



THE CULTURAL  
HERITAGE OF  
**SIKKIM**

*Edited by*

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MANOHAR

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# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	9
<i>Prologue</i>	11
<i>Introduction</i>	13
PART I: HISTORY AND HERITAGE	
1. The Residency, Bharat Bhawan and Raj Bhawan A.C. SINHA	25
2. Mapping the Heritage: Sikkim as a <i>Place</i> in Travel Narratives of the Colonial Era MOINAK CHOUDHURY	39
3. The Process of State Formation and its Impact on Social Formation in Eastern Nepal and Sikkim, Sixteenth-nineteenth Centuries BINAYAK SUNDAS	51
4. Changing Dynamics of Traditional Culture of Sikkim in Different Times: From the Lepcha Era to the Modern Period RAJIV RAI and MAHENDRA PRASAD GURUNG	71
5. Protection of Traditional Cultural Expressions of Indigenous Communities in Sikkim: Contextualization within the Institutional Framework for Protection of Traditional Knowledge in India VEER MAYANK	89
6. Traditional Healing Practices and the Role of Traditional Health Practitioners in Primary Health Care: A Medical Heritage of Sikkim TSHERING LEPCHA	109

## PART II: PEOPLE

7. Culture Kept Alive through Oral Traditions:  
A Peep into the World of the Lepchas  
KACHYO LEPCHA 127
8. *Tamba* Oral Tradition and Transference of  
Tales in the Darjeeling, Sikkim Himalayas  
SHRADHANJALI TAMANG 143
9. Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Tamangs of  
Sikkim: Exploring History through Oral Narratives  
YOUGAN TAMANG 151
10. The Tamang Community in Sikkim:  
A Cultural Background  
ANJANA TAMANG 169
11. Where the Material and the Ceremonial Meet:  
Understanding Alcohol Culture in Sikkim:  
A Gender Analysis  
PABITRA SHARMA and ANUPAM MUKHERJEE 185

## PART III: RELIGION AND RITUAL

12. Bon Religion in Sikkim  
GNUDUP SANGMO BHUTIA 199
13. Geographical Features and Religion:  
Buddhism among the Lhopos  
KARMA CHODEN BHUTIA 213
14. Significance of Cham Dance:  
The Masked Ritual in Sikkim  
PRAMITA GURUNG 223
15. Rituals and Death Memorial: *Chowtara* among  
the Limbus of Sikkim  
BINU DORJEE 235

SECTION IV: TOURISM AND ECONOMY

16. Transhumance to Home Stay Tourism:  
A Transformation of Cultural and Economic  
Activities at Lachen Valley, Sikkim  
NAZRUL ISLAM and BAPPA SARKAR 255
17. Who Dances for Kanchenjunga?  
Cultural Heritage and Tourism in Sikkim  
POURIANGTHANLIU 273
18. Culture, Creativity and Tourism: A Study of Sikkim  
SANJUKTA SATTAR 289
19. Infrastructure Development: Strategy for Inclusive  
and Sustainable Heritage Tourism in Sikkim  
DEBASHISH BATABYAL and DILIP KUMAR DAS 303
20. Maize Cultivation in Sikkim:  
Food Security and Strategy  
SUMITABHA CHAKRABARTY 321

PART V: ART AND MUSEUM

21. Musical Instruments of Limbu in Sikkim  
JAYANTA KUMAR BARMAN 341
22. Folk Dance as a Cultural Symbol among  
Nepalis of Sikkim  
DEPICA DAHAL 353
23. Role of Monastery and Craft Centre in  
the Perpetuation of Ethnic Craft in Sikkim:  
Issues of Tradition and Change  
SUMAHAN BANDYOPADHYAY 369
24. Rong Lupon Sonam Tshering and his 'Museum  
of Innocence': A Unique Mission for the  
Preservation of Lepcha Arts, Crafts and Culture  
MAITREYEE CHOUDHURY 387

25. Integrating Museum, Intangible Heritage, Cultural Empowerment and Anthropology through Collaboration: Focusing on Sikkim Himalaya SEKH RAHIM MONDAL	401
<i>Contributors</i>	415
<i>Index</i>	419

# Introduction

In recent years Sikkim has attracted many tourists from across the world; especially after topping the list of best region to visit in 2014 by the popular travel guide Lonely Planet. It applauded Sikkim for its innovative tourism project setting 'new benchmarks for responsible travel'. But Sikkim has been of interest for many scholars, administrators and explorers long before the travel bug that brings people to Sikkim today.

Populated with only 6.1 lakh people, Sikkim is the second smallest state in India bordering Nepal in the west, Tibet in the north, Bhutan in the east and West Bengal in the south. Mt. Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world is the guardian deity of the state as the various mountain peaks, glaciers, lakes, hot springs, waterfalls, and the many rivers add to its diverse range of flora and fauna that are integral to the ecosystem of the state. From Joseph Dalton Hooker, the world famous Botanist to Halfdan Siiger's Danish expedition that brought them to Sikkim, few interesting researches have introduced Sikkim to the rest of the scholarly world as their topics of study were usually descriptive narratives telling about the people and the place. In recent decades, we have seen the gradual growth in Sikkim studies from both foreign and Indian scholars as there is an increased local interest with the establishment of Sikkim University as well.

