

## Chapter 8

### Sikkim

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Sikkim, an Indian State on the Eastern Himalayan ranges, is counted among states with Buddhist followers, which had strong cultural ties with the Tibetan region of the Peoples' Republic of China. Because of its past feudal history, it was one of the three 'States' along with Nepal and Bhutan which were known as 'the Himalayan Kingdoms' till 1975, the year of its merger with the Indian Union.

It is a small state with 2, 818 sq. m. (7, 096 sq. km.) between 27 deg. 4' North to 28 deg 7' North latitude between 80 deg. East 4' and 88deg. 58' East longitude. This 113 kilometre long and 64 kilometre wide undulating topography is located above 300 to 7,00 metres above sea level. Its known earliest settlers, the Lepchas, termed it as Neliang, the country of the caverns that gave them shelter. Bhotias, the Tibetan migrants, called it lho'mon, 'the land of the southern (Himalayan) slop'. As rice plays important part in Buddhist rituals in Tibet, which they used to procure from India, they began calling it 'Denjong' (the valley of rice). Folk traditions inform us that it was also the land of mythical 'Kiratas' of Indian classics. The people of Kirati origin (Lepcha, Limbu, Rai and possibly Magar) used to marry among themselves in the hoary past. As the saying goes, a newly wedded Limbu bride on her arrival to her groom's newly constructed house, exclaimed, "Su-khim" -- the new house. This word not only got currency, but also got anglicized into Sikkim (Basnet 1974).

Sikkim claims that it had an extensive territory in the past. The Shah rulers of Nepal invaded Sikkim from 1770 to 1810 and came to the river Tista. Subsequently Sikkim lost the region known as Limbuan in Nepal. Up to the last decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chumbi valley was a part of Sikkim. Between 1817 to 1861, Sikkim lost its foothills and Darjeeling hills in the south to British India. Succession disputes in the ruling family in Sikkim gave Bhutan the chance to interfere with its internal affairs and it lost land on its eastern frontiers to Bhutan.

## 1. Land and People

### *Lepchas*

It is claimed that the Lepchas, who call themselves 'Rong', the people living in ravines, migrated to the present site from Assam hills, are the earliest settlers of land. They have elaborate terms for rivers, water lives, flora and fauna of Sikkim unlike any community found in the country. However, their current name itself, is a gift of the Nepali language, "Lapcho", cairn, the residents of the heap of stone, or the stone house. It is claimed that Rongs were organized by Turve Panu, their king or chief, in the hoary past. After some generations, kingship came to an end and the tribe switched off to a system of chieftainship. It is said that Thokeng Tek, the Lepcha chief, was instrumental in installing the Bhotia rule in Sikkim by associating himself with the Tibetan migrants. Accordingly, a dozen of Lepcha chiefs were accorded with the status of Dzongpens, or regional rulers or the governors, by the first Bhotia theocrat, Phuntso Namgyal (1642 –1670). These Dzongpens along with another dozen of Bhotia Councillors came to be known as the qazis or kazis, the Sikkimese aristocrats, in course of time (Sinha, A C 1975). These two dozen qazis inter-married among themselves and many of the Lepchas became Buddhists. However, the Lepcha qazis came to be known as the 'created or the fashioned' ones ('A-den') against the Bhotia ('Bar fung-mo') 'the flowing from on high'; the lower and the higher order respectively of the qazis. Ethnological literature on the Lepchas suggests that it is a community of 'mild, timid, and peaceful persons who are devoid of all sort of conflict'. It is said that there is no word for violence and conflict in their language. By tradition, they are inhabitants of Inner Himalayan highland and they lived in Zongu Lepcha reserve, a preserve of the former royal family.

### *Bhotias*

Bhotia herdsmen moved in search of pasture grounds as per seasonal requirements without any consideration to the geographical divides. They used to camp in high Himalayas during the summer and Chumbi valley in the harsh winter. It appears that the Bhotia herdsmen were already there in Sikkim during the period of Guru Padama Sambhava (eight century A D), who is credited to have preached an early form of Buddhism. It is said that some Bhotia patriarchs of Namgyal dynasty came to Sikkim in 13th century along with their cattle wealth. Khye-Bumsa was one, whose descendants would play significant role in



history of Sikkim, who had settled down in Chumbi valley. Some four hundred years after that date, three monks from Tibet met at Yoksom near Gangtok and staked their claim to rule over Sikkim, but they failed to settle their conflicting claims. At long last, they appeared to have postponed their quarrel and decided to explore more for a better choice.

As the myth goes, they chanced upon Phuntso Namgyal , a well-established patriarch from Khye-Bumsa's stock, who also happened to be close to the local Lepcha. The three holy men took Phuntso to Yoksom, where he was consecrated as the ruler of Denjong in 1642. The Bhotias follow polyandry as well as polygamy. Apart from the newly chosen king, the Bhotia kalons ( Councillors) were encouraged to marry Lepcha and Limbu ladies besides their Bhotia consorts. The monks were also instrumental in creating an ethnic commonwealth of lho'+mon+Tshongs ( Lhomontshong= lho-Bhotia ( father), +mon-Lepcha (mother)+ Tshong-Limbu ( the child), an organic family of three ethnic stocks residing in Sikkim at the time ( Sinha A C : 1975). A ritual of blood brother hood among three tribes was claimed to be solemnized, in which apart from Buddhist practices shamanistic rituals were also enacted.

