

**Women in Sikkim: A Historical Study  
(Seventeenth to Twentieth Century)**

A Thesis Submitted

To

**Sikkim University**



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the  
**Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

By

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May, 2023

*Dedicated*

*To my beloved mother*

*Mrs. Mon Kumari Tamang (Goley)*

Date: 22/05/2023

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I, **Anjana Tamang**, hereby declare that the subject matter in this thesis entitle “**Women in Sikkim: A Historical Study (Seventeenth to Twentieth Century)**” submitted to **Sikkim University** for the Award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is my original work. Any content or any part of this thesis has not been submitted to any other institution or for any academic purposes.

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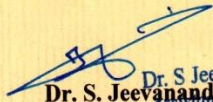
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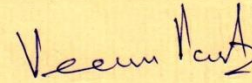
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“Women in Sikkim: A Historical Study (Seventeenth to Twentieth century)”

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ACWW</b>	:	Associated Country Women of the World
<b>CIA</b>	:	Central Intelligence Agency, USA
<b>PNGS</b>	:	Paljor Namgyal Girls School
<b>SNC</b>	:	Sikkim National Congress
<b>SIF</b>	:	Sikkim Independent Front
<b>SSC</b>	:	Sikkim State Congress

## GLOSSARY

<i>Annila or Lamani</i>	:	Nuns
<i>Bakhu</i>	:	Bhutia female costume
<i>Bel-Biya</i>	:	Marriage with the wood apple such practice observed within a newar community of Sikkim.
<i>Bethi Khetala</i>	:	A mandatory help especially during the harvest season to be rendered annually by a particular household to a local village headman.
<i>Bhek-Bo</i>	:	Mediator between groom and bride party
<i>Boonthing</i>	:	Lepcha male Priest
<i>Bon</i>	:	Pre-Buddhist Religion
<i>Changzod</i>	:	Prime Minister in Tibetan language.
<i>Chi, Tumba, Rakshi</i>	:	Local fermented Drinks
<i>Chogyal</i>	:	King (or <i>Dharma Raja</i> )
<i>Chobandi Chola</i>	:	Female Traditional blouse for Nepali women.
<i>Chyabroong</i>	:	Drum played during the occasions of the Limboos
<i>Chu, Daa and Lyep</i>	:	Mountains, lakes, river etc.in Lepcha language

<i>Chotimba or Khandula</i>	:	Head of the Nuns
<i>Daijo</i>	:	Dowry
<i>Dhara</i>	:	Springs
<i>Denzong</i>	:	Tibetan name for Sikkim
<i>Doko</i>	:	Basket which carries on the back
<i>Durbar</i>	:	Government of Sikkim
<i>Dzongpons</i>	:	Governor
<i>Doura-Suruwal</i>	:	Nepali male costume.
<i>Dzong</i>	:	District
<i>Dui Gharey</i>	:	In a Nepali language, a specific term used for the women who marry two times
<i>Dewan</i>	:	Ministers
<i>Denzong Gyalrap</i>	:	History of Sikkim in Tibetan language
<i>Dzumsa</i>	:	Village Council
<i>Gaut</i>	:	Cow urine
<i>Gyalmo</i>	:	Tibetan Title for the queen
<i>Gtorma</i>	:	Butter Statue
<i>Gyal-yum Chenpo</i>	:	Queen mother of Sikkim in Tibetan Language.
<i>Gumpa or Gonpa</i>	:	Monasteries
<i>Honju</i>	:	Silken full sleeve blouse wear with the Bakhu:



<i>Jharlangi/ Kuruwa</i>	:	Forced Labor
<i>Kalo Bhari</i>	:	The literary meaning of the term Kalo Bhari in Nepali is black load
<i>Kazini</i>	:	Wife of Kazi
<i>Kazi</i>	:	landlords
<i>Karbaris</i>	:	dealers between peasants and high officials
<i>Khada</i>	:	Scarf
<i>Lama</i>	:	Monk
<i>Lhadimedi</i>	:	The Council of Elders
<i>Losar</i>	:	Tibetan Festival
<i>Mandal</i>	:	Village headmen in Nepali language, who collects revenue from the public and submit to the government and also settles minor disputes
<i>Madhyasias</i>	:	Plainsmen
<i>Mani lha-khang</i>	:	Nunneries
<i>Mazong Kothi</i>	:	Name of the house
<i>Mun</i>	:	Lepcha female Priest
<i>Munthem</i>	:	Lepcha oral Tradition
<i>Nagzen</i>	:	Courtesan in Limboo language
<i>Nazar</i>	:	Gifts
<i>Paharias</i>	:	Nepalis