The present publication is a result of a conference that was jointly organized by Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University with Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS), Bhopal in April 2015. We are proud to present this volume that touches on the history, the people, the religion, tourism and also the art of Sikkim. It brings together articles from senior professors who have worked in the region for many decades to budding native scholars from the region itself. This volume could be of interest not only to anthropologists but historians, geographers, economists, tourism

personnel, museologists and students in general. There is a hope that this book could be useful to both academics, students and lay persons in studying the various tangible and intangible heritage of Sikkim.

## . ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUME

The book is divided into five parts with twenty-five essays under various sub-themes.

The first part looks into the history and heritage of Sikkim. It starts off with A.C. Sinha's article by giving a picture of how the Raj Bhawan in Sikkim started off as the Himalayan watch tower on Tibet and transitioned to Bharat Bhawan as Sikkim became a protectorate of India and finally the Raj Bhawan since Sikkim's merger with India. In these different roles it has subsumed, the author points out how it has played a crucial role in shaping Sikkim's destiny and the history of the region.

The second chapter by Moinak Choudhury explores colonial travel literature in mapping the cultural heritage of Sikkim. The author argues that these travel narratives create a sense of place as it explores Sikkim's conversion from space to place. Hooker is seen as a significant contributor as he writes about the people, the place and the political atmosphere of Sikkim. It is in his writings that the image of the indolent Lepcha finds its origins as it continues to be found in the writings of Donaldson, Waddell, Freshfield and those that follow. These narratives however are also accused of the absence of information in their writings as there are many missing links in the attempt to create a place.

The third chapter by Binayak Sundas maps the process of state formation and socio-politico history of Sikkim and the Eastern Himalaya in general. The author makes a point how no particular province in these parts could be studied in isolation as it is all a part of the larger history as he analyzes the relationship of these smaller states between the period of sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. He stresses the importance of history in ethnographical and sociological studies because of the rise of ethnic associations even in Sikkim and the need to find a historical perspective to these problems today.



The fourth chapter in this part is by Rajiv Rai and Mahendra Prasad Gurung and provides a thorough insight into the changing dynamics of culture and tradition of the history of Sikkim. The article starts with the introduction of Lepchas who were the first settlers in Sikkim and the coming of Bhutias that lead to the establishment of Namgyal dynasty, introduction of new rituals and the emergence of a new social class. The role of British tracing to the Anglo-Gorkha war and the rise of the Nepalese population changes the polity and demography of Sikkim as the state today is a complex mixture of cultures, ethnicities and religion. The authors highlights the transformation of Sikkim to a modern state.

The fifth chapter by Veer Mayank discusses the provision for protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions that exists for indigenous people across the world. He also highlights the institutional framework in the Indian context by talking about the Biological Diversity Act 2002 that has several provisions to protect traditional knowledge. It is in this framework that the Sikkim State Biodiversity Board was established in 2006 where the traditional knowledge is protected. This chapter therefore gives us an understanding of how indigenous people are empowered to exercise their rights at the local, national, regional and an international level.

The last chapter in this part by Tshering Lepcha dwells on the traditional healing practices and the role of traditional health practitioners as a medical heritage of Sikkim. He mentions how the traditional healers are often the first preference for most people in rural Sikkim when it comes to seeking medical treatment. Different communities in Sikkim have their own healers treating various kinds of illness through chants, medicinal plants and herbs, so to restore good health. While the healers were not always full time practitioners, the author has included different case studies from the field and while people's belief in these traditional healers are strong, he notices the decline in these experts and proposes the strengthening and promotion of these healers at the grassroots level.

The second section of the book explores the oral histories of at least two communities in Sikkim. The first article is on the Lepchas followed by three articles on the Tamangs while the last article looks into gender and alcohol use in Sikkim.

The first chapter by Kachyo Lepcha talks about the Lepcha oral tradition called *lungten sung* that includes myths, origin of the world, humans, animals, and other elements in Lepcha culture. It is a derivation of two Lepcha words, *lungten* meaning traditional activity of handing down statements, beliefs, legends, or customs and *sung* meaning story or narrative. The author focuses on the myth of *Lasso Mung*, the evil spirit that rampaged the Lepcha and killing Lepcha people as many aspects of Lepcha culture and religion are interconnected to this figure.

The second chapter by Shradhanjali Tamang also mentions the Tamang tradition of indigenous storytelling called *Tamba*. The word is a derivation of two Tamang words, *Tam* meaning speech and *Ba* meaning agent of speech making him the carrier of traditional tales and oral history. The author traces the evolution of these oral narratives and how it thrives through songs and rituals and tells the story of *Danphe-Munal* as it is told in this region. While stressing the importance once again in preserving and archiving these tales, she also discusses the power struggle between the spoken and the written word.

The third chapter by Yougan Tamang is on the history of Tamangs through oral narratives as he presents various voices of elderly Tamangs regarding the origin, migration, religion and culture of Tamangs. The author mentions the lack of documentation of these oral narratives and the need to document so to understand the history of Tamangs.

Digressing from oral sources, Anjana Tamang gives a cultural background of the Tamang community in Sikkim. The author gives a detailed description of Tamang origin, religion, rituals, dress and ornaments, songs and dances, festivals and food habits of the community who was granted the Scheduled Tribe status in 2002.

The last chapter in this part by Pabitra Sharma and Anupam Mukherjee discusses alcohol culture in Sikkimese society. Alcohol is an integral part of their everyday life with religious and cultural importance among the different communities here. The brewing of alcohol is seen to be a home-based industry and women are the producers while the men mainly are the consumers. The author cites various myths, rituals to explain the importance of alcohol

while bringing the argument about the shift from traditional to distilled alcohol that has also affected the consumption pattern as women consumption is observed to be the second highest in north-east India. Though a cultural heritage of some sort, the problems due to alcohol especially in contemporary society needs to be addressed by a policy implemented to tackle the same.

