained an important section among the Nepalese in Sikkim. With the liquidation of the Newari power in Kathmandu Valley by the Gurkhas in the middle of the 18th century the Newaris expanded to the east. They settled down in Darjeeling district by the middle of the last century. Within no time, they entered Sikkim as the monopolists of the copper mines and minting industry. The more enterprising among them, such as one Laxmi Das Pradhan and Brothers, obtained land lease from the Sikkimese Kazis. By the close of the 19th century, the Pradhan Newaris (the Sheshya or Shreshtya) emerged as the Nepali counterpart of the Kazis in Sikkim. With them came a large number of service-castes such as the Brahmins, barbers and artisan castes such as smiths (Kami), tailors (Damai) and shoemakers (Karki). The Newaris in Sikkim are, by and large, Hindus, with the highest socio-economic positions given to the Pradhans followed by the ritual leaders — the Brahmins.

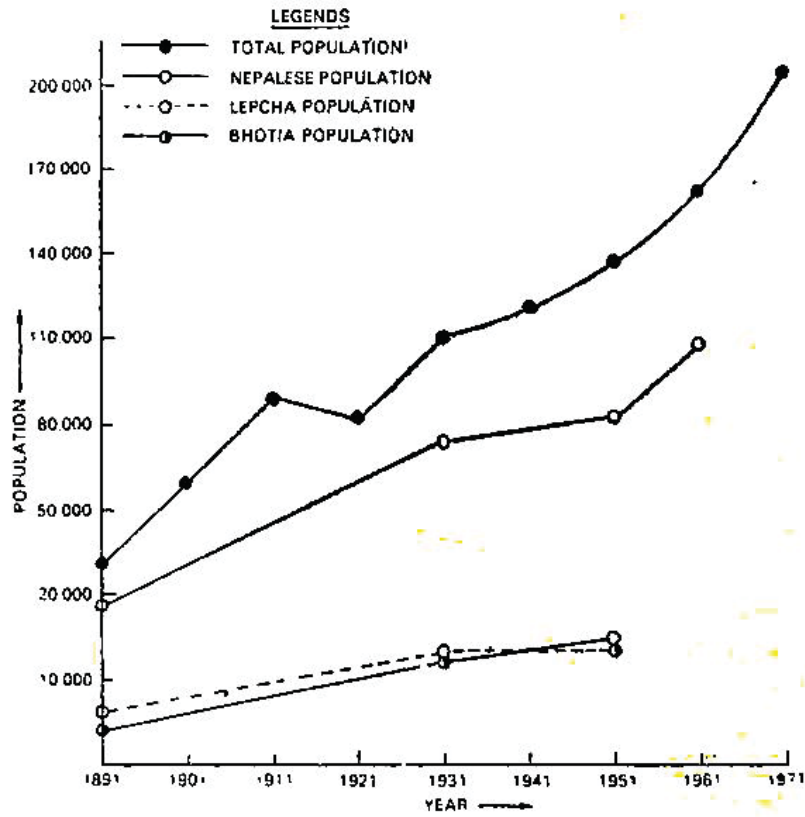
On the socio-ritual ground, the Nepalese in Sikkim may be divided into two groups: the 'Tagadhari' — those who wear the sacred thread — such as the Brahmins and Gurkhas; and the 'Matwali' — those who do not put on sacred thread and are in the habit of drinking. Unlike the Hindu society in India with its rigid caste system, the Nepalese society in Sikkim permits inter-caste marriages. As a whole, the 'tagadhari' Nepalese look down upon the Bhotias and the Kiratis, because they are alleged to eat 'carrion'. Though all the tribes of the Kirati stock have their own dialects such as the Limbu, the Lepcha, the Sherpa etc., they all speak the Nepali or the Gurkhali. Nepali functioning as a *lingua franca*, identical style of life and common religion form the thread of uniformity that lies through their cultural corpus and holds the Nepalese Hindus in Sikkim together against the Lamaists.

## DEMOGRAPHY

Ever since the opening of Sikkim to the outside forces by the British, one of the main concerns of the administration has been to formulate a feasible policy regarding the settlement pattern of a particular ethnic community. The Bhotia rulers had always seen to it that no



## SIKKIM: THE BACKGROUND



Growth of Population in Sikkim from 1891 to 1971.

## SIKKIM: A PROFILE

other community rose to such formidable a position as to pose a threat to their power. They had been able to subjugate the Lepchas easily because of the latter's conversion to Lamaism. The Magars were forced to migrate to the south and the west. The Limbus had been contained to a great extent. Ever since the inception of Sikkim's effective contacts with the British in 1817, one of the most controversial issues has been the Nepalese immigration and settlement in Sikkim. This led to a number of minor clashes between the Sikkimese forces and the British constabulary. Notwithstanding their repressive and regulative devices, the Bhotia rulers failed to control the flood of the Nepalese immigration to Sikkim. To counteract the growing number of the Nepalese the Bhotias encouraged the Tibetans to settle down in Sikkim.

The first authentic information regarding Sikkim's population is the census of 1891 in which the total population is shown as 30,458, including 5,762 Lepchas, 4,894 Bhotias, 3,356 Limbus and 15,458 Nepalese<sup>12</sup>. Writing some three years ahead of the fourth decennial census of 1911, White<sup>13</sup> mentions, "by far the greater number of the inhabitants of Sikkim... are the Paharias (the Nepalese) who number nearly 50,000 of an estimated population of 80,000." The latest census figures for the ethnic affiliation are available for 1931, when out of a total population of 109,808, 13,060 were the Lepchas, 11,955 the Bhotias and the rest mainly being the Nepalese. In 1951, statistics based on religious affiliations presented an overall increased population of 137,725 with 39,397 Buddhists (largely the Lepchas 13,625 and the Bhotias 15,626) and 97,863 Hindus (the Hindu Nepalese inclusive of 15,991 Limbus). After 10 years these figures increased to 162,189, 49,894 and 108,165,<sup>14</sup> respectively. And density of population rose to 57.52 persons per square mile. The tentative figures for the 1971 census have been shown as 2,03,000<sup>15</sup> with no detailed categorizations into ethnic, religious or linguistic groups. The growth of the Sikkimese population during the last 80 years has been shown by the graph on Page 9.

## POLITICAL CULTURE

The political system of Sikkim is a typically Himalayan theocratic feudalism parallel to the Tibetan Lamaist pattern. The ruler is not only the secular head of the State, but also an incarnate lama with

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responsibility to rule the subjects in accordance with the tenets of the 'Chhos'—the *Dharma*. The basic tenets of the Lamaist polity in Sikkim ever since 1642 are the Chos (Chhos) as the established religion and the rulers (rGyalpo) who are instrumental in upholding the doctrine justifying the appellation, the "Chos-rGyal" (Chogyal). In ideological sense, the traditional Tibetan government is a synthesis of clerical and lay elements. "... There could not be any absolute separation between spiritual and temporal estates. Besides, the lamas held a good number of civil posts. The apex, the Sakya hierarch, was the meeting point of both ecclesiastical and civil jurisdictions. Here was a government possessed of both Chhos (*Dharma*) and Srid (*Samsar*)".<sup>16</sup>

The ethnic complexity coupled with the British subjugation made the Sikkimese ruling class to adopt many non-Tibetan elements into the political system. Among the most manifest results of this assimilation, mention may be made of the evolution of the Kazis and the Newars both as landlords and the appointment of non-Tibetans as lay civil servants. In the recent past, the ruler though proclaimed and consecrated as the Chos-rGyal, has incorporated some of the features of democracy, in which secular aspects are predominant. Though the Lamaism is given weightage, it is mainly in the name of safeguarding the character of the minority (i.e. the Buddhist Lepchas and Bhotias). In fact, Sikkim is facing a serious problem. The political hegemony rests with the minority, namely the Bhotia-Lepcha community, which receives the royal support and patronage, while the Nepalese, the numerically major community, feels aggrieved over the denial of proportionate representation in the councils of the government.