<i>Potey</i>	:	The green colour glass bead necklace wear by Nepali married women
<i>Po thyut</i>	:	Bamboo bottles filled with drinks
<i>Pewa</i>	:	Gifts which were given to the daughter during the marriage,
<i>Pipons</i>	:	Village Headmen
<i>Pangden</i>	:	Bhutia married women wears a stripped apron in front of Bakhu, which is the sign of married women.
<i>Rith</i>	:	Bride-Price
<i>Rongs</i>	:	Another name for the Lepcha tribe
<i>Sudhi</i>	:	Pure
<i>Sindoor</i>	:	Vermillion
<i>Thika-dars</i>	:	Contractor or Nepali Landlords
<i>Tin Gharey</i>	:	In a Nepali Language, specific term used for the women who marry third times.
<i>Tsongs</i>	:	Another name for the Limboo tribe
<i>Zho</i>	:	Money

## **CHAPTER – I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In history, women, as a category, have always been distinct from men and their activities. They played a significant role in history and, in general, historical events have ignored the role of women. Women have a history and women are in the history. Women are an essential and central part of the construction of society. They have always been an actor and an agent in the history of human civilization.

Gender history is often a form of historical revisionism. It has been noted that the historical writings were mainly interpreted through the masculine perspective with regard to their activities such as politics, culture and religion and even in all other social spheres. Women have been usually executed and portrayed in gender stereotypical roles such as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters and mistresses.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the representation of women in history has become an area of interest among the researchers in the field of social sciences.

The concept of gender has immensely proved as helpful in understanding women's lives within the wider context of society's definition. In general, women's history is the study of the role played by women in the past. Historical events had included women but their role was kept behind the scene. The historical documents were used to fascinate the stereotypical gender role. Therefore, it is believed that the traditional history had minimized or ignored the contribution of women in different fields. In this respect, women history is often a form of historical revisionism seeking to challenge or expand the traditional historical consensus.

The resurgence of feminism in the 1970s had changed the state of affairs and challenging the *androcentric* view of the world, which had prevailed for so long. The history of women had come a long way. Women indeed have a history and that moreover recovering this rich and varied past had the potential to reshape the contours of official male dominated history. It is not just to bring the women back into the history from which they had been left out but to rewrite the history. Therefore, proper recognition would be given to the ways in which gender, as a key axis of power in society, which provides a crucial understanding of how any society is structured and organized.<sup>2</sup> In this context, this particular thesis is trying to establish the women representation in the history of Sikkim.

Sikkim occupies a very important place in the north-eastern landscape of the Indian Union, which became the 22nd state of the Indian Republic in 1975.<sup>3</sup> Sikkim is bounded on the north and north-east by Tibet, on the east by Bhutan, on the west by Nepal and on the south by Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Sikkim's population comprises many ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups and the total number of population is 607,688 with different communities characterized by their individual culture, customs and traditions. The three main outstanding groups are the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Indian Nepalis.<sup>4</sup>

The status and rights of the women in Sikkim were unique as compared to the other parts of the South Asia. Sikkim, historically, witnessed the 333 years of monarchical rule of *Namgyal* dynasty, under whose reign there were many invasions, foreign interference, accession and annexations. All the political, social, military and monastic powers were exercised by men in the past while women were confined to the private and domestic spheres.<sup>5</sup>