The third part of the book is on Religion and Ritual in Sikkim. Gnudup Sangmo Bhutia discusses the presence of Bon Religion in Sikkim and traces its origin to Tibet. Bon was a pre-Buddhist belief system of the people of Tibet which declined after the introduction of Buddhism. Followers of Bon faced persecution and were forced to convert to Buddhism but they managed to incorporate their everyday rituals into Buddhism. So Bon religion did not vanish completely as it continued side by side and even made way to Sikkim when the Bhutias migrated here. The author then gives a descriptive account of one of the only two Bon monasteries in India that is located in Kewzing, South Sikkim. Established in the latter half of 1980s, this monastery forms an important religious centre for Bon followers as it has become a minority religion today.

The next chapter by Karma Choden Bhutia brings the geographical dimension to religion and stresses the need to understand culture and geography of the region, in order to understand the kind of Buddhism practiced in Sikkim. Geographical features and natural biodiversity is believed to have influenced and even altered Buddhism here. Mountains are revered and worshipped as local deities, and those of larger magnitude are given higher religious status like Mt. Kanchenjunga as the guardian deity of the state. The author also brings the existing Lepcha beliefs of nature worship that has played its role in the creation of a distinct Sikkimese Buddhism today.

The third chapter in this part discusses the significance of Cham dance in Sikkim. Cham is a religious dance performed by monks in elaborate costumes and masks representing deities and invoking sacred chants. The author describes the mask dance of Kanchenjunga performed during the Pang Lhabso festival where the guardian deity of Kanchenjunga is invoked to protect and bless the land with prosperity, tranquility and good harvest. She also mentions

the black hat dance and mahakalacham dance but notes that these dances in Sikkim have a separate set of colourful masks. While the cham attendance is at an all time high with both locals, tourists and food vendors, she laments the loss of its sacredness as these events appear more like concerts and *melas* for most attendees. Likewise, the dances are not documented and the decline in the number of monks also pose a threat to the disappearance of this ritual art form.

The last paper in this part by Binu Dorjee is about the construction of death memorials among the Limbus of Sikkim. It provides a descriptive account of the death ritual and the role of *phedangma*, a Limbu ritual specialist from the stage of separation to transition and the construction of a memorial for the dead. He also explains the syncretic nature of these memorials with the influence of Hindu symbols and Buddhist *khadas* that marks the changes that have occurred in this death rite.

The fourth part of the book deals with Tourism and Economy. In this part, the first paper by Nazrul Islam and Bappa Sarkar gives a detailed overview of the people of Lachen valley and their nomadic ways of life. They are pastoralists and practice transhumance economy for their livelihood. In recent decades the introduction of homestays in line with Sikkim's promotion of ecotourism has opened new avenues for these pastoral nomads. The authors make an assessment of how transhumance activity and homestay tourism works for the betterment of a sustainable livelihood in north Sikkim.

'Who dances for Kanchenjunga?' by Pourianthanliu brings an insightful argument about the relationship between culture and tourism in the development of popular destinations. She argues that the reason for Sikkim's popularity has to do with the purposeful construction of Sikkimese culture through visual materials like postcards, films and photographs used by both private and state agencies in promoting tourism in Sikkim. This leads to the creation of a Sikkimese cultural identity which is adapted to the cultural experience of tourists as culture is seen to be a major asset for tourism in Sikkim.

Sanjukta Sattar adds the dimension of creativity when it comes to culture and tourism as she mentions the intrinsic connection between the three. While Sikkim has been endowed with natural beauty, the author recognizes the state's unique culture and heritage as she proposes a new form of tourism, i.e. creative tourism that is associated with providing tourists an authentic experience with participatory learning in the arts, heritage and connecting with the locals and creating a living culture. The author proposes that such linkages will also promote and preserve both tangible and intangible cultural heritage while generating income and strengthening cultural production and creativity.

**Infrastructure Development: Strategy for Inclusive and Sustainable Heritage Tourism in Sikkim** is a joint paper by Debashish Batabyal and Dilip Kumar Das as they collected data by talking to tourists in three different places i.e. Gangtok, Namchi and Mangan. For an effective sustainable tourism in the coming future, they propose a development strategy for the infrastructure development revolving around 'demand and supply' aspects of tourism.

The last chapter by Sumitabha Chakrabarty and Prabhat K. Singh is included in this part since 'Maize Cultivation in Sikkim' is an important economy since a long time. The chapter provides a brief overview of the origin of maize, its importance in local rituals and its production and post harvest management in Sikkim. With favourable climatic conditions, and new technological interventions, it sees the possibility of increased maize production even in the national level.

The last part of the book is categorized as Art and Museum and includes five papers concerning the sub theme. The first paper by Jayanta Kumar Barman is on the musical instruments of the Limbus of Sikkim. His paper gives a brief introduction of the various instruments used by Limbus as he identifies the nature and function of these instruments. Since the history and culture of a community is often told through song and music, it becomes important to study the musical instruments. The author emphasizes the need to safeguard the old linkage of folk music as the trend of fusion music might threaten its existence.