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## Chapter 2

# Political Evolution

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**T**HE historical studies of Sikkim<sup>1</sup> that exist today deal mostly with invasions, raids and military exploits and the Bhotia rulers. Our concern is mainly with the evolution of the inter-ethnic social intercourse. Normally, a study of such evolutionary processes does not require a strictly chronological treatment. But the history of Sikkim suggests that with certain dates not only the rulers were changed but also the process of socio-economic and cultural intercourse was drastically reoriented. In this way the history of Sikkim may be divided broadly into four phases: (1) the pre-theocratic phase (2) the mediaeval theocracy (3) the colonial feudalism, and (4) the transition to modernity.

### PRE-THEOCRATIC PHASE

The Limbu tradition does not maintain distinction among the Lepcha, the Magar and the Limbu tribes but includes them among the Kirati stock. About a thousand years back the Kiratis were ruled by their tribal chiefs.<sup>2</sup> Col. Mainwaring<sup>3</sup> reports of a Lepcha Pano (king) Turve ruling around A.D. 1425 when a Bhotia patriarch—Khye Bumsa—the ancestor of Phuntso Namgyal, came to Sikkim from Kham (Tibet). Khye Bumsa came across a Lepcha chief—Tho-Kung-Tek.<sup>4</sup> The last Lepcha Pano<sup>5</sup> was born in 1686 and ruled for a period of 25 years.

The Lepchas had a simple material culture. They had a subsistence life of hunting and collecting. Some of them had a primitive form of slash-and-burn type of rotational cultivation of rice, maize and millet.<sup>6</sup> The village was the most important territorial unit in the social system of the clans and tribal entities. Some of

## POLITICAL EVOLUTION

the influential village headmen assumed the leadership of the clans, which used to be hereditary. To avoid inter-clan and inter-tribal feuds, they used to negotiate polyandrous marriages with the Limbus, the Magars, the Sherpas, the Bhotias and the Dukpas.

Their animistic priests were a combination of holy specialists, magicians, and medicine men. Their most important festival was the worship of the Kanchenzunga summit as the abode of the spirits of the Lepcha Bon religion. The Lepcha mythology says that their animistic priests "were tricked into bringing all their writings to the (Buddhist) Lamas, who mercilessly burnt the manuscripts and poisoned them...."<sup>7</sup> It suggests that the animist Lepchas have been subjected to some harsh treatment at the hands of the proselytizing Lamas. The consecration of the first Bhotia ruler of Sikkim in 1642 made the beginning of the Lepcha subservience to the Bhotia theocratic feudalism.

## MEDIEVAL THEOCRACY

In the first half of the 17th century, three monks of the Nyingmapa sect (the Red Sect or 'red hats') of the Tibetan Lamaism came to Sikkim with a view to converting the country to their faith. These lamas persuaded Phuntso, a Bhotia patriarch of Khye Bumsa's dynasty, to rule the country religiously and sought recognition from the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama recognized Phuntso Namgyal as the ruler of the southern slopes of the Himalayas (Sikkim) and is also credited to have sent ceremonial presents such as the silken scarf bearing Dalai Lama's seal, the mitre (hat) of the Guru Rimpoche, the devil dagger (Phurpa), and the most precious sand image of the Guru. Consequently, the newly established Bhotia principality of Namgyal dynasty was tied to Tibetan theocracy. Since then up to 19th century, the Bhotia rulers of Sikkim looked up to Tibet for protection against political foes.

Phuntso Namgyal's greatest problem was to establish a viable administrative structure. This pragmatic ruler realized that the entire land was in the hands of the Lepcha Tassos and Karthaks. So he decided to win their favour without causing conflict in the then existing social order or disturbing the prevalent system of land tenure. The Lepchas were not only the 'sons of the soil', but were also relatively better cultivators. The Bhotia ruler adopted a magnificent device for court-



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ing the Lepcha loyalty by recognizing the 12 important Lepcha chiefs as the Dzongpens (governors or administrators of the forts) and by dividing the country into 12 Dzongs<sup>8</sup> (districts).

To win the confidence of the Kirati tribes, he invited all the tribal chiefs to a meeting where he proclaimed that the Sikkim Bhotias (the victorious Lhopas), the Membas or the Monpas (the Lepchas), and the Tsongs (the Yakthambas or the Limbus) were of one family. The king (a Lhopa) should be considered the father, the Lepchas (the Membas or Monpa) the mother, and the Limbus (Tsongs) the sons of the same family, forming a council called 'Lhomentsong'.<sup>9</sup> However, the Magar chiefs did not come to terms with the Bhotias and continued their fight, and, when defeated, migrated to the south and the west.

For about a hundred years after 1670, the year the second ruler of the Namgyal dynasty was consecrated, inter-tribal conflicts, raids and wars remained the main preoccupation of the five successive rulers. By this time, the Lepcha chiefs were either lured to the Dzongpenships or persuaded to align themselves with the Bhotia rulers. But then two of the important tribes which had not been subdued were strong enough to challenge the Bhotia overlordship. The Bhotias decided to win over the Limbus<sup>10</sup> by marital alliances and religious conversion. Out of a dozen rulers, seven married Limbu ladies from Limbuana, a practice which was enthusiastically followed by the Kalons (ministers), and the Dzongpens. For the Magars, such traps proved to be inadequate. Consequently, the Bhotias undertook to deal with them. But all these machinations could not win a firm and lasting allegiance of the various tribes to the Bhotias.

In 1725, Tasso Bidur, a Lepcha chief from the plain frontiers — Chakhung — aroused a feeling of patriotism among the Lepchas. He claimed to be an incarnation of the Guru Rimpoche (Padma Sambhava) and acquired a large following. He stopped sending revenues to the ruler from the Siliguri region and sought the help of the neighbouring Magar chief for his rebellion against the Bhotia ruler. But Tasso Bidur's insurrection was very soon put down by Yangthang Desit, a Bhotia courtier who was deputed for that.

The Kazis used the Limbus and the Magars constantly as unpaid labourers for the construction of buildings and fortifications and for household chores. Aggrieved by this, some of these tribals left their habitation and migrated to Nepal. In 1741 one Limbu—Sri Junga



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Devasi — revived the Kirati Mundhum religion. The Bhotia Tachhang lama of Pemiongchi monastery put him under arrest and shot him dead. A controversy about succession to the throne of Sikkim began in the 1740's. Chagzot Karwang of Barmoik estate, a Lepcha minister, saved the illegitimate claimant of the crown from the wrath of the Bhotia minister, Chagzot Tamding, who had rebelled against the infant ruler and declared himself the ruler. Around 1750 the Magar chief of Sikkim Terai, outraged by the discourtesy shown to him by the Sikkim Durbar (Court), persuaded the Deb Raja of Bhutan to attack Sikkim. This was the parting of the ways between the Bhotia rulers and the Magar tribe.