During the latter period of the *Namgyal* dynasty, the marital status of the Sikkimese<sup>6</sup> women not only determined their legal rights but also their identity within the kingdom of Sikkim. Interestingly, women in Sikkim had no legal rights before the merger (1975) with the Indian Union. In 1962, *Chogyal* (King) of Sikkim issued a proclamation, *Married Women's Property Regulation Act*,<sup>7</sup> which stated that Sikkimese women would lose the property or inheritance rights, if they married to non-Sikkimese. The Government of Sikkim, on 15 March 1968, also initiated the proclamation of scrapping Sikkim citizenship from women who marries outsider (non-Sikkimese) not belonging to the state of Sikkim.<sup>8</sup> Ruth Karthak Lepchani was considered as the first victim of this proclamation. She revolted against the Sikkim Government politically by forming Sikkim Independent Front in 1966 and also voiced for the Lepchas.<sup>9</sup> Besides her, this edict was applied to other Sikkimese women who married non-Sikkimese men. Even, *Chogyal* Palden Thondup *Namgyal's* (twelfth King of Sikkim) sister, Princess Pema Choki (Coola), also left from the scene of Sikkim, when she married to an Indian man.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime, women could give a legacy.<sup>11</sup>

Looking at the socio-political and economic structure of *Namgyal* dynasty, the Lepchas and the Bhutias lived together for three centuries. There were much cultural similarities among them.<sup>12</sup> The Bhutia mainly came from Tibet and followed the Tibetan culture, where polyandrous was much in common. Lepchas were also known as the *Rongs* and considered as the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim, who were detested polyandry and were polygynous initially.<sup>13</sup> However, the royal family of Sikkim followed both the systems. The society was based on the patriarchal family system.<sup>14</sup>

The social system of the Lepchas retained a tribal affinity and a strong sense of territorial unity in social relations. The tribe was divided into thirty patrilineal clans (*Ptsos*), which are exogamous units. On the other hand, the Bhutias do not possess a strict social organization of clans.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the history of Sikkim, many inter-marriages, including illegal liaison, have been found among the Bhutia and the Lepcha communities.<sup>16</sup>

The position and status of women in any society are always determined by its socio-economic and political background as well as their social customs. The marriage system among the Lepchas and the Bhutias was in many ways related to the economic fate of the people. One important feature was the custom of bride price, which proved to be too steep for the groom. Very often, the groom had to work in the fields of his father-in-law to cover the bride price. On the other hand, the vigorously saved bride price was utilized into unproductive expenditures, mostly in the form of feasts in which the entire village people are invited. However, the culture of Sikkim had contributed to the development of the economy in some cases.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, Nepalis was considered to have been originated from Nepal and settled much later in Sikkim. They followed the Hindu custom.<sup>18</sup> The marriage among the Nepalis was very simple and there was no expenditure included in it. In general, Nepalis wives were treated as an important source of labour and marriage to them means the acquisition of more labour for productive purposes rather than responsibility to feed a dependent.<sup>19</sup>

Though the society was patriarchal, the polyandry was much common among the Bhutias and the Lepchas. The custom was that if the eldest brother took a wife, she was common to all the brothers. However, the eldest brother had no co-habitation

right with the wives of the younger brothers. Usually, marriage was not considered as sacred. The tie was very slight and could be dissolved at any time by either the man or the woman. There was hardly any class and caste distinction, which inhabited social life. The pre-marital child bearing was not considered as dishonoured.<sup>20</sup> The customary law permitted women to get divorce from its men after paying certain amount of money (*Zho*). If there was a dispute over a child, women were allowed to take girl child whereas the father took male child.<sup>21</sup> Usually, polyandry did not prevail amongst the Nepali community.<sup>22</sup>

The practice of polyandry among tribal communities could be one of the variables explaining the higher value attached to women. Similarly, local religious practice also plays an important role in influencing the status of women. The participation of women in economic activities was high in Sikkim. The women, especially in rural areas, were involved in agricultural operation from sowing to harvesting. It has been their responsibility, traditionally, to collect fuel wood and fodder for the family, and fetch water from *dharas* (springs) in vessels, which they carried in a *doko* (basket) on their backs. They were responsible for all domestic tasks including caring of domestic animals. Women also work as paid agricultural labourers, construction workers and took part in economic activities such as selling vegetables in the market place. They contributed to the income of the family through their traditional skills in spinning and weaving.<sup>23</sup>

Traditionally, all land in Sikkim belonged to the kings and they were the sole owner of the land. The entire farmer's land in Sikkim was held by the king. There were *kazis* (landlords) and the headmen and various other officials, who exercised jurisdiction over specific tracts of lands. The *kazis* and officials enjoyed some authority but final

authority was the king in all matters of import. Apart from exercising some authority, dedicating minor disputes and referring the ruler things of moment, the official also assessed the revenue payable by all the people settled on the lands within his jurisdiction that was paid to the ruler with a certain fixed contribution and the officials kept the greater portion for themselves.<sup>24</sup>