The second chapter by Depica Dahal stresses the importance of performing art like dance as a cultural symbol that gives identity to a community. Folk dances of Sikkim include various components of folk culture, folk songs, and folk musical instruments as it is inherited from one generation to another. She categorizes different dance forms as ritual, harvest, seasonal, recreational and ceremonial dances and mentions the participation of both men and women in these dances. While the influence of globalization has accelerated hybrid dance forms bringing changes in Nepali dances too, the community is seen to be preserving and performing their various dance forms in some way or another.

The third chapter by Sumahan Bandyopadhyay focuses on the craft of Sikkim and highlights how this art form was centred around monasteries and even flourished under its patronage. While placing the importance of art in Buddhist ethos, the author also talks about the transformation of how these religious objects become art objects. Today there are various craft centres promoted to spread the craft tradition in Sikkim as the government has also taken measures to not just produce traditional art and craft but also to preserve and revive these arts.

The fourth chapter focuses on the private museum of Rong Lupon Sonam Tshering Lepcha, a musician whose solo efforts in collecting traditional musical instruments expanded to a collection of various artefacts that eventually lead to the creation of Lepcha museum in Kalimpong. Maitreyee Choudhury borrows the concept of 'museum of innocence' from Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk's work although it may not have the same semblance as she starts with the biography of Sonam Tshering the creator and caretaker of Lepcha museum. The paper also describes the various Lepcha musical instruments, weapons and artefacts that is found in the museum as she thinks that Sonam Tshering's dedication and effort through this museum is leading way for the preservation of Lepcha culture and heritage.

The last chapter by Sekh Rahim Mondal is an important chapter on the role of museum and anthropology in documenting, conserving, exhibiting and researching intangible cultural heritage across the world. It discusses the theoretical, conceptual and metho-

dological issues pertaining to indigenous knowledge system and heritage management. In the case of Sikkim, he proposes collaborative efforts from various institutions and to involve local population for the fostering and promotion of intangible heritage while adopting cultural empowerment policies as well.

PART I

HISTORY AND HERITAGE



# The Residency, Bharat Bhawan and Raj Bhawan

A.C. SINHA

Being a trained anthropologist, by and large one keeps away from formal structures, the high and the mighty, kings and rulers, and selects a representative rustic (rural) locale to observe, watch and learn for ourselves from below the 'improbabilia of life'. What does an anthropologist such as me have to do with the Residency, the Barakothi, and the Bharat Bhawan or the Raj Bhawan? I have hardly visited the place about half a dozen on formal occasions to be herded among the 'invited guests to the tables' and similarly seen off. I have been face to face with only two 'high and mighty' occupants belonging to Bharat Bhawan era and only three of the present inhabitants very briefly. I am unacquainted with honoured occupants of the Raj Bhawan personally; neither am I an expert on the constitutional role of governors in the state; neither have I any access to any official documents there. I recall my first accidental brush with the then Chief Secretary of *Denzong* in 1970, who advised me to go to Lachen and Lachung to study the Bhotias, rather than wasting my time in Gangtok bazaar. So with my populist (not popular) tid-bits of disjointed views relating to the distant Barakothi and its denizens, what relevant and sensible statement shall I be making so that it fits, if not adequately, at least it should not be odd enough to disturb the sanctity of the august office?

Then I began looking back to my more than five-decades old association with Sikkim and readings on it, which provides some glimpse of the glory, gossips, events, and individuals of the Residency and its subsequent *avatars*. In fact, I had wished to study

'Community Power Structures of Two Feudal Cities: Gangtok and Thimphu' way back in 1969, which was considered academically not feasible (Sinha: 2014). Then I recollected the past tradition in the Eastern Himalayan kingdoms—how the 'capital' shifted with the kings, when they used to move on horses or other animals. Then came the British, who looked for everything in a formal cast: a headman, a chief, measured land, fixed boundaries, taxes in cash, kings, capitals, bureaucracy, rules and recorded files. I recall having heard that the Residency was the watch-tower in the Himalayas, whose resident Tibetologist Political Officers wrote annual reports on Sikkim and Bhutan, organized the Maharajas' administration, got roads constructed, opened schools, established hospitals, got educated the royal progeny and even over-saw their kinship ties. So far Sikkim was concerned, the Barakothi had emerged really as the focal point of everything and anything worth in its puny kingdom. It was a haughty, arrogant, aloof, distant, and formal entity and as the *mai-bap* of the subjects, which is needless to say it functioned on a grand paternalistic style. And that one has to read pages after pages deliberately penned down by J.C. White, the first Political Officer in Sikkim.

#### THE BRITISH RESIDENCY: THE HIMALAYAN WATCH TOWER ON TIBET AND BEYOND

There is no recorded evidence of the presence of an ancient city in the eastern Himalayas. The early Namgyal rulers maintained two residential establishments: one, at Phari in Chumbi Valley, now Tibet, and another, in Sikkim. The first Namgyal king, Phuntso Namgyal, was consecrated at Yoksom in 1642 seated on a stone slab and ruled his fief from there. His son moved his seat of authority near the border of Nepal at Rabdentse in 1670. The capital was shifted from Rabdentse to Tamlong after the Nepalese incursion in late eighteenth century. John W. Edgar, Deputy Commissioner, Darjeeling, visited Tumlong in 1873, almost a hundred years after the Nepalese invasion and recorded:

Besides the Raja's dwelling and the monasteries (three in numbers), there are scattered over Toomlong hills a number of substantial looking houses belong-

ing to various officials. Each house was surrounded by some cultivable land, in which are generally a few clumps of bamboo or fruit trees. Many of these houses were unoccupied during my visit. . . . I saw two officers, who were styled Dewans, and who had been left at Toomlong in charge of the state affairs (in the absence of the king. (Edgar 1969)

A W. Paul, Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, was sent to Tumlong in 1880 to persuade the rival Lepcha and Bhutia factions in the royal court to come to an agreement among themselves (White 1971).