### *Limbus*

Limbus are one of the indigenous communities of Sikkim, residing there even before the Namgyal dynasty was established in 1642. It is a community divided into three gotras (clan): Bhiphuta (the animists), Kashi Gotra (those, who are under Hindu fold) and Lhasa Gotra or the Tshongs (the Buddhists). Myth suggests that while the first clan claims to have sprung up from earth right in Limbuan and they have their own system of belief. The second one are said to have come from Varanasi (Kashi on river Ganges in India) and they appear to be sanskritised Limbus, who are under Hindu fold. Lastly, the Lhasa clan is said to have migrated from Lhasa, Tibet and are Lamaists. So much so that last Chogyal of Sikkim had introduced a separate reserve seat in Sikkim State Council for the Tshongs. However, once the system of ethnic parity was done away with in 1979, this provision was withdrawn. Right now Limbus are counted among the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) since 1994. And since then, it is the Limbus (Sanchman and Pawan Singh Limbus ), who are ruling the State.

### *Nepalese or the Paharias (NEPAMUL)*

A new power emerged in Nepal in the form of Prithvi Narayan Shah in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, who consolidated his kingdom in Nepal and his successors tried to extend its boundaries in the East and West of the country. Gorkha generals vanquished the weak Namgyal authority in Sikkim. Gorkha generals Kazi Damodar Pande and Jahar Singh Thapa crossed in to Sikkim and captured territories west of river Tista in 1789. The king of Sikkim, Tenzing Namgyal (1780-1793), ran away to Tibet and sought an asylum. Gorkha occupation in Sikkim continued up to 1817, when the British forced them to leave Sikkim east of river Mechi as per terms of Segauli Treaty. Though the bulk of the Gurkhas withdrew from Sikkim for time being, they returned eastward within a few years as per the British policy to locate Nepalese on the Eastern Himalayas.

Darjeeling was secured by the British from Sikkim, as a hill resort for the convalescing Europeans in 1835. Hardy Nepalese labors were encouraged to settle to clear the forests and develop it in to an urban centre for the European. As per the provisions of the 1861 Treaty signed at Tumlong, the British got a complete foothold in Sikkim. The British secured the Sikkimese principality in 1888 and appointed John Claude White as the Political Officer residing at Gangtok. The Ruler was interned along with his consort and White ran administration with the help of Council of Advisors.

Land lease system was introduced; Nepali Newars were invited to mine copper and mint coins; forestland was released to Nepali labour for agricultural development so that revenue of the State could be increased. Settlement of the 'Paharias' –Nepalese labour led to physical violence between the colonizers and Bhotia qazis. Matter went up to such a situation that ruler, Thutub Namgyal, appealed to the Viceroy to intervene in colonization of the Nepalese in Sikkim. At last, an imaginary line just north of Gangtok, drawn from East to West in 1894, was agreed to be the northern limit of Nepalese settlement in Sikkim.

By the time the third Census of India was conducted in 1891, the number of the Nepalese in Sikkim had risen to 30, 458. Out of which after discounting the Lepchas (5,762), the Bhotias (4,894) and the Limbus (3,356), Nepalese were numbered more than half (15,458). The 2001 Census of India recorded the population of Sikkim at 540,493 persons. Among them 22 percent were identified as the scheduled tribes (Lepcha, Bhotia inclusive of Chumbipa, Dophthapa, Dukpa,



Kagatey, Sherpa, Tibetan, Tromopa, and Dolmo), 5.93 percent as the scheduled castes of Nepali origin (Kami, Saraki, Damai, Lohar and Manjhi) and there are Nepamul (Sinha, A C : 2003) communities such as Tamang, Gurung, Rai, Limbu and Sunwar, who have been recognized as the Other Backward Castes (OBCs).

More than three-fourth population of Sikkim is of Nepali origin. They are socially divided into 'tagadharis' (those, who are entitled to sacred thread---Bahun and Chhetris) and 'matwalis' (those, who are by tradition permitted to drink intoxicants). Then, there is a social hierarchy starting with the Thakuris, Newaris and Kiratis. While the Thakuris have a four fold division of varns (casts); Newaris are a separate ethnic stock invariably following Lamaism and Kiratas claim to the status of 'janajatis' i.e. tribesmen on the fringe of the Nepali social world. The lingua franca of the community is Nepali or Gorkhali. However, Newaris and kiratis are at least bi-lingual and they are not necessarily Hindus.

## **2. Political and Economic Profile**

### ***Sikkim and Nepal***

A profile of Sikkim, even today, cannot be developed without a detailed examination of its long relationship with Nepal which has shaped its history and development more than any other influence, barring India. It appears that with consolidation of Gorkha rule in Kathmandu Valley (1768 - 1814), a new Gorkha or Nepalese identity began to emerge. The Gorkha onslaught on Sikkim led to bad blood between the Bhotias and the Nepalese. There was another reason for this mutual distrust. While Bhotias looked to Tibet as their political, religious and cultural fount, Nepalese were of Hindu orientation in such matters. Almost five decade long excursion in Sikkim did not mean complete withdrawal of Nepalese ethnic elements from Sikkim in 1817 with signing of Treaty of Titaliya, by which Nepal surrender all her possessions east of river Mechi to Namgyal rulers. For example, Jorethang, a small village on south -eastern part of Sikkim, is derived after name of Gorkha General, Jawaher Singh Thapa.

Within less than two decades of signing of the Treaty of Titaliya, Sikkim was inveigled to cede Darjeeling hills, 'the road of destiny' (Pinn 1990) to the British between 1835-1839. Col. W G A Lloyd, the British factotum on Darjeeling hills

in 1830s, “whose lack of sensitivity in human relations was one of his least attractive traits” informed his superiors in Calcutta that the Sikkim ruler had gifted the hill to the British out of friendship. What he did not sufficiently inform that as per oriental tradition the ruler of Sikkim expected a matching return gift from the Governor- General. Thus, possession of Darjeeling began with a built-in grudge on the part of Sikkim. To begin with, it was an enclave within Sikkimese territory, to which the British got engaged in developing in to an urban hill resort.