About 1752, the Limbus revolted again, but were crushed by the Bhotia ruler. Even during the Sikkim-Nepal wars, the Lepchas, the Bhotias and the Limbus had their separate garrisons, which were combined under Chuthup and Deba Takaspo. The expanding Gurkhas constantly raided Sikkim, especially the Tista valley and the Terai, under the leadership of the Gurkha General, Kazi Damodar Pande. As per Anglo-Nepalese Treaty of Titalia, Nepal surrendered the southern part of Sikkim to the British. Sikkim negotiated a costly deal to get back her territories lost to the Nepalese. The British Political Agent at the Purneah frontier agreed through an arrangement with the representatives of Sikkim on 10 February 1817 to restore the ceded territory to Sikkim. Throughout this period the Lepchas remained in the vanguard of the fight against the Gurkhas. Consequently, their influence in the court increased, which was resented by the Bhotia Kazis. Among the Lepcha Kazis who thus rose to prominence was the then Chief Minister and maternal uncle of the ruler (Tsugphud) — Chagzot Bolek. The Bhotia intrigues at the court led to the murder of Bolek and his family in 1820 at the behest of Tung-Yik-Minche, an ancestor of the 'mad chief minister' (the Pagla Dewan). In panic, Bolek's Lepcha supporters sought refuge in Elam (eastern Nepal). And from there the Lepchas kept on raiding and harassing the Bhotias till the British contracted the possession of Darjeeling district.

In the past, the main Indo-Tibetan trade route lay from Varanasi to Lhasa through the Kathmandu Valley. With the emergence of a belligerent Gurkha kingdom in the 18th century, this route came to be controlled by the Nepalese. Moreover, in the altered political economy of British India, Calcutta was emerging not only as the



## SIKKIM : THE BACKGROUND

political, but also as the commercial capital of the British Indian Empire. Initially, the British sought the good offices of the Bhutanese rulers to open the route to Tibet, but they got a rebuff. Ultimately, they discovered the most strategic and economic trade route from Calcutta to Lhasa through the Chumbi Valley. The Bhotia rulers, theoretically under the tutelage of the Dalai Lamas and politically and socially aligned with the Tibetan aristocracy, occupied a unique position between Tibet and India. Keeping in view the trade and political implications, the British decided to court Sikkim's favour.

On the plea of returning the Sikkimese Lepchas from Nepal, Captain Lloyd along with J.W. Grant visited the frontier areas of Sikkim and Nepal. On their recommendation, the British Government obtained "all the land south of the Great Rangeet River, east of the Rungno and Mahanadi rivers" on 1 February, 1835. Though this was an unconditional transfer out of friendship of the Sikkimese ruler with the British Governor General, an annual grant—initially of Rs. 3,000 and later raised to Rs. 6,000 from 1841 onward—was fixed for the Sikkimese ruler. "Darjeeling provided numerous facilities for free trade in mercantile commodities and in labour; its extensive forest lands, which could be reclaimed for cultivation, attracted large number of the Lepchas and the Nepalese to migrate and settle there. Such developments not only threatened the privileges traditionally enjoyed by certain Bhotia families of Sikkim—for instance, their monopoly of trade in this part of the Himalayas—but also disturbed the age-old population balance and inter-tribal relations in Sikkim, and became a source of embarrassment to Sikkim in her relations with Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet. In 1844 the ruler of Sikkim and Paro Penlop of Bhutan clashed at Phari in Tibet. The Government of Tibet gave vent to its displeasure by restricting the Sikkim ruler's visits to Lhasa to once in eight years, as also by curtailing the grazing rights that the Sikkimese on the border had always enjoyed in Tibet. In 1847, therefore, the ruler of Sikkim appointed one Tokhang Namgyal (popularly known as the Pagla Dewan or the Mad Chief Minister), a Tibetan of strong anti-British conviction, as his Chief Minister".<sup>11</sup>

The hostility between the Tibetan and the Bhotia aristocracy on the one hand and the British on the other led to a number of British military expeditions to Sikkim between 1850 and 1860. Ultimately, a peace treaty was signed at Tumlong—the Sikkimese capital—on



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28 March 1861 and Sikkim became a British dependency. This treaty envisaged the banishment of the mad Chief Minister to Tibet, Tsugphud Namgyal's abdication in favour of his son, transfer of the seat of Government from Chumbi Valley to Sikkim, and the right of the Government of India to construct roads through Sikkim. At that time the Government of India was in a position to annex Sikkim, but would not do so because they wished to maintain a buffer zone between the Indian plains and the Tibetan plateau. The British encouraged the Nepalese settlers to reclaim the waste land, open copper mines and work as labour force in road construction. The Bhotias disapproved all these activities. They made representations to the British Government that the seventh ruler, Tsugphud Namgyal, had prohibited the settlement of the Nepalese in Sikkim.

At the ruler's request the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal suggested an agreement limiting the Nepalese settlement to the south of a line drawn across Sikkim from the east to the west and passing just a few miles north of Gangtok. An influential section of the Kazis vehemently opposed this agreement. That led to a mild armed encounter between the Kazis and the Newars at Rhenock in 1880. *The Durbar Chronicle* claims that a document drawn by the Sikkim court prohibiting such settlements was tampered with by the powerful pro-British Chief Minister — Khangsarpa Dewan — in which this clause was added: "According to the Governor's desire I promise to abide by the policy of allowing the Gurkhalese to settle in uninhabited wastelands of Sikkim." This document was exchanged between the Sikkim ruler and the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling. However, it was agreed that the Paharias (the Nepalese) would not hold office of the village headmanship or some similar posts of importance.

The Bhotias could not reconcile themselves to the Nepalese settlement and the British paramountcy. In their anti-Nepali designs, they were encouraged by the Tibetan aristocracy. A section of the Kazis, such as the Khagsarpa brothers, saw danger in the growing Tibetan influence in Sikkim. The Kazis were openly divided on most of the issues. One section retained the power in the state with the support of the British and the other section aligned itself with the Tibetan interests along with the ruler. At such a juncture in 1874, Thutub Namgyal, "a man of indolent disposition, whose inclination was to live in retirement and stay aloof from the worries of Government" was consecrated the ninth ruler of Sikkim. His second wife



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happened to be the daughter of a high Tibetan official in Lhasa, and "a born intriguer and diplomat". She undertook to champion the cause of Tibet with the support of the Bhotia courtiers. This created new problems for the Ruler. The Tibetans occupied Lingthu frontiers, which necessitated a British expeditionary force to be sent in March 1889 to evict them. The Tibetan hostility against the British interest in Sikkim came to a halt with the Anglo-Chinese convention at Calcutta in March 1890. The Chinese and the Tibetans agreed to the British protectorate over Sikkim, a definite demarcation of Tibeto-Sikkimese borders and the surrender of Sikkimese claim over the Chumbi Valley. The British had already taken steps to consolidate their gains by appointing a Political Officer in Gangtok in 1888. And with the 1890 convention, Tibetan hegemony over Sikkim came to an end.

The political structure of theocratic Sikkim combined three distinct segments: the clergy, the aristocracy, and the commoners. The monks were drawn from the high-born Bhotias and Lepchas. It was during the third ruler's reign that every second son of a Bhotia family was commanded to be ordained a monk of Pemiongchi monastery. A network of the Buddhist monasteries was established and huge estates were attached to them. These monasteries were the centres of theological training for the clergy. Some of the monasteries were maintained with the support of the state exchequer and served as administrative centres. As the revenue was accepted in kind, the monasteries served the purpose of regional centres for storage as well. In this way, the monasteries were important institutions not only from socio-ritual points of view, but also from economic and political considerations. Hundreds of nuns and monks, while they were trainees, got free maintenance at their monasteries. Unlike their counterparts in the Hinayan Buddhist countries like Burma and Ceylon, these monks did not teach the laity nor did they preach to the commoners. These clergymen were variously trained as painters, calligraphers, embroiders, carvers and skilled craftsmen. The monks could work in the secular fields as well. Since the rulers were also monk-incarnates constantly in transaction with the high Lamas of Tibet and the Deb-Raja of Bhutan, these monks were used as emissaries, mediators, and settlers of various state affairs. In internal administration also, the monks held important positions. They were appointed to the State Council, they managed the monastery estates, administered justice and even helped the laity in fighting against

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the enemies. Though economically dependent, they were very much influential both in the court and in public life. In fact, it was these clergymen who managed the affairs of the state in collaboration with the Kazis.