The *kazis* had no proprietary rights on the land. However, they did have a kind of hereditary title to their office.<sup>25</sup> When the cultivators were not able to pay the revenue to the king on time, his property, including his cattle, furniture, wives and slaves, was taken into consideration but not to extend his field.<sup>26</sup> It showed that women were just counted as a property that can be easily accessed or mortgaged. Therefore, L.B. Basnet, a scholar from Sikkim, stated that during the monarchical period, most parts of the state were controlled by the *kazis*, who acted as barons who collected taxes for the king and rule with an iron grip.<sup>27</sup> Women did not hold the post of landlords and neither in the king ministry and people had to suffer the atrocities in the form of force labour.<sup>28</sup> Especially, peasant women were utilized for pleasure by the landlords. Socially, they were exploited and legally they did not have any rights.<sup>29</sup>

Regarding the property rights, women have the property rights in Sikkim but they did not have the inheritance right. Women also hold their own land. Therefore, R. Moktan in his work, *Sikkim: Darjeeling Compendium of Documents*, mentioned that the place called Dzongu, which is in the north Sikkim now, was once under the name of queen and the other areas such as Lachen and Lachung in north Sikkim were also assigned to the queen.<sup>30</sup> During the latter period, the land came under the hands of the Prime Minister, and thereafter, it came under the heir apparent to the throne.<sup>31</sup> It shows that women also have ownership over the land.

Before the establishment of the British era, there was no codified law in Sikkim. The king was the only source of all legal and judicial authorities and his subject was bound by his orders. The king, along with feudal lords and *Pipons* or villager's headman, was the main source of laws.<sup>32</sup> Laws of Sikkim had been taken from the Tibetan manuscript. Therefore, the Tibetan influences in the political sphere were established and the style of the court became progressively Tibetan and the Tibetan language became the language of the court.<sup>33</sup>

Traditionally, princes and princesses of the dynasty generally contracted marriage alliances with the aristocracy families of Lhasa (Tibet). As a result, Tibetan culture gained increasing influences in the country modifying the ways and modes of the original indigenous Lepchas.<sup>34</sup> Political and religious bond between Tibet and Sikkim was strong enough and the king and monasteries always looked at Tibet for guidance. Some year later, *Chogyal* established the practice of bride searching system from Tibet. Therefore, most of the queens are from Tibet and they played a significant role in the history of Sikkim. J.C. White, the first political officer of Sikkim mentioned in his work, *Sikkim and Bhutan: Twenty-One Years on the North-East Frontier 1887–1908*, that the lady with the striking personality, Empress Yeshe Dolma was extremely bright and well educated. She played a significant role in the history of Sikkim. She had a knowledge of many subjects and she wrote well. On the occasion of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897, she personally composed and engrossed in beautiful Tibetan characters the address presented by the Sikkim king.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from her, other royal women such as Queen Hope Cooke *Namgyal* and Princess Pema Tsedeun *Namgyal*, also known as Princess Coocoola, actively took part in Sikkim's politics and these royal women also worked for the betterment of the

Sikkimese society in many ways. Not only the royal women but also other women like Mrs. Elisa Maria *Kazini* (wife of the first Chief Minister of Sikkim), Ruth Karthak Lepchani and Mrs. Hemlata Chettri played a leading part in the politics of Sikkim. Women in Sikkim always worked shoulder to shoulder with their men and complete all walks of life. However, their works were found unimportant and historian did not interpret in their writings.