Within no time, developers, shopkeepers, tea planters and hordes of labourers began to pour in this newly established hill station in search of opportunities. Those were the days, when slavery was a common practice in Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. Apart from genuine migrants, slaves, criminals, and even political fugitives began to take shelter in this New Haven. The hill resort not only gave new opportunities to the new comers, but it also offered better terms of earning and wages.

There was something like exodus of human beings to Darjeeling, which became a matter of resentment among hill states such as Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan with thin population. There was a sizeable migration of the Nepalese to Darjeeling, but Nepal found alternatives to its depleting manpower. Sikkim and Bhutan developed a grudge against growing glitter of Darjeeling and their rulers felt that as if it was done at their cost. Continuous harassment of Darjeeling enclave by ill-informed Sikkimese authorities led to a number of skirmishes between the Sikkimese and the British in next 25 years from ceding of Darjeeling in 1835.

Needless to add that ill-equipped Sikkim was poorly prepared for this context and it lost all the territories south of its present boundary up to the plains of India and west of river Teesta to the Nepalese boundary in the west. Not only that, the British overlords also brought Sikkim under their imperial protection.

This created a new situation in which the British watched Nepalese perseverance and industriousness from close quarters while engaged in developing the newly acquired district of Darjeeling. Wherever unskilled and semi-skilled labour was required, the Nepalese were employed, especially in the hilly tracts. Within a few decades, Darjeeling was developed as model district by dint of Nepalese labour. There was another angle to this scenario.

The British were suspicious of the people of Tibetan origin. They experimented



with Nepalese response in similar situations and found them 'loyal, trustworthy and obedient'. Thus, they decided unintentionally to settle the eastern Himalayan foothills with the Nepalese settlement, a wedge between the highlander Bhotias and the Indian plains.

The culmination of this policy might be seen in Herbert H Risley's famous gazetteer of Sikkim in 1994 (Risley, H H : 1994). Naturally, under British inspiration, the Nepalese began to settle in western, and southern Sikkim and south western Bhutan. In the year 1867, two Newar brothers, Laxmidas and Chandrabir Maksey, were granted deeds for settling Nepalese on wasteland and uninhabited areas in East and South Sikkim, mining copper and minting coins.

The lease was granted for a period of 20 years at an annual rate of Rs. 500 to the king and Rs. 700 to Phodang Lama and Khansa Dewan. They opened the virgin areas to the colonizers, brought in skilled labour for mining and minting, organized forests, constructed link roads and bridged some of the streams for road traffic. They ultimately developed about 20 estates and within two decades the demographic picture of Sikkim was changed by turning the west and south districts into predominantly Nepalese habitations. This was not to the liking of the Bhotia pastoralists, who desired extensive land for grazing their cattle, leading to armed conflicts between the two sides.

Thutub Namgyal (1874-1914) succeeded his half brother to the throne of Sikkim in 1874 and married his widow. He appears to be obstinate in temperament, indecisive in state matters and partisan to a faction of the courtiers. Unfortunate for him, his coming to power in Sikkim coincided with an aggressive policy to push to the Himalayas by the British. Sikkim rulers had extensive estate in Chumbi valley and they used to reside at Phari specially during the winter months and some members of the family used to stay there regularly and visit royal personae in Sikkim frequently. Herdsmen grazing royal cattle on northern pastureland across the Himalayan divide used to descend to low lying Chumbi valley during the freezing winter months. Northern Sikkim commanded ideal and extensive pasture -land in which Tibetan and Sikkimese cattle used to graze as per the demand of the season.

The herdsmen traded butter, cheese, wool, yak tails, leather and hide, precious stone, horses, dogs and other light but precious commodities. By tradition every Bhotia inclusive of monks are entitled to trade. Their normal orientation was



naturally north to Tibet, to which they visited on pilgrimage, trading and even contracting marital alliances. The Namgyal court was equally divided in to factions. At least the one of such factions, to which the British termed as the pro-Tibetan, was aggressively antagonistic to Nepalese settlement, and not without reasons, on alleged British instigation.

Thutub was ordered to secure Tibetan compliance on the British demands to open their marts for British goods and to receive the British representatives for political and commercial negotiations, to which he was not temperamentally suited. Having failed to accomplish the expected demands, the royal couple was imprisoned at Kurseong, Darjeeling and Kalimpong on nominal maintenance allowance. The King was asked to re-call his son, Tchoda Namgyal, the crown prince known as Tarings, to Sikkim for getting him educated. The royal couple saw through the façade and decided to send the contrary message to the Prince. Having exhausted their patience in securing the Prince back to Sikkim, the British at last refused his claim to the throne and decided to groom Sidkeong Tulku as the future king.

### *Sikkim and Bengal*

All through second part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sikkim was treated as if it was part of Bengal Presidency. In fact, it was the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling and Commissioner of Rajshahi Division, of Bengal, who were controlling the affairs of the state. By 1888, the British had decided to take over the administration by appointing a resident Political Officer, John Claude White, who had experienced the Nepalese perseverance in the past and was steeped in the British desire to push to the Himalayas to the maximum. He began to structure the Sikkimese economy “Chaos reigned everywhere, no revenue system, the Maharaja taking what he required, as he wanted it from the people, those nearest the capital having to contribute to the larger share, while those more remote had toll taken from them by the local officials in the name the raja, though little found its way to him; no court of justice, no police, no public works, no education for younger generation. The task before me was a difficult one, but fascinating; the country was a new one and every thing was in my hands”(White 1971).

In such a situation, there was no surprise that the coffers of the state were empty; he appointed an advisory council; surveyed the different districts and within a period of five years, a system taxation and revenue was established. Further more,



he found "the country sparsely populated, and in order to bring more land under cultivation, it was necessary to encourage immigration, and this was done by giving land on favourable terms to Nepalese, who, as soon as they knew it was to be had, came freely in".