Edgar has not mentioned the existence of a market centre or commercial sector or a court complex in Sikkim. Such was the economic specialization that as soon as the capital of the king was shifted from one place to another, the site was lost in the woods, as most of the houses were made of stone, wood, bamboo and straw. He also found 'heaps of building materials left on the Gangtok ridge for constructing another residence for the king'. In the words of White:

On reaching Gangtok (the assumed capital in November, 1887), we pitched our tent on the ridge, close to the Maharaja's palace, then covered with jungle, now site of a flourishing bazaar, with post and telegraph offices, dak bungalow or rest house, charitable hospital and dispensary, and many large and flourishing shops, including that of the state bankers. (ibid.: 20)

Further, he described how he could select the site for building the Residency House at the highest hillock, identified the non-existent building materials, workforce, furnishings and personnel as the household staff. In course of time, the Residency, known as the last post on way to Tibet from India, was described by one of its future residents, Sir Basil Gould, as 'perhaps the most attractive mediumsized home in the whole of India' (Gould 1957).

In this way, it was left to White, a civil engineer by profession and the first Political Officer in Sikkim, to build not only the Residency and other offices for administration, but also the permanent capital of the principality of Sikkim at Gangtok, which continues to be the premier city of the state since then. In course of time, it came to be known as the 'world's first outpost for China-watching'. The building was twice damaged by earthquakes—once in 1897, and then in 2006, when it was rendered too dangerous for

its august resident for habitation. In the perceptive assessment of a raconteurs of heritage buildings:

From the demise of Tibet in 1959 to the establishment of the Kingdom of Bhutan in 1907 and eventually the accension of the Kingdom of Sikkim to India in 1975, the (residency) building was not only the theatre of unfolding history, but also the home of extraordinary men, who helped shape the future and development of the region. (Balikci-Denjongpa 2008: 179)

During the days of 'the great game in Central Asia', the Residency played a crucial role especially under Nathaniel Curzon's move of 'forward policy' to the Himalayas, when the Tibet Expedition was launched under Colonel Francis Younghusband in 1903-4. Even prior to that, the Residency and its main functionary devoted a major part of his time in advancing the British imperial and commercial interests across the Himalayan heights. Political Officer J.C. White was roped in the expedition and so was the local resources in terms of men and material and the Residency was turned out to be the launching pad of the expedition. An offshoot of the exercise was the successful incorporation of Bhutan within the British imperial frame through the good office of J.C. White, Ugyen Wangchuk and Kazi Ugyen Dorji. It is pertinent to note that gains of the Tibet Expedition were lost soon, because of the change in British imperial emphasis in the region, but a lasting achievement was that of the goodwill of the Wangchuks and Dorjis of Bhutan for the future. It is said that White and Wangchuk, who came closer as intimate friends for two different reasons: first for the British imperial interest to secure Bhutan as a faithful ally in the Himalayas, and the second, for the newly-created Bhutanese throne for his descendants. Once Bhutan was secured, successive political officers made efforts to cultivate the Dalai Lama in favour of the British Empire.

Among the various Resident British Political Officers in Gangtok besides J.C. White, who shaped the British imperial policy to Tibet through their diplomacy and expertise in Tibetology, were Charles A. Bell, F.M. Bailey and Basil J. Gould. The last PO, Arthur J. Hopkinson, as the Residents were known, even wrote a significant Note for the forthcoming Indian Union on his charge:

In practice, it may well prove difficult to secure a tidy solution of the future of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, and even the eastern marches of Kashmir. This will largely depend on the future policy and fate of China and hence of Tibet. The Government of the (Indian) Union must be prepared for complications on Northeast Frontier and evolve a policy to meet them. This may well have to be that of maintaining all the principalities in virtual independence of India, but as buffer, as far as possible, (as) client states. There may be greater advantages in according Sikkim a more independent status than seeking to absorb Bhutan as well as Sikkim in the Indian Union, adding communal problem of Buddhism. . . . The Government will be well advised to avoid entering into fresh commitments with any one of these frontier states or seeking to redefining their status. Their importance is strategic in direct relation to Tibet and China and, indirectly to Russia. Such adjustment of relations with the (Indian) Union can fully be affected by those political and strategic considerations . . . account of which, it is hoped, the treaty will take rather than the political niceties, which do not help defense policy. (Sinha 2008: 63)

And needless to say that the 'Note' shaped the regional political scenario for decades to come.