The Kazis were the regional lords and as such were in charge of their territories. "The Kazis and officials enjoyed some authority (over specific tracts of lands) but the final authority was the king in all matters of import;... Aside from exercising some authority, adjudicating minor disputes, and referring to the ruler things of moment, an official also assessed the revenue payable by all the people settled on the lands within his jurisdiction; paid over to the ruler a certain fixed contribution and kept the greater portion for himself. The Kazis had no proprietary right in the lands although they did have a kind of hereditary title to their office."<sup>12</sup>

These Kazis constituted a fluid social class in which intermarriage with the ruler's family was also practised. Since they commanded the regional territories, had some tradition of religious education, were the kinsmen of the ruler and used to offer their children as the incarnate lamas to the important monasteries, they were widely respected and their favour solicited. They manned the council and the official positions. They commanded the contingents against the enemies and wielded considerable authority in the realm, and indeed over the ruler himself. In fact, at times, the stronger and more influential Kazis were even more powerful than the rulers.

## COLONIAL FEUDALISM

In 1888, the British Government appointed John Claude White as the first Political Officer in Gangtok to clear the administrative mess and checkmate the Tibetan influence. The Durbar was divided on all the major issues faced by the State like establishing a closer liaison with British India, helping the British in establishing trade ties with Tibet, and allowing settlement of the Nepalese in Sikkim. White undertook to recast the very structure of the Sikkimese administration. Since the ruler was in the habit of living in the Chumbi Valley (Tibet), he was virtually cut off from the routine administrative responsibilities. And it was an ideal situation for anti-British intrigues to flourish with the support of the queen. White forced the ruler to come back to Gangtok. When Thutob, the ruler, refused to co-



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operate with the British in their designs, he was put under confinement and subjected to extreme deprivation. For years together the ruling couple was subjected to harsh treatment and was shuttled from Tumlong to Kalimpong, to Kurseong and to Darjeeling. The actual administration passed into the hands of the Political Officer. With a view to providing an institutional forum as his support, White appointed an advisory council consisting of four Kazis, two lamas and two ex-dewans (ministers) of the ruler.

White scrapped all the tenancy regulations and introduced the lessee system of land tenure. He set apart the entire arable lands except the ruler's estate, on contractual lease for a specific period on a fixed annual rent. For raising the state revenue and strengthening the British position, he, along with some Lepcha Kazis, encouraged the Nepalese to settle in Sikkim. He initiated the plans for opening up tracks through densely forested hills, development of a single form of law and justice and welfare schemes such as opening of schools and hospitals. He was instrumental in introducing apple growing, cloth weaving, carpet manufacture and copper mining.

From 1888 till Indian Independence about half a dozen Political Officers served the three rulers of Sikkim. The pattern of socio-political structure painstakingly built up by White remained the cornerstone of the administrative policy. Thutob Namgyal was restored to authority partially in 1905, when he visited Calcutta and apologized for past lapses. On a number of occasions, the Sikkimese ruler or his heir-apparent attended various regal Durbars in India along with those of other Indian principalities. Virtually, the rulers were captives in the hands of the powerful Political Officers who enjoyed the paramount authority. However, full powers were transferred to the ruler, Tashi Namgyal in 1918. He was destined to face much political turmoil during his reign. By this time, after nearly direct British rule over Sikkim for a span of 30 years, the population had increased five-fold and material resources ten-fold. The British transferred the Sikkimese administration to the ruler with the expectation of an enlightened and benevolent rule. This expectation was based on Sir Tashi's training in administration under the Political Officer.

To counteract the anti-British intrigues of the Bhotia aristocracy the British encouraged the Nepalese to settle in Sikkim and this paid them due dividend. A British administrator wrote in 1894, "From the commencement of our relations with Sikkim there have been two



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parties in that state, one which may be called the Lepcha or national party, consistently friendly to our government, and a foreign or Tibetan party, steadily hostile. The family of chiefs has generally been by way of siding with the latter, partly in consequence of their habit of marrying Tibetan women and partly through their fondness for Chumbi. Of late years a further complication has been introduced by the settlement of colonies of Nepalese in parts of Sikkim — a measure favoured by the Lepchas generally. These settlers look to our (the British) Government, but their presence is regarded with disfavour by many influential lamas, who allege that they waste the forests, allow their cattle to trespass, and make themselves unpleasant to neighbours in other ways. . . . So long as these three parties maintained what may be called their natural relations, there was no fear of our influence declining and the internal affairs of the country could be trusted to adjust themselves with the minimum of interference on our (the British) part.”<sup>13</sup>

The introduction of the system of land lease was an event of great socio-political significance. Among the Nepalese immigrants, the commercial community of the Newars emerged as the Nepalese counterpart of Lepcha-Bhotia Kazis. This happened with the inception of copper-mining and minting activities, which were exclusively held by the Newars. It may be recalled that it was taboo for the Lamaist Kazis to dig mines — history bears evidence to the fact that the Nepalese minted coins for Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim.<sup>14</sup> In Sikkimese context, these newly arrived Nepali immigrants could contract lease of land from the Sikkimese administration, thus earning in course of time the title of ‘Thikadars’\* for themselves.

This period saw the consolidation of the institution of Kazis on a new plane. The Kazis had a very obscure beginning. The institution of the Kazi was neither brought to Sikkim from Tibet nor introduced by a ruler or a regent at any particular period of time. The claim of Thutob and his consort that the first consecrated ruler of Sikkim had appointed 12 Kazis does not sound convincing. The Nepalese sources suggest that the institution of the Kazi was introduced in Nepal during the reign of King Bijoy Narain Rai (1584-1609).<sup>15</sup> The history of Nepal shows how the generals were elevated to the position of Kazis

\* ‘Thikadar’, a word of Hindustani and Nepali origin denoting one who functions according to the terms and conditions of a contract, i.e., a contractor.



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irrespective of caste and religion. It also suggests that Kaziship was hereditary. Among such hereditary inheritors of Kaziship mention may be made of Kazi Jagjit Pande, Kazi Ranjeet Singh Thapa, (son of Kazi Amar Singh Thapa), Kazi Chamn Bhandari, Kazi Uder (Uday) Man Singh and Kazi Bhakwar Singh.<sup>16</sup> It may also be seen that the term is differently spelt and pronounced in Nepal: Kazi, Quazi, Kajee, Kaji. During the long period of theocratic feudalism, the Gangetic plain south of Sikkim was under the Muslim rulers who had the institution of the Kazis. In case the term was borrowed from Nepal, its broad currency and acceptance can be attributed to the transactions between the feudal chiefs of Sikkim and the representatives of their neighbouring Muslim rulers at Purneah and Dinajpur.<sup>17</sup>

Among the Bhotia families of repute, Risley mentioned 14 Kazi families, which might have been admitted to the sacred Pemiongchi monastery. There were eight other families which were admitted to Pemiongchi monastery but only on payment of heavy entrance fees.<sup>18</sup> As for the Lepchas, most of the present-day aristocratic families trace their origin to the Lepcha chief, Tho-Kung-Tek. A majority of the Lepcha Kazi houses such as Barmoik, Rhenock, Enchey, Rumtek, Fatong, and Gangtok belonged to the legendary Barphungpa stock (i.e. "the flowing from on high" or the Patricians).<sup>19</sup> The history of Sikkim records that all these Bhotia and Lepcha families that claim aristocratic blood were inter-related by matrimonial alliances. These Kazis had a kind of hereditary succession to their office. They exercised limited civil and criminal jurisdiction in the area over which they had been collecting revenue. In accordance with the Tibetan tradition they were named after the localities they ruled. The size of their estates also varied. Waddel mentioned the name of only 12 Kazi houses<sup>20</sup> such as Lasso, Yangthang, Gangtok, Rhenock, Dallam, Barmoik, Song, Tashiding, Libing, Maling, Simik and Pendong. It is also to be noted that the imperial Gazetteer of India, XXIII, gives the number of Kazis as 21 (p. 3072). At present, it will not be difficult to enumerate about three dozen of Kazi houses in Sikkim.