The British took the steps to introduce a system of periodic land lease, in which cultivable areas were divided into Ellakas. The entire such land was divided into: land lease to the Lessees on periodic auction, private estates, and Ellakas under the five/ six monasteries. Land revenue was to be deposited on the fixed dates by the lease holders to the State bankers. Revenue from the private estates was also to be deposited to the State Bankers, M/S Jethraj Bhojmul on state account. And the monasteries held their estates rent -free and spend the revenue on upkeep of their establishments and other ecclesiastic purposes.

However, all three types of land holdings were extremely oppressive to the cultivators (*bustiwalas*). There was a series of unpaid labour practices employed by all the Ellaka-holders. Then there were Newar *Thekodars*, who were allotted land on contract (*thika*) way back in 1877 for mining, settlements, and forest management. The State was happy to collect its revenue on fixed dates and forget about the fate of the cultivators most of time.

Most of these landlords held judicial and policing powers as well, which made the life of cultivators all the more difficult. The last lease of land ended in 1935, which was extended to the time it was finally abolished under popular demand after Indian independence.

### **3. Sikkim and India**

By the 1940s, the Political Officer in Gangtok had developed a new found sympathy for the Bhotia ruler. It appears that the common Nepalese inking towards democratic movements warned them to side with the Bhotias against their one time favourite, the Nepalese. AJ Hopekinson, the last British Political Officer, advised the rulers of Sikkim and Bhutan to send their delegation along with their memoranda to wait on the Cabinet Mission sent by Britain to negotiate with the Indians for transfer of power. The Sikkimese delegation went to Delhi, but failed to meet the Mission. However, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India prepared a route for the Cabinet Mission on August 10, 1946,

which provided the guidelines for future to the Indian Union:

“In practice, it may well prove difficult to secure a tidy solution to the future of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan and even to the Eastern marches of Kashmir, Ladakh. This will largely depend on future policy and fate of China and hence of Tibet. The Government of the (Indian) Union must be prepared for complication on North East Frontier (NEFA) and evolve a policy to meet them. This may well have to be that of maintaining all principalities in virtual independence of India, but as buffer and, as far as possible, client states. There may be greater advantage in according Sikkim a more independent status than in seeking to absorb Bhutan as well Sikkim in the Indian Union, adding to the communal problem of Buddhism to those of Islam and Hinduism...the Government would be well advised to avoid entering in to fresh commitments with any one of those frontier states or seeking to redefine their status. Their importance is strategic in direct relation to Tibet and China and indirectly to Russia. Such adjustment of their relations with the (Indian) Union as can usefully be affected by ...those political strategic considerations ... account of which it is hoped that the Treaty will take rather than the Constitutional niceties, which do not help defence policy” (Sinha 1998).

### *State Politics*

Against the above imperial advice, which the newly independent Indian Union seems to have followed, the masses of three Himalayan kingdoms identified themselves with Indian aspirations and shared their perception of change and identified their feudal rulers with archaic colonial privileges. Many of leaders of the Nepali Congress, Sikkim State Congress and Bhutan State Congress were members of the Indian National Congress and at least some of them, identified themselves with the demands for responsible government, abolition of the feudal rights and introduction of land reforms by abolishing landed gentry.

Similarly, the oppressed of Sikkim, before they organized themselves into Sikkim State Congress, had limited and localized organizations such as Praja Sudharak Samaj, Gangtok, led by Tashi Tshering; Praja Samelan, Temi Tarku, led by D B Tewari and Gobardhan Pradhan; and Praja Mandal, Chakhung, led by Lhendup Dorji Kazi. The indomitable Tashi Tshering called for a public meeting of like-minded groups on December 7, 1947 at Polo Ground, Gangtok and invited other two fora to join his efforts. He had prepared a document, “A Few Facts About



Sikkim” in English, which was translated in to Nepali by Chandra Das Rai and its cyclo-styled copies were distributed among the masses. There were star leaders such as Tshering himself, Sonam Tshering, L D Kazi, Roy Chaudhury, Mrs.Helen Lepch , but the thunder was stolen by 24 year old C.D Rai, whose eloquent Nepali speech was a novel experience to politically indolent Sikkim.

Sensing the public mood, the three above organizations decided jointly to form Sikkim State Congress on that very day and chalked out to meet the ruler with a three point demand: (a) abolition of landlordism; (b) formation of an interim government and (c) accession of Sikkim to India. The State Congress leaders met the ruler on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1947 with their above charter of demands.

The Maharaja was advised to go with the changing time and concede the popular demands of the common man. Some land reforms were immediately introduced such as abolition of lessee system; end of various forms of un-paid labour; restructuring of judicial system. As negotiation was on between the Sikkim Durbar and the Government of India, it was decided to keep in abeyance the demand for Sikkim’s merger with India. Without working out modalities of its functioning, its power and legal implications, it was agreed to install a popular interim government with five members; two nominees of the king and three from the State Congress.

The indolent Maharaja had almost surrendered all his political and administrative functions in favour of his son, Palden Thondup, in whose scheme of things Sikkim stood for only Bhotia, Lepchs and Tchongs.

Sensing the mood of time, even the prince was forced to go to the people. He got his courtiers, aristocrats, monks and sycophants organized into the Sikkim National Party, “an anti-thesis of the State Congress” on April 30, 1948 to oppose all the steps, resolutions and personnel of the State Congress and back all the moves on the part of palace for the continuation of its anachronism. The popular leaders waited for about a year and saw that the palace instead of agreeing to their demands was busy consolidating itself.