#### POLITICAL OFFICERS OF BHARAT BHAWAN

With the exit of the British from India, there was anti-feudal democratic struggle waged by the Sikkim State Congress, which was led by one of the superannuated Bhutia employees of the Political Office, Tashi Tshering. The first Indian Political Officer, Harishwar Dayal, played the crucial role first, in diffusing the volatile political situation after nudging the ruler to install a popular government, and then dismissing the dispensation, when the new cabinet could not manage the deteriorating law and order situation. All through the anti-feudal movements in the second part of the 1940s, it was the Political Officer who emerged as the impartial appellate authority among conflicting interests in Sikkim on behalf of the Government of India. The king was equated with other princely states in India and the political parties saw themselves as the extensions of the Indian political parties. And accordingly they were associated with the like-minded political fora in the plains. Sikkim and Indian Union signed a new treaty through which Sikkim turned out to be

the protectorate of India and a new office of the Dewan, manned by a senior Indian officer, was created to run the administration of the state. In the words of journalist, Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, both the Sikkimese protectorate and the office of the Political Officer in Gangtok, were 'anachronism', making everybody, the Sikkimese and the Indians, equally uncomfortable (Dutta-Ray 1985: 66). Perhaps, nobody gave a serious thought to it, and thus, the British office and its occupant, both, the Residency and the Political Officer, continued with the same nomenclature even in democratic India. In all, there were eight such functionaries' beginning with Harishwar Dayal, who was followed by Apa B. Pant, Indrajit Bahadur Singh, Avtar Singh, Vincent H. Coelho, N.B. Menon, Katyayani Shankar Bajpai and Gurbachan Singh, in that order.

The Political Officer continued in the old establishment, which was controlled by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, though the old Residency was renamed Bharat Bhawan in the 1960s, but not its style or authority. It was in a way an anomalous situation; it was neither British, nor Sikkimese, but vaguely Indian, which could not easily shrug off its colonial heritage. Though Sikkim was officially a Protectorate, it was neither treated as part of democratic India, nor was it strictly termed as foreign. In the process, the office of the Political Officer lost its previous prestige, relevance and utility in the eyes of the local population. The Political Office lost its role in reporting on Tibet in 1949 and Bhutan was taken away from it in 1971, once it became a member of the United Nations Organization. So eight of the Indian Political Officers, who served Sikkim between 1948 and 1975, slowly lost their significance in terms of their relevance and work, which was revived for a while in 1973, when the Sikkimese took to the street against their theocrat, Palden Thondup Namgyal and New Delhi decided to look afresh to the affairs of Sikkim. The problem with the office of the Dewans, who enjoyed themselves by terming themselves as 'the prime ministers', was an embarrassment, again in the words of Datta-Ray:

If a Dewan was popular with the Chogyal, like Rustomji, who held the job from 1954 to 1959, he at once, incurred India House's suspicions. If he was trusted by India House, the Palace was bound to be wary. Trifles were blown

out of proportion, and the POs' believed they should supervise who the Dewan saw and even what he wore. Dewans were also expected to submit confidential reports on the royal family's doings to India House. (Datta-Ray 1985: 76).

The problem was unlike in the past—the Political Office and the Political Officer were not supposed to take decisions, but they were blamed for interfering in everything and anything within Sikkim. They were file pushers, who were always busy in sending something to New Delhi and waiting for instructions, orders, sanctions, or visitors from New Delhi. Some of them unwittingly got involved in the local affairs and occasionally competed with the *diwans*, and their other incarnations: PAO, *Sidlon*. In the process, the *darbar* was determined to derive mileage from this apparent bureaucratic discomfort and embarrassment and occasionally tried to emerge as the arbitrator in the situation. And who enjoyed the alleged show—the Gyalmo's (Hope Namgyal, Palden Namgyal, the last Namgyal ruler's wife) kitchen cabinet, and members of the Sikkim Study Circle. That was also the period, when the so-called bazaar crowd could openly talk about the contest between the Barakothi and the Chotakothi (the *darbar*) with the Dewan hill in between. As New Delhi had its hands full elsewhere and puny Sikkim was seething with international citizens, Barakothi was losing its glamour and lustre and its presiding deity was increasingly being reduced to insignificance. This was further complicated by the presence of another Indian functionary, an ICS/IAS in the form of the *diwan*. These two Indian functionaries, representing two national streams of services, at times hailing from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds, were unknowingly pitted against one another to the gleeful mirth of bazaar gossip in the Sikkimese establishment. The last Indian officer in the line of the former *diwans*, Chief Executive B.S. Das perceptively comments on the unbecoming scenario:

The first Political Officer (John C. Lall) carried the day with him as it was too soon for the power equations to develop by then. So did the first Dewan, who was posted at a time to observe the administration on behalf of Delhi. . . . The second Dewan (Nari K. Rustomji) . . . happened to be a batch mate of the (last) Chogyal in ICS (training). The then PO (Appa B. Pant) was of

different origin and he believed in his role as a messiah than a political agent of Delhi. The Dewan joined hands with the (future) Chogyal and soon lost his value. The Chogyal enjoyed the scenario as it served his purpose admirably. The Dewan, of course, became more Sikkimese than the Sikkimese themselves. The Chogyal played the game beautifully. The third Dewan and the PO were not even on talking terms. There was also a third element involved in these goings on. They were the top bureaucrats and the army brass visiting Sikkim. Being entertained lavishly at the Palace (some of them) were too amenable to the charms and persuasion of the Chogyal and the family and the charms were used in full measures. The fourth Dewan never got his powers as *Sidlon* (principal administrative officer). This gentleman was well-known for his weaknesses and the Chogyal was aware of these. The *Sidlon* sold himself completely to the Chogyal. . . . No senior Indian officer brought such a disgrace to his office in Sikkim as he did. (Das 1983: 65-6)