It is on record that the first Bhotia ruler of Sikkim appointed 12 Dzongpens from among the Lepcha chiefs and 12 Kalons from his Bhotia warrior supporters. It is obvious that these two dozen families had been very influential during those days. Phuntso Namgyal, being a far-sighted ruler, did not want to dissatisfy Lepcha chiefs,



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who had accepted him as their ruler and were converted to the Lamaism. So he might have recognized them as his Dzongpens; and besides himself establishing matrimonial alliances with them, also commanded the Bhotia aristocrats to marry among the Lepcha chieftains. Since it was the Lepchas, who held the landed estates and since the institution of the Kazi had been strongly based on the ownership of landed estates, it would have been only natural for them to hold the position of the Kazihood first. Such Lepcha chiefs could considerably increase their influence in the Bhotia state of Sikkim because of their numerical strength, control of the Dzongs and their militant resistance to the Nepalese intrusions and raids.

The Kazis also held ministerial positions and were commanded to maintain two residential provisions: one at their provincial estate where they ruled and another in the capital around the palace of the king where they were traditional functionaries of the Durbar. These ministers and Dzongpens were sent to the courts of the adjoining Muglan (parts of Mughal India) for mutual transactions, since they were more in contact with the plainsfolk than the highlander Bhotias. It must be kept in mind that the aristocracy in Sikkim from its inception was unified by the ties of blood and rituals. The Bhotias began to establish their dominance because the central administration was maintained according to the Tibetan style of state-craft. Apart from the ritual and matrimonial alliances, large-scale borrowing of cultural artefacts and ideologies provided an added prominence to the Bhotia aristocracy. Polyandrous family structure provided suitable grounds to any body claiming not only Bhotia but also Tibetan origin. Consequently, at the beginning of this period, no self-respecting Kazi would claim a pure Lepcha aristocratic origin.

“In order to explain the land revenue, it may be mentioned that according to the State Revenue Roll, there were three classes of Illakas (revenue divisions under the lessee) with different systems of collection, viz. (1) leased out Illakas, (2) Illakas under direct management, and (3) Monasteries. Under class (1) are those Illakas which are leased out to various Illakadars on fixed annual Khazana (revenue) at various acreage rates. There are 91 Illakas under this class and the system of collection is that the lease-holders pay annually certain fixed sums on account of land rent and household taxes on the 15th of January and 28th of February respectively every year. Illakas under class (2) are those which are under direct management of the state.



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There are 11 Illakas under this class which are placed in charge of different managers who credit into the State Bank (the Jethraj Bhojmall Bank, a private banking concern owned by a plainsman still operating as the state banker in most of the parts of the state) from time to time the whole of revenue collected by them under different heads as they come in. . . . Under class (3) are the monastery estates. There are seven Illakas under this class. These monasteries pay annually on the 28th of February certain fixed sum on account of household taxes. They do not pay land rent which they recover from the ryots and utilize it for religious purposes in the monasteries."<sup>21</sup>

The only land record maintained by the state was the register showing the number of the houses and their owners for the purpose of house tax. There were 51 Adda (judicial-cum-criminal) courts in Sikkim in 1930, leased out to various lessees or placed under managers appointed on commission by the state or the monasteries. Every lessee, manager of the estates and head of the monastery holding Illakas, was *ipso facto* the court of original jurisdiction of that Illaka. Among such courts, 22 were invested with first class magisterial powers, 18 Illakadars with the second class, 10 with the third class and 17 with the fourth class, making a total of 67 Illaka courts. The ruler was the source of all authority and the administration was run through these specific departments. The various departments were under the charge of three and later five secretaries, who were the highest public officers of the state.

## TRANSITION TO MODERNITY

Inspired by the ideals of Indian Independence and a consciousness of the need for political reform in Sikkim, some educated Sikkimese came forward to form the first political party in Sikkim. Thus the Sikkim State Congress formally came into existence on 5 December 1947. The State Congress was organized as the Sikkimese counterpart of the Indian National Congress, and affiliation to the parent body was sought.<sup>22</sup> With their three-point demands of (i) abolition of landlordism, (ii) formation of a popular interim government and (iii) Sikkim's merger with India, the party petitioned to the ruler<sup>23</sup> for a drastic change in the political structure. Apart from formulating and presenting political issues of radical significance, the State Congress started to impart political education to the masses through campaigns

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and movements. In no time, it became the party of the masses, reflecting their aspirations. Though its popularity was more among the Nepalese, the State Congress took special care to appear as the forum of consensus and avoided any overt identification with a particular community.

Alarmed at the impressive popular response and organizational success of the State Congress, the Young Maharaj Kumar (the present ruler, H.H. Palden Thondup Namgyal) got the Sikkim National Party\* organized. This party had few clear political objectives. It was an organization of the aristocrats and the neo-rich Bhotias, and it sought to safeguard Lepcha-Bhotia interests against the Nepali-dominated State Congress. The National Party stood for an independent Sikkim with special treaty with India.<sup>24</sup> This party could not assume the character of a mass party, did not spell out its ideological commitments, and was mainly a defender of the *status quo*. From its very inception it remained a party under the leadership of the affluent Bhotias with the backing of the lamas. The National Party leadership was convinced that the State Congress was committed to wresting power from the ruler and establishing the tyranny of the majority.†

The State Congress organized a series of no-tax campaigns, non-cooperation movements and non-violent agitations. Its leaders courted arrest in favour of their three-point demands. They also lobbied to convince New Delhi of the urgency of drastic political change in Sikkim. To some extent they were able to impress upon New Delhi about the partisan attitude of the ruler towards the National Party. Armed with organizational experience and fraternal assurances from the politicians in New Delhi, the State Congress embarked on the second Satyagraha movement in May 1949. After prolonged negotiation, the Maharaja agreed to install a five-member interim government including two nominees of his own. In this way, the first popular Government of Sikkim was installed on 9 May 1949 under the leadership of the State Congress President, Tashi Tshering, and included Dimik Singh Lepcha and C.D. Rai of the State Congress, and Dorji Dadul and Reshmi Prasad Alley as the

\* On the basis of the verbal statement of the ex-President of Sikkim National Party and State Congress, and the present President of National Congress.

† Based on the verbal statement of Mr. Sonam Tshering, the first Executive Councillor of Sikkim National Party.