The Congress went on agitation to press for its demands in February, 1949, in which popular leaders such as C D Rai and other five were arrested. This triggered a spate of resentment against the palace and more than ten thousand followers of the Congress gheraoed the palace on May 1, 1949. The Maharaja had

taken shelter in the Residency and the administration had stopped functioning. On the advice of the Political Officer, Harishwer Dayal, I C S to Maharaja was forced to install at long last a popular ministry on May 1949 with Tashi Tshering as the Chief Minister, D S Lepcha, and C D Rai from the State Congress and D Dahdul and R P Alley, two nominees of the ruler.

This was the high point of the achievements of the Sikkim Congress, which normally assumed that it had the mandate from the people to rule the country as per its party programme. On the other hand, the palace felt that it had placated the populists and it would choose their own time and action to mould the emergent situation. In such a situation, there was little chance that this half way democratic experiment would succeed. Having read the writings on the walls, Tashi Tshering, the Chief Minister realized that the formation of the ministry had been agreed to by the Durbar more with a view to discrediting the Congress leaders than allowing them to carry out the people's mandate. Disgusted with scheming of the Crown Prince, the Chief Minister threatened to resign and assumed agitation (*satyagraha* or peaceful protests).

Alarmed by these developments, New Delhi decided to send its Deputy Minister for External Affairs to Gangtok. The minister stayed in Sikkim for four days, met with the ministers twice, the Maharaja, Maharajkumar, even the 'leaders' of Sikkim National Party and came back to Delhi without resolving the problem. It is alleged that 'the Sikkim Durbar went all out to dazzle the Minister with Sikkim's royal hospitality and loaded him with costly gifts'. It appears that the palace had been able to impress upon the visitor that New Delhi would find the Durbar more dependable than that of the popular public leaders. This became clear on June 6, 1949, when Political Officer, Harishwer Dayal, I C S, summoned the Sikkim cabinet to his office and informed them that they had been dismissed by him in the name of the Government of India and he had taken over the administration of Sikkim himself.

The leaders, who had all along had faith in good office of the ruling Indian leaders, were stunned by this course of action. The public was demoralized and the palace heaved a sigh of relief. The Government of India asked the Durbar to appoint a senior administrator as the Dewan of Sikkim, who would over-see the social reforms, economic development and governance of the state.



### *Ethnic Balancing Act*

J S Lall of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) took over as the Dewan of Sikkim on August 11, 1949 and tried to streamline the administration in view of the popular demands for land reforms, forced labour and feudal privileges. To the disappointment of State Congress, the Indo-Sikkimese Treaty was signed at Gangtok by Political Officer, Harishwer Dayal and the Maharaja of Sikkim, Tashi Namgyal on December 5, 1950. It stipulated that Sikkim would be an Indian protectorate.

The Government of India was to retain defence, external affairs, custom and communication. India agreed to provide Rs. three lakh per annum to Sikkim as long as the Government of Sikkim duly observed the terms of Treaty. Furthermore, the Supreme Court of India would be the last arbitrator in case of any dispute in interpretation of the provisions of Treaty. The Maharaja issued a Proclamation proposing an election for the State Council with 12 elected members, five nominated members and a President to be nominated by the king.

More sinister for democratic forces was the introduction of the evil of notorious 'parity system', by which about 25 percent Lepcha- Bhotias on six elective seats were equated with 75 percent Sikkimese of Nepalese extraction on another six such seats in the Council. Needless to add that this formula was further extended to all walks of life in Sikkimese administration causing strong resentment among the sufferers. Similarly, the electoral process, voting procedure, counting system and even election tribunals were skewed in such a way that the Nepalese in general and democratic forces in particular were at a disadvantage.

The first election to the State Council was held in the middle of June 1953. The results confirmed the expected electoral behaviour by choosing six Nepalese belonging to State Congress on Nepali seats and six Lepcha- Bhotias aligned to Sikkim National Party on Lepcha- Bhotia seats. The number of seats in the State Council kept on changing from 17 in 1953 to 20 in 1958 ( One, more to king's nominees + one to the Monks—Sangha + one, the General Seat running for entire state), and 24 in 1966 ( King's nominees-6+Lepcha-Bhotia-7 + Nepalese-7+ Sangha- 1 + General -1 + Tchongs-1 + Scheduled Castes- 1).

In practice 18 elective seats in State Council were divided between Nepalese and Lepcha- Bhotias. While two ethnic Lepchas and Bhotias were shown together for

distribution of loafs and bread, numerically large Nepalese common wealth invariably shown as fragmented. While Sikkim National Party, a beneficiary to these scheming was more than willing to welcome such a fraud, t he State Congress and its off-shoots invariably protested, which was brushed aside by the palace. The State Council and Executive Council Proclamation, 1953 claimed “to associating people more and more closely with the governance of the State’, but in reality it created an intricate arrangement of electoral process with a limited, complex, controversial and purposive political participation. The Executive Council with its limited power was used as a leverage to cause defection from democratic parties and legislative wing of these parties were not given their right to choose their representatives to it. All along, efforts were made on the part of the Durbar to polarize the political parties along its ‘cherished ethnic divide’. This becomes clear, when one casts a glance on electoral results of political parties during the five elections held for the State Council from 1953 to 1973:

**Table 1**  
**Electoral results of the political parties in Sikkim from 1953 to 1973.**

S.N	Political Parties	1953	1958	1967	1970	1973	Total
1.	Sikkim State Congress	6	8	2	4	2	22
2.	Sikkim National Party	6	6	5	7	9	33
3.	Sikkim National Congress ..	..	..	8	5	5	18
4.	Unattached Independents ..	..	..	3	2	2	07
	Elective Seats in Council	12	14	18	18	18	80

One learns certain lessons from the above table. Firstly, with active support and connivance of the Durbar, the Sikkim National Party increased its representation in the Council continuously from 1958 to 1973, when its rigged support base colapsed once the massed decided not to take the farce any more. Secondly, affairs of Sikkim State Congress were similarly on the decline, as its leaders proved more vulnerable to the poaching from others susceptible to the loaves and fishes from power to be. Thirdly, Sikkim National Congress under the leadership of Lhendup Dorji Kazi continued to be persecuted and its functionaries were invariably harassed to the extent that all its General Secretaries were made to leave the party. Chandra D Rai, Bhim B Gurung, Lal B Basnet, Santosh K Rai, Chatur Singh Rai and Nand Lal Thapa were made to leave the party because of various cases filed by the State or agencies.