The matrimonial alliance was important in the gender construction of Sikkimese society. The matrimonial alliance with Bhutias must have had some influences on Sikkimese life and culture. Even the matrimonial alliances played an important role in the prevention of foreign intervention in Sikkim. Polygamy was co-existed with polyandry, dowry with bride purchase.<sup>36</sup> The marriage bonds may be for life, temporary and broken at whim. It will be interesting to know that the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 has been extended to Sikkim with effect from 1 May 1989 only. However, the law was not applicable to the Bhutia–Lepcha communities as they have been declared as a scheduled tribe in Sikkim in 1978.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the marriage and divorce of the Lepcha–Bhutia people of Sikkim are still regulated by customary laws. There was no difference between divorce and separation and if the couple did not pull on well. They can separate easily by mutual consent. Bhutia people (even the elites) hardly go to court for legal separation or divorce.<sup>38</sup>

In this regard, it became necessary to study the historical event and the system that was prevailed among the tribal community in Sikkim history. The women had contributed in the past and played a significant role but their role and works had been excluded from the history of Sikkim.

Therefore, the study of the women history leads to an interesting factor because Sikkim always represents history from the androcentric perspective. In Sikkim, women always played an important role in all spheres of life. However, their history was not recorded yet. Social and political progress is closely linked with the role of the women played in the society. It would be impossible to discuss the past, without dwelling at the role played by the women in the history of Sikkim. Therefore, this work will trace the history of women living in different parts of Sikkim during the monarchical period.

The traditional historiography has always focused on areas of human activities that were war, diplomacy, politics or commerce, in which male are dominant and women participation in the political, social and economic activities, agriculture, domestic spheres, family rituals and traditional folk and art has been regarded as unimportant and take it as outside the realms of study of history. The conventional historians produced history in the forms of patriarchal thought and they mostly focus on the perspective of male dominance, whereas women's participation and their hard work were uncovered and did not interpret in their writing. Traditional historiography even ignores the role of women in the history of Sikkim. Therefore, this work will mainly focus on those voices, which were not recorded earlier.

### **1.1. Statement of the problem**

The historical texts were composed by multiple authors. However, these texts have ignored the contribution of women. Therefore, it is necessary to put them back into the picture and documents their role and work for a better understanding of the past. Woman has done a great service through preserving age-old traditions, caste system, moral favour and spiritual vein in their old traditional system of their society. Their

contribution found unimportant. There were many socio-economic and political issues in Sikkim that show the gender inequality in the past. There are plenty of works available on the history of Sikkim and extensive work has been done on the socio-political and economic history of Sikkim. However, the sources that deal with the women history in Sikkim are inadequate.

In a very few books, we have a chapter called women, but it mostly talked about the dresses, jewellery, pleasure, entertainment and their physical appearance. Therefore, this work will try to reconstruct the history by highlighting the role played by the women in Sikkim.

Women in Sikkim are always governed by the customary laws and prevalence of such laws curtails them from access to property inheritance rights. Historically, women were neglected from many areas and were limited only to a private sphere. In the monarchical period, there was no such laws enacted for women in Sikkim. In the royal court also, only men exercised the power and they are always in the forefront, whereas the work of the women was always put behind the curtain. Therefore, it is necessary to study the history of royal women and the politics of gender in the royal court of Sikkim.

In any case, the contributions of women in the past and in shaping its economy, religion, politics and society have not been fully brought out. In order to write women's history, it is important to relook at the existing materials, chronicles, literature, documents and archival information. There is much more gender gap in the past. Though Sikkim is the gender sensitized area but the history of women did not get much importance. There were very less records on the life of elite as well as of the common women.



During the colonial and even early period, gender like any groups, class or race has always been a very powerful factor in the course of history. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the condition of women through the gender perspective as a distinct sociological group, which experiences both overt and covert control through legal, political and social restrictions. Social existences of the women could be seen as depicted or expressed through the art and literature of that particular times as well.

## **1.2. Review of Literature**

Extensive work had been done on the political, economic, social and religious histories of Sikkim by different authors in different time periods. However, these works do not give much importance to the women's question in Sikkim. However, there are very less work that defined the socio-economic and political status of the women during the *Namgyal* period. Therefore, this research is based on two kinds of secondary sources. One is on the basis of the socio-economic and political history of Sikkim and the next one is on the discussion and issues related to the position of women in Sikkim.