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Durbar's nominees. This ministry was installed without defining the scope of its powers and functions. On important issues the Durbar disagreed with the Chief Minister. Moreover, the Durbar's nominees proved to be unenthusiastic about the popular government which was also not in a position to liberate the masses from the feudal autocracy. The ruler refused to introduce agrarian and administrative reforms. Out of desperation, the State Congress leadership embarked on questionable political gimmicks with vulgarity.\* Meanwhile the Maharaj Kumar had been trying to convince New Delhi that popular government in Sikkim meant anarchy and political instability. This led the Government of India to act 'in the interest of law and order.' All of a sudden the Political Officer sent for all the five ministers on 6 June 1949 and curtly announced the summary dismissal of the ministry in the name of the Government of India. This action on the part of the Government of India came as a boost to the Durbar and a rude shock to the democratic forces.

The Indian Government explained that the 'threat of disorder might not have come from the State Congress side but might have come from the Maharaja's side.'<sup>25A</sup> Thus the Government had little choice but to act in any case. However, executive power was proposed to be transferred from the erstwhile ministry to a Dewan (Quasi-Chief Minister) selected from among the Indian administrative cadre "for the good of Sikkim, but that his (the Dewan's) administration would be for the briefest possible period."<sup>25</sup> Consequently, an Indian, John Lall, was appointed Dewan of Sikkim on 11 August 1949. The Dewan undertook to apply remedial measures to alleviate the hardship of the agrarian system. The lessee system along with the privileges was abolished. The peasants were protected against frequent evictions from their patrimonial holdings. Effective steps were taken to recast the judicial, legal, and revenue administration.

\* One of the ministers in those days said in an interview that the State Congress invited the party volunteers and the sympathizers from the interior areas to Gangtok, where they formed into an unruly crowd. They kept on singing on mikes abusive songs addressed to the aristocracy and the ruler. Some of the leaders and many volunteers, under the effect of intoxication, kept on moving in the bazaar of Gangtok, thus holding the administrative machinery to ransom. The Maharaj-kumar and ruler's private secretary, Tse-ten Tashi, brought all these to the knowledge of the Political Officer.

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These steps eased to some extent the tension between the Durbar and the masses.

As regards the status of Sikkim *vis-a-vis* India, Sikkim was bound by the declaration made by the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, in anticipating of a transfer of power in the subcontinent which envisaged new political arrangements between the states and the successor governments. Sikkim attempted to negotiate on her future status along with the other members of the Indian Chamber of Princes. The Constituent Assembly of India adopted a resolution on 22 January 1947 to the effect that a Committee should deal with the special problems of Sikkim and Bhutan,<sup>26</sup> negotiate with the Chamber of Princes and duly report to the Assembly. Later, a standstill Agreement between the Sikkim Durbar and the Government of India was signed on 27 February 1948 by which "all agreements, relations and administrative arrangements as to the matter of common concern existing between the Crown and the Sikkim state on August 14, 1947" were deemed to continue till a new treaty was negotiated.

The Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, issued a statement on 20 March 1950 on the principles on the basis of which the new treaty was to be signed. Both the parties agreed that Sikkim would continue to be an Indian protectorate in respect of external relations, defence and communication. Though Sikkim would have her internal autonomy, maintenance of good administration and law and order would be the ultimate responsibility of the Government of India. Both the parties also decided to follow a policy of "progressive association of the people of the state with her government" and institute a system of village Panchayats. The Indo-Sikkimese Treaty enshrining the above principles was signed at Gangtok on 5 December 1950 by the Maharaja Tashi Namgyal and Harishwar Dayal, the Indian Political Officer in Sikkim.<sup>27</sup> The popular political leaders were sceptical towards the treaty. In fact, it was such an odd mixture that all the political activists could find some aspects of the treaty to be in their favour. The Sikkim State Congress held that the autonomous status of Sikkim was identical with that of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir with the exception, that the latter had joined the Indian Union formally, while the former did not.

In the spirit of an understanding given by the Government of India to the leaders of the State Congress, an attempt was made



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to hold the election for local self-government in Sikkim in February 1951. "Since no safeguards were given to the indigenous population (reservation of the seats for the minority) the election was boycotted by the Sikkim National Party."<sup>28</sup> After much discussion and bargaining a formula<sup>29</sup> was agreed upon in which the Nepalese were equated with the Lepcha-Bhotia combine for the distribution of seats in the State Council.\* It was on the basis of this 'parity system' that the first general election was held in 1953. The Durbar introduced an intricate electoral system according to which the Nepalese and the Lepcha-Bhotia were allotted six seats each and the remaining six were nominated by the Ruler. Thus National Party emerged as an equal contender for administration with the State Congress.<sup>30</sup>

An executive council of three members was installed, with the Dewan (the ruler's nominee), K.R. Pradhan (the State Congress) and Sonam Tshering (the National Party). As expected, this window-dressing device of "progressive association of the people of the State with its government", proved to be a farce. The Executive Councillors were in charge of transferred subjects such as education, forest, health and sanitation, agriculture, P.W.D., excise, etc.† Some development plans were undertaken at the behest of the Government of India, but nothing tangible was done to encourage the democratic process. The successor to the first Dewan, Nari Rustomji, took pains to invent the items of national glamour such as Tibeto-Chinese pattern of house construction<sup>31</sup> as the Sikkimese. Nothing could be more gratifying to the Maharajkumar than this.

Before Sikkim went to polls for the second time in 1958, two seats (one for the monasteries and the other for the Sikkimese in general) were added to the State Council. At the same time, a very complicated and intriguing device of counting was introduced.<sup>32</sup> The State Congress won a majority of the elective seats (8 out of 14), capturing

\*The principle behind this provision for the equal representation of the Nepalese and the Lepcha-Bhotia in the State representative bodies was extended to the distribution of the administrative posts, economic facilities and other State sponsored activities. This arrangement is known as the parity system.

†This demarcation of transferred and reserved subjects, introduced in India by the British in 1919, was known as diarchy. The Government of India Act, 1919 had to be superseded by the Government of India Act, 1935, which conceded direct rule to the provinces. See Pradhan K.R., "Process of Democratization in Sikkim", *Kanchenjunga* Vol. 4(4), 15 October 1963, p. 8, and Basnet L.B. 1966, *ibid.*

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the general seat as well. By this time, the size of the Executive Council had been enlarged to five members. An Election Tribunal was appointed to investigate certain alleged malpractices. On 25 May 1959 the Tribunal announced that "(1) K.R. Pradhan, President of the State Congress, and N.K. Pradhan, Secretary General of the State Congress, had been guilty of corrupt practices and dissemination of false propaganda, and were disqualified for holding office for six years; (2) that Sonam Tshering, President of the National Party, was also guilty of corrupt practices and was disqualified for holding office for six years; and (3) that Thendu Bhutia, of the National Party, was also guilty and therefore suspended from office."<sup>33</sup> But a Gazette Extraordinary was issued on 4 September 1959 announcing that, "His Highness has been pleased to order that (1) K.R. Pradhan is disqualified for seeking membership of the Sikkim Council for a period of six months with effect from 25.9.59. There will be bye-election for this seat; (2) N.K. Pradhan, the same; and (3) Sonam Tshering is disqualified for seeking membership in the Sikkim Council for a period of three years with effect from 28.5.59." In the ensuing bye-election, K.R. Pradhan, President of the State Congress, lost to C.D. Rai, General Secretary of the same party, so badly as to forfeit his deposit (3,013 votes for C.D. Rai against 684 for K.R. Pradhan).