## *The Indian Hand*

Rigging and other electoral malpractices became blatant by the time elections to the State Council were held in 1973. A small controversy with reference to the counting centre at Gangtok ignited and within no time political parties organized demonstrations against the Government. Police force was used to control the agitation, which added fuel to fire. Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim State Congress demanded countermanding of the election and ordering a fresh poll. The Durbar adopted its old dual policy of repression and causing dissension in its political rivals. But this time it did not work. Demonstrators began to attack and take over the police stations in the interior. The two political parties decided to boycott and disturb ruler's birthday celebration on April 4, 1974 in spite of appeals made on the contrary. The situation was grim and a pitched battle was fought between the demonstrators and the police. The place was obdurate and went ahead with the birthday celebrations, which angered the masses even more. The administration collapsed and the ruler was forced to request the Political Officer to take over the administration, as his father had done 24 years back. The Political Officer took over the administration for time being, but the political stalemate continued. The Government of India encouraged the Durbar and political leaders to negotiate an agreement and establish normalcy in the State, but stands on both sides were hardening. At last, a tripartite agreement between the ruler, political leaders and India was reached on May 8, 1973.

Unlike in 1949, the Government of India had decided to discard the unsolicited colonial advice this time and took a clear stand on democratic principles. The famous tripartite agreement envisaged ruler to be a constitutional head, establishment of a responsible government with democratic rights, rule of law, fundamental rights, independent judiciary, adult franchise and executive and legislative powers to the people's representatives. Article 5 of the Agreement envisages: "The system of election shall be so organized as to make the (State) Assembly adequately representative of the various sections of the population. The size and the composition of the Assembly and of the Executive Council shall be such as may be prescribed from time to time, care being taken to ensure that no single section of the population acquires a dominating position due mainly to its ethnic origin, and that the rights and interests of the Sikkimese Bhotia- Lepcha origin and of Sikkimese Nepali, which includes Tsongs and scheduled castes origin, are fully protected".

According to the provisions of the Agreement, a State Legislative Assembly of 32 members (Lepcha- Bhotia 15 + one seat to the monks + Nepalese 15 + one seat to the Scheduled Castes among the Nepalese untouchables), a Chief Minister, and a Council of Ministers responsible to the Assembly to be elected on universal adult franchise was envisaged. With a view to carrying out special provisions of the Indo-Sikkimese Treaty, an Office of the Chief Executive to be manned by an Indian functionary was created between the two and a deference of opinion between him the ruler was to be referred to the Political Officer at Gangtok, whose opinion would be binding. The political atmosphere in Sikkim surcharged with and in such excitements, election to the State Assembly were held in April, 1974. With exception of one Lepcha- Bhotia seat to a nominee of Sikkim National Party, the remaining 31 seats were captured by the newly formed Sikkim Congress. Lhendup Dorji Kazi, the leader of Sikkim Congress Legislature Party, was sworn as the first duly elected Chief Minister of Sikkim. These and other developments were seen as evidence of dilution of "Sikkim's International Status" by the Ruler, which may be seen as a conflict between the head of the state and his people.

### *Merger of Sikkim*

The State Assembly met in an emergency session and passed this resolution: "The institution of Chogyal (the head of the state) is hereby abolished and Sikkim shall hence forth be a constituent unit of India". While the ruler went on asking for right of self determination to Sikkim, this Resolution of the Assembly was put to the electorate and 97 percent favoured it. This led to the Indian Parliament passing the 38<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill on April 26, 1975. Thus, Sikkim ceased to exist as an Indian protectorate and became the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of the Indian Union. Accordingly, the office of the Chogyal stood abolished and provisions of the Indo-Sikkimese Treaty, Tripartite Agreement and the Government of India ACT, 1974 were made inoperative. Lhendup Dorji Kazi (LD Kazi), the Chief Minister, emerged as the central figure after these epoch making developments. His style of functioning was that of an old -world patriarch, addicted to advice from all corners, but too old to learn anything afresh.

As the Chief Minister of Sikkim, he changed political affiliation five times between December 1975 to January 1980 as per the change of ruling parties in the Central Government in Delhi. For New Delhi, the Kazi had replaced the old



Chogyal and old policies continued to be pursued. In such a situation, the bureaucrats from the Central Government turned out to be friends, philosophers and guides to the Kazi. The Governor to the State, B B Lal, ICS and Kazi's consort, Kazani Eliza Maria Dorji, basically ran the state. The Kazi was effective for politically placid Sikkimese scenario, but he was not cut for the complex Indian political reality. He could neither restrain his younger colleagues such as Nar Bhadrur Khatiwara, Ram Chandra Poudyal, nor could he satisfy the senior colleagues like Chatur Singh Rai or Bhim B. Gurung.