#### THE RAJ BHAWAN, THEN AND NOW

With the merger of Sikkim to the Indian Union in 1975, its first Governor, Bipin Bihari (Mathur) Lal, began his five-year term, which also saw a period of turmoil in Indian politics. First, it was the regime of the powerful prime minister, Indira Gandhi, who was instrumental in the liberation of East Pakistan and creation of Bangladesh. Then came a phase of civil agitations in different parts of the country, led by Jayaprakash Narayan. Then an internal Emergency was declared, in which civil rights of the citizens were curtailed. The General Elections were fought in 1977, when the internal Emergency was lifted, and a new democratically elected hodge-podge of a government led by Morarji Desai came to power in Delhi. This arrangement to govern the country among desperate political parties lasted for better than two years and it was replaced by a short-lived government led by Chaudhury Charan Singh. The next general election, called in 1980, brought Mrs Indira Gandhi back to power in New Delhi. The important message for the nascent Indian state of Sikkim was that there was no continuity in the policy among these five politico-administrative arrangements vis-à-vis Sikkim and in this utterly confusing situation, Sikkim was left by default in the hands of the relic of the British



imperial heritage, the ICS, B.B. Lal, the governor. In this context, one may remember the successor to Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi, Morarji Desai's statement on the merger of Sikkim to India and its procedure, which led to some confusion in the minds of many interested parties. Sikkim could not have a fate worse than that. B.B. Lal, was in contrast of another ICS, Nari K. Rustomji, and the second *dewan* of Sikkim, who was universally known as 'uncle' in Sikkim and Bhutan, because of his warmth, sympathy, helpful attitude and instant resourcefulness.

The first governor was a wrong choice, inappropriate to the occasion, a batchmate of the ex-Chogyal in ICS training, who took every occasion to humiliate an already vanquished, impoverished, but needy and demolished adversary. He tried to revive the old residency days by doing everything in the state, which discredited an immensely popular but untested nascent democratic system. Furthermore, he behaved high handedly with his modestly educated and politically inadequate chief minister, Lhendup Dorji Kazi, and was dismissive of the rest of the ministers, legislature and the political leaders. Unfortunately, that was Sikkim's first brush with full blown democratic dispensation through the institution of a governor. The governor was simply incapable of handling the political demands of the hour to clear the Sikkimese democratic affairs in an everchanging political scenario in New Delhi. In this chaotic situation, instead of a guided, concerted and sympathetic push to healthy democratic tradition, the intrusive, interfering, vindictive and haughty governor imparted a sour taste of democracy to the Sikkimese. In fact, that should have been the time in the history of the state to lay healthy traditions by according honour to the adversaries and applying a healing touch to their defeat, but the governor saw any hint of dissention as potential of rebellion. With a view to uncovering the extent of his pettiness, one has to turn to the pages of Sunanda Datta-Ray's and Nari Rustomji's books on Sikkim.

To further facilitate the governor's machinations, L.D. Kazi, the chief minister, a scion of the Chakhung Lepcha Kazi family, born and brought up in a feudal and theocratic monastic fold,

was too old to change fast in a democratic mould. This most active politician of Sikkim for over three decades and the only effective face of democratic opposition to the former ruler was after all a state level leader, who was not cutout for the hurlyburly of the Indian national political scene. Thus, he kept on changing his political affiliation as per the fast changing power structure in New Delhi. He appeared to have ignored the organizational base of his political party and wily-nilly created an impression among the Sikkimese at large that the bureaucrats on deputation, sent by New Delhi, were actually running the show on his behalf. While effective mass leaders had switched off their loyalty to the Kazi, the feudal elements were looking for a viable set-up to teach him a lesson or two. They discovered Nar Bahadur Bhandari, a former school teacher, who had opposed the merger of Sikkim with India. (Sinha 2008: 254)

And how did the Sikkimese react to all these machinations? They simply demolished all 32 members of the Legislative Assembly in October 1979, when the first democratic election was held on the basis of adult franchise. Those worthies were seen only five years earlier as liberators of the Sikkim's masses against the alleged feudal anachronism. And those who came to power in their place were sulking 'democrats', to say the least, and were always ready and willing to do something to 'tease' New Delhi. This, in fact, was a reaction to the governor's 'over' rule, which, in a way, was addressed to neither L.D. Kazi, nor to his rag tag political forum, nor to New Delhi's apathy. This was actually an answer to the governor's stewardship of the state during those lost fateful five years in the history of Sikkim. The 1980s was another lost phase in Sikkim's history so far as democracy was concerned, because no healthy traditions were laid down. For example, instead of tolerating dissent, a practice was ensued to demolish the dissenters through fair and foul means. This non-democratic antagonistic practice of forcefully denying space to the opposite point of view in the body politics continues to be the bane of Sikkim's politics; and its roots may conveniently be traced to the wrong steps initiated during 1975-80.