Under the leadership of L.D. Kazi, the ex-president of the State Congress and the then president of the Swatantra Dal, various factions of all the existing political parties were induced to form a new party — Sikkim National Congress. A resolution was formally passed at the convention of the founding fathers of the Party at Singtam on 20 May 1960. "The legitimate demands of the people of Sikkim, such as the establishment of responsible government, a written constitution, universal adult franchise based on joint electorate etc., are not yet fulfilled. The main reason for these demands enumerated above lies in the weakness of the people of Sikkim themselves. The weakness of the people was in the existence of the small political parties holding divergent and often conflicting views. Keeping in view the futility of the existence of small political parties, and bearing in mind the large interest of the people of Sikkim the parties concerned decided to merge into one compact body known as the Sikkim National Congress." The Founder-President of the party stated its policy thus and added at the same time: "Sikkim run by Proclamation



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cannot be called a democratic country. . . . Never before in the history of India and China has Sikkim come within the orbit of both India and China. In such a critical period, therefore, the aspirations of the people of Sikkim must find expression in the formation of responsible government based on a written constitution. Nothing short of this will satisfy the people of Sikkim. . . .”<sup>34</sup> The new party was cold-shouldered by the Maharaj Kumar and their demands were ridiculed. Disappointed by the response of the Durbar, L.D. Kazi led a delegation of the Sikkim National Congress to apprise Indian leaders of their stand and submitted a memorandum enlisting the demands of his party.<sup>35</sup>

A providential opportunity was offered to the ruler to extricate himself from the political mess by the declaration of the emergency in the fall of 1962 following the Chinese aggression on India. At that time the political parties were preparing for contesting the third general election for the State Council. The elections were postponed and ‘People’s Consultative Committee’ with 31 members was constituted on 26 November 1962. The Executive Councillors, however, remained in office till the General Election in 1967. This was the period when a chain of events led to the emergence of the intrigue-loving Maharajkumar as the powerful Chogyal, the ruler of Sikkim.\*

\* “Before Hope came along, the royal tradition in Sikkim did not amount to very much. The rulers, who called themselves Maharajahs, were little more than nomadic Tibetan chieftains — who only 100 years ago were running around bare-foot. As heir apparent, Palden Thondup Namgyal’s ambitions in life, they said, didn’t go beyond wine, women and Mah-Jongg.

Then, at the age of 40, he married Hope. It was her influence, many Sikkimese believe, that launched Namgyal on the pursuit of the trappings and appurtenances of monarchy. When his father died, the title of Maharajah — which underlined the fact that Sikkim is not a sovereign nation but a protectorate of India — was not good enough for Namgyal. He had it changed to Chogyal, the ancient Tibetan title for “ruler.” His modesi bungalow officially became “the palace.” As for Hope, one frequent palace visitor told me that she set out to be more of an Oriental queen than ever existed this side of Siam. In speaking of herself (which she invariably did in a Jackie Kennedy whisper), she affected the regal “we” and demanded to be treated with the deference due to royalty.

The Chogyal and Hope seemed to be dashing off to Europe or the United States almost constantly. On each return, the palace-controlled *Sikkim Herald* would make a big thing of announcing just which kings and queens had entertained the Sikkimese rulers — a not very subtle attempt to imply parity between the royal houses of Europe and the rustic court of Gangtok.”(from *Newsweek*, July 2, 1973)



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Just before the third general election in 1967, the ruler added four more seats to the State Council, one each for the scheduled castes, the Tsongs, the Nepalese and the Lepcha-Bhotias. This move was considered as another attempt to create divisions among the Nepalese community. While the scheduled castes are the untouchable Hindus hitherto neglected by the Durbar, the Tsongs are the Buddhist Limbus — a Nepali-speaking community. The National Congress opposed this divisive trap of 'casteism', but decided to fight the election. In this general election, the National Congress won 8 of the 18 elective seats, followed by the National Party with five seats, the State Congress with two and one each of the Tsongs, the Monasteries and the scheduled castes seats won by independents. In the new Executive Council the representation for the National Congress was not given to the party nominee, but to Mr. B.B. Gurung, the General Secretary of the party, who consequently, formed a parallel National Congress.

The period between the third and the fourth general elections was one of a pathetic betrayal of democracy by the old guards among the popular leaders. The young and turbulent elements among the National Congress wanted to organize movements on popular issues. The weary and tired leadership did not agree to this. They were in control of the financial resources and the organizational machinery. This led to a split in the party. By this time the State Congress had been left only with the Nepalese under the Newar ex-lessees and was virtually relegated to a third position. The National Party, with the patronage of the ruler, emerged stronger, but it could not become a party of all the communities in Sikkim. Moreover, it was also split into two just before the fourth general election. Even a minor party like the Scheduled Castes League suffered from the split. To add to the political confusion, a new party, the Sikkim Janta Party, was born with avowedly socialistic leanings.<sup>36</sup>

In such a political climate, the fourth general election was fought in April 1970. Both the factions of the National Party together got seven seats, the parent National Congress won five seats, the State Congress could manage four and independents two. The most significant point was that in spite of the large-scale defections, the National Congress emerged as a common political platform for the different communities. It not only won the General seat covering the entire Sikkim for the second time but also managed to get Nepalese, Bhotia-Lepcha and Tsong candidates elected on its tickets. In July 1970, a



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six-man Executive Council was appointed. It included three councillors of the National Party, two from the State Congress and one from the National Congress.

Though the National Congress was represented in the Executive Council, this party was not reconciled to the political rot in the body politic of Sikkim. They kept on criticizing the political system, the administration, and the Ruler through their bulletins. In one of its issues (published on 26 January 1972), the National Congress levelled charges of corruption and extravagance against the ruler. This bulletin likened the President of the National Congress to Mujibur Rahman and the National Congress to the Awami League of Bangladesh. This led to the passing of a no-confidence motion in the State Council and the dismissal of the president of the National Congress by the ruler from the Executive Council. Sedition charges were framed against some of the important functionaries of the Party. However, a compromise was worked out and charges against the National Congress leaders were withdrawn. This party was, thus, able to contest the fifth general election held in January 1973.

Meanwhile, the Nepalese politicians of the State Congress and the Janta Party held a meeting on 15 August, 1972 and drew up a tentative programme for the formation of a new political party to be called the Sikkim Janta Congress. This created serious apprehensions in the minds of the Lamaist communalists, who started talking loosely of banishing the Nepalese from Sikkim. In this atmosphere of communal confrontation, the fifth general election was held on 10 and 23 January, 1973. There were three political parties in the electoral battle. The National Party, enjoying the support of the ruler, the monks and the Kazis, was in an advantageous position. The National Congress had to refurbish its organization after going through the period of persecution. The Janta Congress had yet to establish its credential as a political party distinct from the others.

The key to electoral success lay with the Nepalese who appeared to have formed the National Congress. On the other hand, most of its Lepcha and Bhotia supporters either became politically inactive or aligned themselves with the National Party. This is evident from the election results. The National Party won all the seven Lepcha-Bhotia and two Nepali seats. Two independents elected on the Sangha and the Scheduled Caste seats also chose to join hands with the National Party. The National Congress, as in 1970, won the General



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and the Tsong seats along with three for the Nepalese. The Janta Congress, the successor of the State Congress, was badly treated by the electorate. Its representation in the State Council was reduced to two only the on Nepalese seats. *Boycott of the Council*