Very soon, the party became faction ridden; serious charges of corruption were levelled against functionaries. The governor, the Kazani and higher bureaucrats, all began to assert in day to day administration on the name of "the popular government". Kazi was still basking in the 'glory of the merger (of Sikkim to India)' when the first election to the State Assembly was announced. Prior to that Ordinance 7, 1979 was issued by the Government of India, by which 12 seats were reserved for the indigenous tribes like Lepchas and Bhotias, two to the scheduled castes and one to the monks and rest of 17 seats in Assembly were declared as 'general', which means they were open to any Indian to contest, provided that person was a bona fide voter in Sikkim.

Elections to State Assembly were conducted at the end of 1979. The Kazi's party was soundly beaten and he too lost. An upstart, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, who had mounted an aggressive campaign against "Kazi and Co." and termed them 'des bechwas' (those, who had sold the country, Sikkim), secured the maximum seats in the Assembly. And in the subsequent elections, in 1984 and 1989, it was Bhandari, who swept the polls winning almost all the seats in Assembly. He was invited to form the government. Bhandari's long regime of 15 years was notorious for charges of corruption, inefficiency, and high-handedness.

This schoolteacher turned Chief Minister was later charged for possessing property disproportionate to his known sources of income. Bhandari became so autocratic that no body could oppose him for his lapses and survive politically. That also included his wife, who was elected as the member of the Indian Parliament from Sikkim. However, he kept on raising the issue of reserving seats in the State Assembly for the Nepamul, the Indians of Nepalese origin, the constitutional recognition of Nepali as an Indian language and granting citizenship to the remaining Nepamul in Sikkim. But, once the Government of India implemented the Mandal Commission Reports, there was a type of upsurge



among the Nepamul Bharatiyas.

Leaders of communities, listed as the 'Other Backward Castes' by the Mandal Commission, raised the flag of revolt against Bhandari charging that he stood for the hegemony of the higher castes among the Nepamul. A little-known former police constable turned politician, Pawan Singh Chamlin, upset Bhandari's apple cart, by forming a new political party, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) and posing a serious challenge to his leadership. The elections to the State Assembly 1994, 1999 and 2004 proved that Bhandari's style of politics was not appreciated any more by the Sikkimese electorate and Chamling carried home in these polls.

#### **4. Sikkim and its Immediate Region**

Sikkim is a Himalayan State. Its history, culture, society, economy, resources and over-all world-view is intricately routed in its neighbourhood and is shared with the communities across political boundaries. Bhotia, Lamaism (Mahayan Buddhism), traditional north ward trading across the Himalayas will not be understood without reference to Sherpas, Tibetans and Bhutanese in general and Chumbi Valley in particular. Similarly, highlanders' pastoral economy will be better appreciated and its relevance understood in terms of its linkages with North District beyond Nothu-la pass and seasonal cycle of human and cattle movements across the Himalayan divide. Lepcha and Linbu traditions in themselves will remain relevant largely to the ethnographic interest, but if an effort is made to see the phenomenon in its terms of 'kirati culture' and 'janajati movement in eastern Nepal, a new vista will open to appreciate the nuances of ethnicity.

Only then, can a holistic image of Sikkimese society emerge. How can one imagine high altitude eco-tourism in Sikkim without reference to Eastern Nepal, Chumbi valley in Tibet, Ha Valley of Bhutan and Darjeeling? Even if we agree to insulate Sikkimese Nepamul from Nepal for the sake of argument, the Nepamul scenario of Sikkim will always be incomplete without reference to Darjeeling. And the river Teesta, which is backbone of Lepcha and Sikkimese lifeline, equally inseparable from every day life of the common people of North Bengal. Any talk of electric generation, industrial enterprise, irrigation system, horticultural efforts in Sikkim without reference to West Bengal will simply be impractical and futile.



## ***Border Trade***

Up to 1962 there was a thriving Indo-Tibetan trade across the border through the Nathu-la Pass, Gangtok, Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Calcutta. This trade was carried with the help of coolies, ponies, yaks, and other animals across Himalayan divides through road less terrain. Tibetan aristocrats, lamas, commoners, Sikkimese Kazis, Newar traders, Ladakhachi caravan pliers, and Marwari merchants all had their establishments at the above towns. So much so that even cars used to be dismantled in parts and carried to the Tibetan plateau on the back of humans and animals. And there was an intricate net work to supply commodities from Calcutta to Lhasa in Tibet and likewise Tibetan wool, gold, precious gems, borax, dogs, yak tails and other light and luxury items were brought to Indian markets.

The British had an eye on the Tibetan tea market and had even planned a hundred years back to stretch the Indian railways from Siliguri to Chumbi valley to facilitate this border trade. There were occasions on these days, when Chinese travelers from Tibetan locations to China and Tibetan dignitaries going back to Tibet from China were facilitated through this route. Kalimpong, located on a nodal point, was closest to Chumbi Valley, Bhutan, Gangtok and Darjeeling, and thus it developed in to an ideal border trading mart.

The border dispute between India and China led to discontinuation of this regional lifeline in 1962. It is gratifying that once more Sino-Indian friendship is growing and it is hoped that border trade across Nathu-la pass will begin very soon. There is some teething problem in it at the local level. Nathu-la falls under exclusive Bhotia region, where non-tribal cannot own land as per existing law of the land. But not only all ethnic groups of Sikkim, but even traders from outside Sikkim see opening of the border trade as a new opportunity for them to join in.

There is already a clamour in favour or against the existing land laws in the region. In fact, the governments of Sikkim and West Bengal are coordinating their efforts to remove bottlenecks, and creating warehousing, custom clearance facilities, space for the traders, market, transportation, electric power transmission, residential, banking and other administrative amenities in consultation with the Central Government. Caution has to be sounded in this regard. Traditional patterns of trading is on the mind of the Indian stake-holders, in which human and

animal power was used for transportation on the mule tracks; limited and relatively light commodities were traded; and informal banking facilities based on kinship or friendly ties were utilized. Since then the world has undergone a massive change.