Therefore, works like *History of Sikkim*, manuscript written by *Chogyal* Thutob *Namgyal* and *Gyalmo* Yeshe Dolma, in Tibetan language,<sup>39</sup> detailed about the origin and formation of the *Namgyal* dynasty in Sikkim. It provides a detailed account of the lineage of twelve successive rulers and their matrimonial relationships not only with Tibet but with Bhutan and Nepal too. However, this work can be classified as being male-centric in its orientation wherein the focus is mostly on kings rather than queens. Though this book has not explained the role and contribution of the women in Sikkim, nonetheless, it does provide a short commentary on the status of the queens in

different time periods. It is perhaps considered to be the only authentic indigenous work on Sikkim, which gives a valuable insight to the scholars.

Similarly, the work of John A. Ardussi, Anna Balikci Denzongpa and Pre-K. Sørensen, *The Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal*, is another source that provides insight into the royal court of the *Namgyals*. This chronicle is the new version of the old book written in Tibetan language by King Thutob *Namgyal* and his consort Yeshe Dolma.<sup>40</sup> As compared to previous works, this chronicle contains more details about royal women and their socio-economic and political status. This new version of Sikkim history was clearer on royal women and their work during the *Namgyal's* reign. It provides much more detailed account on the Queen Monkyid Lhayum, Yeshe Dolma, Mingur Dolma, Princess Choni Wongmo and others. Basically, this chronicle is on the royal family of Sikkim.

George Kotturan, in his work, *The Himalayan Gateway: History and Culture of Sikkim*,<sup>41</sup> mainly focuses on the social background of the people during the *Namgyal* period. He stated Sikkim maintained a separated identity under the *Chogyal* rule culturally and socially, but with the coming of the Nepalis, Hindu culture was amalgamated with the Tibetan cultural. He further defined that within a patriarchal society, women also inherited property and were not considered dishonoured by having a child before marriage. However, author failed to give the example of such practices in his work.

On the other side Sukhdev Singh Chib in his book, *This Beautiful India: Sikkim*, mostly discussed about the Lepcha's marriage alliances with different tribal groups living in the adjoining hill tract before coming up of the Bhutias in Sikkim.<sup>42</sup> He further explained how they connected with the Bhutias from Tibet and

relation converted into matrimonial alliances. Author mostly focused on the socio-political structure of the *Namgyal* dynasty where he failed to discuss the life of the common as well as elite women in the history of Sikkim.

A.C. Sinha in his book, *Politics of Sikkim: A Sociological Study*, most importantly discussed about the origin of the social institution of the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalis during the *Namgyal* period.<sup>43</sup> He stated that during the monarchical period, all the religious, social, economic and political institutions were run by the group of men who are able to control the social forces. Most importantly, this book talked about the social institution of the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalis where he said within the Lepcha community, women enjoy more social freedom as compared to Bhutia and the Nepalis.

Pedro Carrasco's work, *Land and Polity in Tibet*,<sup>44</sup> mainly deals with the peasantry system and inheritance right over the land in Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim. He defined that only men have the right to inherit the land in Sikkim and women did not inherit the property neither in her family nor in her husband's place. If there would be no son in the family, the property was handed over to the village headman, but it would not pass down to the women. He even highlighted existence of the slavery system in Sikkim during the monarchical period and men do not marry female slaves. Only slave men can marry the women slaves. This book basically talked about the existence of land ownership in Sikkim during the monarchical period but it gives very insightful knowledge on the property inheritance right of the women.

V.H. Coelho's work, *Sikkim and Bhutan*, discussed about the matrimonial relationship of the royal family of Sikkim with Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal.<sup>45</sup> He further discussed how such matrimonial relations later converted into the internal disturbance in the

royal court of Sikkim. However, author had not discussed why women were suppressed in the patriarchal rules within the royal court of Sikkim during the seventeenth century. Author only talked about how women were used as a political tool for the marriage alliances.

The article, *Women in the Diplomatic Game: Preliminary Notes on the Matrimonial Link of the Sikkim Royal Family with Tibet (13th to 20th)*, by Alice Travers reflects how royal women were important to maintain the internal as well as external diplomacy in Sikkim through the matrimonial alliances.<sup>46</sup> Author discussed about how women were used as political and religious tools to maintain the foreign diplomacy between the Sikkim and the Tibet during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. This article concludes by stating how women were important to maintain the religious and political bound between these two countries.