The pro-palace elements, on the eve of their success in the elections, turned out to be more arrogant towards the Nepalese sensibility. They started warning the Nepalese that they must adopt the Lamaist way of life or else they would be forced to leave Sikkim for good. Under such circumstances a minor controversy about the counting of votes on 2 February 1973 led to the boycott of the counting by the representatives of the two Congress parties. The leaders of the Congress parties complained to the Ruler against the pro-National Party officials. The complaint was ignored. This led both the Congress parties to come still close to each other on many popular demands such as full-fledged democracy, a written constitution, fundamental rights, the one-man-one-vote principle based on adult franchise and the abolition of the parity formula. The two Congress parties organised the masses in favour of these demands as well as against the rigging of the fifth general election in favour of the National Party. The Ruler cold-shouldered all these demands and went ahead with the appointment of a six-member Executive Council with four from the National Party and one each from both the Congress parties. The new State Council which was to be inaugurated by the Ruler on 28 March, was boycotted by the councillors of both the Congress parties. The masses, and especially the Sikkimese youth were so much agitated that two youth leaders went on indefinite fast on the palace lawns. and, thus, agitation was launched in full swing. K.C. Pradhan, President of the Janta Congress, was arrested. It appears that the Ruler could not pay much attention to these developments. The administration was busy in organizing the golden jubilee celebration of the Ruler's 50th birthday on 4 April. The two Congress parties, by then, had formed the Joint Action Committee (J.A.C.) under the chairmanship of L.D. Kazi. The J.A.C. served an ultimatum on the Ruler that if their demands were not met before 4 April, they would not allow the birthday celebration to be held. The pro-palace establishment went ahead with arrangements for the celebration without measuring the anguish of the masses. While the celebration was on in the palace chapel and the Ruler was taking ceremonial salute at the local polo ground, thousands of



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demonstrators clashed with the police, leading to serious lathi charges and firing. The demonstrators kept on pouring into Gangtok in thousands from other parts of Sikkim. Warrants of arrest were issued against the leaders of the J.A.C. who took political asylum in the Political Office. By then the administration in the South-west and Eastern Sikkim had collapsed and had been taken over by the people, organizing a parallel people's administration (the Janata Raj).

The Government of India sent Avtar Singh, a senior official in the External Affairs Ministry, to assess the situation in Sikkim. He tried to sort the issues out between the palace and the J.A.C., but stalemate continued for many days. Meanwhile, demonstrations against the Ruler were staged in the Capital and elsewhere. Ultimately, the Ruler realized that he could not continue in power any longer. He made a written request to the Government of India to intervene and restore law and order, and then to take over the administration as well. Similar requests were made by the Chairman of the J.A.C. and leaders of the National Party. Meanwhile, anti-Ruler sentiments were on the increase. The demonstrators burnt the effigies of the royal couple and demanded abdication of the Ruler. New Delhi sent B.S. Das as Administrator and the Indian Army took over the administration. Das and the Army had a very difficult task in disbanding the armed youths commanding the police stations, manning various district offices and establishing their authority. The Ruler's domain had virtually been restricted to the palace only.

Talks were held between the leaders of the J.A.C. and the Ruler and his supporters from the National Party. These reconciliation talks, initiated by the Indian Foreign Secretary, led to a tripartite agreement on 8 May. This agreement was signed by the Ruler, the Indian Foreign Secretary and five representatives from among the National Party, the National Congress and the Janta Congress. The agreement envisaged the future constitutional set-up and the Sikkim's relations with India. These included a Legislative Assembly elected on the basis of one-man-one-vote principle, elections on the basis of adult franchise and a Cabinet responsible to the State Assembly. Independence of the judiciary and rights of the minorities were to be guaranteed. It was also agreed upon that India would provide the head of the administration with enough authority to ensure good administration, communal harmony and rapid economic and social



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development. As in the past with the State Council, the Assembly would not discuss matters relating to the Ruler and the members of his family, and the matters concerning the responsibilities of the Government of India. Pending the election to the Assembly, an Advisory Council comprising five representatives from among all the three political parties was constituted on 2 August 1973.

Before Sikkim went to the polls in April, 1974 for the first popular democratic set-up, an announcement was made by which in the newly constituted State Assembly would be representatives of 15 Lepcha-Bhotias, 15 Nepalese, one each representing Sangha and the Scheduled Castes. Old practice of communal voting was replaced by the principle of one-man-one-vote. Parity between the two major stocks was maintained, but in a diluted fashion. By this time, the J.A.C. had transformed itself into the Sikkim Congress, presided over by L.D. Kazi. The National Party without overt support from the Ruler was in disarray. This party could field candidates only for six seats out of 32 and only one of them won the election. It was like a walk-over for the Sikkim Congress. Thirty out of the Party's 31 candidates were elected to the Assembly. The Youth Congress leader, Narbahadur Khatiwara, elected as an independent, also chose to join the Sikkim Congress Assembly Party (S.C.A.P). L.D. Kazi was elected leader of the S.C.A.P. On the basis of their newly acquired mandate from the masses, the Sikkim Congress requested New Delhi to send a constitutional expert to draft a constitution for Sikkim.

Meanwhile, the clash of will between a Ruler not reconciled to the loss of his past authority and an equally ambitious democratic leadership was taking place. The members of the Assembly refused to take oath on the Ruler's name and boycotted the dinner hosted by him. The newly constituted Assembly passed a resolution requesting New Delhi "to examine the modalities for Sikkim's participation in the political and economic institutions of India." The Government of Sikkim Bill, 1974 was introduced in the Assembly by which the entire Sikkimese administration would be re-structured. It envisaged a three-tier system in which the Ruler was reduced to a figure-head; the Chief Executive would be the head of the administration and the Chief Minister and his Cabinet would be responsible to Assembly for the non-reserved subjects.

The Ruler was to address the opening session of the Assembly on



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20 June, but he cancelled it at the eleventh hour. The members of the Assembly on way to the Assembly House for attending the session were confronted with a pro-Ruler demonstration staged by the palace guards, some Bhotias, Tibetan refugees and pro-palace bureaucrats. The Assembly house was virtually gheraoed by the demonstrators. However, the Assembly met and passed the Draft Constitution unanimously. The Ruler not only refused his consent to the Bill but also left Gangtok to seek clarifications from New Delhi. He took objection to Section 30 (c) of the Draft Constitution, through which the Government of Sikkim may seek participation and representation for the people of Sikkim in the political institutions of India. In his view this provision would erode Sikkim's separate identity and international personage as a protectorate of India under the Indo-Sikkimese Treaty of 1950. The Sikkim Congress gave an answer to the Ruler's objection by passing a resolution: "There is only one way out for the Chogyal. Either he acts strictly subject to the provisions of the Government of Sikkim Act, 1974 and the May 1973 agreements or quit the Sikkimese political scene." He was also advised by New Delhi to sort out his differences with his people and give his consent to the Constitution Bill. By then, the Assembly had met thrice — on 20 June, 28 June and 3 July—and passed the Constitution Bill unanimously. Thus, the Ruler, under the impending threat of removal, had no choice but to give his consent to the Government of Sikkim Bill, 1974 on 4 July, 1974.

A five-member ministry under the Chief Ministership of L.D. Kazi was installed on 23 July 1974. The Chief Minister approached New Delhi for giving concrete shape to the provisions in the Government of Sikkim Act, 1974, by which representation of Sikkim in the body politic of India was envisaged. The Government of India acted in accordance with the request by introducing the 36th Constitutional Amendment Bill in the Indian Parliament. This Bill proposed to give Sikkim the status of an Associate State with India and representation of Sikkim in the Indian Parliament. The Bill was passed by the Indian Parliament on 7 September 1974. The Sikkim Congress, the Sikkim Assembly, the Sikkimese Cabinet, and all the democratic forces in Sikkim have welcomed these developments. On the other hand, the Ruler does not appear to appreciate the process of fast democratization in Sikkim. To him, it would seem, a separate identity and international personage of Sikkim could be reflected only

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through his unbridled autocratic authority. However, it appears that in the final analysis the liberal democratic forces seem to have an edge over the feudal anachronism of the Lamaist Namgyal dynasty.