B.B. Lal was subsequently succeeded by H.J.H. Taleyar Khan, K. Prabhaker Rao, B.N. Singh, T.V. Rajeshwar, S.K. Bhatnagar, R.H. Tahliani, P. Shiv Shanker, K.V. Raghunath Reddy, Chaudhury

Randhir Singh, Kedar Nath Sahni, R.S. Govai, V. Rama Rao, Sudarshan Agrawal and B.P. Singh, in that order. With the exception of some of the above dignitaries, most of them were petty politicians, fairly unknown; neither experienced administrators, nor known as public figures, who had earned social status through the humdrum of public life, nor were they scholar-administrators having penned-down something on land, history, society, politics, administration, or literature. They were not interested in the history, culture or religion of their charge. With the exception of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (which was in any way a strange commodity to most of His Excellencies), Sikkim had no centre of higher learning of note; so there was hardly an atmosphere of liberal education, learning, research and pursuit of knowledge, where HE's presence could be noted. In such a depressing situation, the Raj Bhawan and its honourable residents remained in 'splendid isolation far from maddening crowd' and were busy spending their time in nothingness. Be it Political Officers, or the Governors, apart from their personal attributes and excellence, their performance to an extent reflect the power of their patrons behind them. The British Political Officers were all very powerful, and could shape the destiny of the regional rulers. For example, J.C. White's role in Sikkim ruler Thutub Namgyal's tribulations and his zealous espousal of Ugyen Wangchuk's elevation as Druk-Gyalpo are legendary. But once he relinquished his office as the PO and appeared in Bhutan as the promoter of mineral-, forest- and plantation-based industries in 1913, against all his expectations, he was treated like any other investor and, in fact, he returned home not only as a disappointed investor, but also with a sense of humiliation at the hands of his old ally, Ugyen Wangchuk. Similarly, when the newly-independent Indian Union was unable to clearly define the extent and nature of its involvement in the affairs of Sikkim, the Political Officers had nothing significant to get involved in and kept on gazing on *diwan's* actions or inactions.

All through the 1980s, Sikkim was in the news for wrong reasons: defection of the legislature from one political party to another, charges of corruption, court cases against the chief minister, political expulsion from political parties and the like. One strong

signal sent from Sikkim to the Indian democratic system was loud and clear. And that is 'they had little patience with the national parties of all political shades: Congress, Communists, Socialists, and so-called communalists'. They consciously opted for the regional political outfit, which had its own political agenda or lack of it. Another aspect of this scenario was that the charges of corruption were not considered something of serious public offence. Another aspect of this machination was that the regional outfit would invariably go with the political formation, which would be in power in New Delhi. And this has been the case ever since Sikkim joined the Indian Union. Another issue, which is of serious significance, is that of the treatment given to the migrant communities from among the Nepalese social commonwealth. Numerically, in majority, but socially divided, this cultural commonwealth first fought for its political agenda to get its *lingua franca*, Nepali, recognized as an Indian language and 'stateless Sikkim's Nepali residents' as citizens of India, but failed to get the community as such provided with on the reserved ethnic seats in the State Legislative Assembly. The community opted for the provisions within the Indian Constitution and demanded the status of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (OBC) for various sub-sets within its fold. This issue continues to be unresolved and remains potentially explosive. In this way, the Sikkimese of various social backgrounds have truly joined the Indian political firmament and are trying to find their rightful place in the system. It is instructive that certain traditions of pre-merger phase from Sikkim's past have been incorporated as a state ritual even in the democratic setup, which adds to the uniqueness of Sikkim.

One of the problems in Sikkim is that the Sikkimese have developed a type of reluctance to adopt instantly the expectations from the federal government. Possibly they are not sure how much they should expect and what is expected from them. Maybe because of their late entry to the system of Indian democratic procedure; or they may have become wiser after seeing the fate of L.D. Kazi; or unlike other north-eastern frontier 'tribal states', Sikkim is neither a tribal nor a typically Indian sub-nationality like Gujarat or Punjab. It is vaguely a 'Himalayan Buddhist state' of India, where

Buddhists constitute about one-third of the population, which demographically does not matter much, but symbolically it is of critical importance in secular India. In such a situation, the governor of the state as the 'ears and eyes' of the Union government, unlike in the past, must act as the invisible polestar, which will determine the correct direction to the state leadership to steer through the haze of misgivings and carve their special place among the federal units of the Union. It is a fact that it is the elected representatives, who run the political affairs of state, but at the same time, political animals are extremely pragmatic creatures in spite of their various types of limitations. A caring, pragmatic, and a statesman-like governor may appear to be a reliable, but invisible guide to the elected government in its efforts of harnessing durable peace and economic prosperity by exploiting its natural resources. The state also expects its governor to convey its worries, knotty issues, and genuine expectations from the federal government tactfully, which otherwise the government may not be able to communicate effectively. In its fourth decade of democratic experience, Sikkim has achieved a level of maturity and thus, it has learnt to look up to an empathic head of the state.

The Gangtok Residency, the Bharat Bhawan and the Raj Bhawan, with its about a century and a quarter-long chequered past, has played not only a significant role in shaping Sikkim's destiny, but also guided the course of regional history. Similarly, its presiding deities, first the Political Officers and subsequently, the governors, were taken to be the key players in Indian Himalayan policy with a bearing on security environment, regional development and of late hydraulic power potential and flood control. The Raj Bhawan will continue to play its historical role of Tibet (or China) watching in the days to come, as Tibet continues to be in turmoil and it is likely to remain so in near future. Similarly, as Sikkim's neighbourhood, Darjeeling in the south and Nepal in the west, are under political turmoil for more than two decades, a socially and politically stable Sikkim appears to be an oasis of peace in the region. Moreover, Sikkim has embarked on a massive scheme of hydraulic power generation by tapping its perennial rivers, engaged in an ambitious programme for eco-cum-pilgrim tourism and trans-border trade

with the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. The governor of the state is in an unprecedented role of facilitator between the Federal Government and the state government for evolving out a coordinate strategy to achieve these noble objectives, which have the potential to alter the regional landscape. In this way, the institution of the state governor in Sikkim has come to play an even more critical role in the welfare of state directly, and the country indirectly.

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