Local and regional Bhotia and Tibetan traders will now have to compete with the most articulate, experienced and enterprising younger generation of new traders coming from all over the region and beyond. In case this route does meet with their expectations of the stake holders, it will be a big setback to similar initiatives elsewhere. Expectations are high from this trade route and if it is opened, it has the potential to provide a new corridor to Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal from Tibet besides boosting the regional economy of Sikkim and Darjeeling.

## **5. Eco-Tourism, Mountain Tourism**

Apart from trading, this region has other potential: eco-tourism and mountain tourism and horticultural innovations. Darjeeling has been a centre of mountaineering to high Himalayan peaks for decades. Darjeeling has the world heritage toy train, a narrow gauge train built at the time of the British and which is a major tourist attraction. High altitude mountain trekking and climbing, pilgrimages to hill top monasteries across Eastern Nepal, Darjeeling, Sikkim, Chumbi Valley and western Bhutan are enormous draws. It is time to think along these lines and plan for the infrastructure to turn potential into reality. Sikkim, Darjeeling and Western Bhutan are endowed with some of the rare varieties of orchids, flowers, fruits, rhododendrons, butterflies as well as the rarely-sighted snow leopard, bears and many birds species. These are rarely exposed on eco-tourism, which will also be linked with high altitude sports.

More than 82 percent of the total area of the State is classified as forestland. Out of which 42.46 percent area is under the National Parks and Sanctuaries, where flora and fauna are protected. In this context it may be mentioned that 1, 785 sq. km. Khangchendzonga National Park is proposed to increase to 2,600 sq. km. More than one- third of the 5,000 flowering plants found in the country, are located in Sikkim.

Similarly, almost fifty percent of 1400 butterflies, recorded in Indian sub-continent, have been identified in the State (Department of Information and



Public Relations: 2003). The Sikkim is the State, whose Chief Minister was adjudged as the most eco-friendly (the Greenest) head of the administration among the Indian States some year's back. The State has identified Dendrobium Nobile as the State Flower, rhododendron as the State Tree, red Panda as the State Animal and Blood Pheasant as the State Bird.

As we have mentioned earlier that Sikkim is the land of Limbu-kirati cultural context with Buddhistic overtone, religious tourism may be another area where Sikkim may collaborate with its immediate neighbours to the north in Tibet, east to Bhutan and south in Darjeeling in West Bengal. Sikkim has three dozen significant monasteries besides famous Namgyal Institute of Technology at Gangtok. The hydroelectric power is one area in which Sikkim has potential, because its snowfed perennial rivers pass through extremely undulating topography, ideal for such an enterprise.

It goes without saying that Sikkim's recent membership to North Eastern Council is more in the domain of economic development of smaller mountainous and frontier states on India's north eastern frontiers. As soon as one crosses the Rangit River at Rangpo, one finds evidence of new direction -- small-scale industrial units, institutions of higher learning, hydropower generation projects. In view of a journalist, Sikkim has limited industrial options, which are further complicated by the absence of its own airport and railhead. It has, therefore, rightly focused on micro industries. A current success is the processing of Dalley, the small red chilly that surprises every body by its volatile pungency (Rai, J : 2004).

By and large, Sikkim is entirely engaged in primary sector of production: agriculture, horticulture, grazing, dairy production and mining. Among the industries, Sikkim Distillery, Sikkim Jewels, Sikkim Time Corporation are the ones, which are just visible. There are about a dozen cotton production-cum-training centres and another half a dozen centres for production of woollen cloth. All these together hardly employ less than 5, 000 persons. In the absence of sufficient cultivable land in this mountainous state, it is industries, which holds the key for providing gainful employment to the Sikkimese. However, there are handicaps and constraints in this regard: (i) Lack of knowledge of the entrepreneur regarding manufacturing activities; (ii) Lack of raw material; (iii) Absence of proper manpower; (iv) Poor marketing network; (v) Inflexible land laws and lack of enabling laws; (vi) Underdeveloped infrastructure facilities, and (vii) Shortage of credit and finance (Lama, M P : 2001).

Sikkim has made progress during these last decades. For example, the infant mortality rate dropped from 60 in 1951 to 51 in the year 1997. Similarly, literacy rates went up from 7 percent in 1951 to 70 percent in 2001 and as much as 83 percent children between the age group of 6 to 17 years attend schools. Now school exists within walking distance of each village. Women enjoy relatively greater freedom in Sikkim compared to their sisters from other state of Indian Union in a number of ways. Sikkim reported a per capita Net Domestic Product of Rs.. 9, 472 in 1995-1996. Only 23 percent children below the age of 3 years were found malnourished against an all India such statistics of 47 percent in the year 1998-99. Over 80 percent households have electricity; 85 percent of the households have piped or hand pump generated drinking water system and as much as 73 percent households have toilet or latrine facility as against 36 percent for India as a whole.

As agriculture has a handicap and industries are yet to make a mark, Sikkim as well joins her other sister states of North Eastern Council for solution to their similar problems. Once the trade route between Tibet and Sikkim at Nathula pass is formalized, an all weather multilane road running from Nathula to Gangtok, Rangpo, Kalimpong and Siliguri in the plains will change the economic scenario of the region. Then possibly Sikkim will have to think of developing a dry transport depot at Rangpo. There is a lot of silent trade, which goes across borders with Nepal and Bangladesh. This has to be formalized and made use of in a positive way. Sikkim is similar in some ways to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Kampuchea, Malaysia and Vietnam. Most of them are basically agricultural communities with a fast growing rural population. They have their traditional skill of mountain agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry, fishing and hunting. What these hard working people require are modern technological expertise to get gainful employment in industries and service sectors.

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