When it comes to the socio-economic condition of the women in Sikkim, Satyendra R. Shukla in his work, *Sikkim: A Story of Integration*, gives the valuable insight into the history of various communities of Sikkim, and also highlighted social and political conditions of the women during the *Namgyal* period.<sup>47</sup> He defined in the past status of the women varies from one community to another and the peasant women used to cover their head, whereas educated women keep their hair bobbed cut. Lastly, he mentioned Sikkimese women deserve a special mention. They are beautiful, soft spoken and hardworking. In Sikkim, women are completely liberated. They not only work shoulder to shoulder with their men but also compete with them in all fields of life. They worked in fields, shops, offices and factories. They can be seen doing everything and everywhere in house and field as well as in the market.

Nari Rustomji's work, *Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy*, detailed about the role played by some of the royal women in the political history<sup>48</sup> like Queen Yeshe Dolma, Queen Hope Cooke *Namgyal*, Princess Coooola and others. Besides that, his work mainly based on the life story of the Late King P.T. *Namgyal*, and it is considered as an autobiography of Palden Thondup *Namgyal* rather than the history of Sikkim.

Lal Bahadur Basnet's work, *A Short Political History*, covered the history of Sikkim from 1642 to 1975.<sup>49</sup> Author described the role of the few women who were actively involved in the politics of Sikkim during the monarchical period. One of such women was Princess Pende Wangmo who challenged the patriarchal dominated society during the seventeenth century. Apart from that, he discussed the power struggle between Hope Cooke, who supported her husband to retain Sikkim as an independent kingdom and on the other side, Ruth Karthak Lepchani and *Kazi* Lhendup Dorji's wife, Elisa Maria *Kazini*, who struggled themselves in bringing up the democracy in Sikkim.

B.S.K. Grover's work, *Sikkim and India 1947–1974*, gives the detailed account of the political history of Sikkim from the birth of political parties till the Sikkim merger with the Indian Union in 1975.<sup>50</sup> Grover mentioned that before 1974, no women represented in the politics of Sikkim. But it was only in 1974 election, Mrs. Hemlata Chettri became the first female member in the Sikkim state assembly election.

The work of Tashi, Tenzing C. and Norbu Jamyang, *Princess from Tibet*, is considered as one of the important articles on the lone Queen, Sangey Deki.<sup>51</sup> She was from Tibet and became the first wife of the last *Chogyal*, Palden Thondup *Namgyal*. This article primarily focused on her personal life only. Similarly, *Princess Pema Tsedeun of Sikkim (1924–2008)* written by Anna Balikci Denzongpa is a short

biography of Princess Pema Tsedeun/Coocoola in Sikkim.<sup>52</sup> In this article, she had detailed about the talk shared between she and Princess Coocoola, once upon a time at Gangtok. Based on her conversation with princess, she wrote this article that is most understandable about the journey of Princess Coocoola from her birth to till date.

Andrew Duff's work, *Sikkim: Requiem for a Himalayan Kingdom*, talked about Queen Hope Cooke *Namgyal* and her journey in Sikkim.<sup>53</sup> Duff discussed the Sikkim scenario during the nineteenth century when Queen Hope Cooke just took her footstep in the land of Sikkim and how her marriage with the King Palden Thondup *Namgyal* became the most talked subject in the international chessboard. Author also discussed the political clashes between Hope Cooke and Elisa Maria *Kazini* on support of her husband's political ambition. Hope Cooke with P.T. *Namgyal* to retain Sikkim as an independent kingdom and on the other side, Elisa-Maria being English supported L. D. Kazi to bring democracy in Sikkim.

B.S. Das in his work, *The Sikkim Saga*, focused on the political life of the American Queen Hope Cooke *Namgyal*, Elisa Maria *Kazini* and Princesses Coocoola and Coola.<sup>54</sup> Das described that all these ladies were very ambitious and wanted to make a powerful image in the Sikkim's history. He described Hope Cooke, who always supported her husband in every field, but being a foreigner, she never made her place in the heart of the Sikkimese people. He further mentioned about Belgian origin Elisa Maria *Kazini* (the wife of L.D. *Kazi*), who played a vital role behind the Sikkim merger with India and she was totally against the monarchical government. Das nicely coated the line by saying behind every successful man there is a woman like same as Elisa-Maria was for her husband *Kazi* Lhendup Dorjee. But he mainly focused on the political life of these women rather than their social and economic activities in the

society. He has written the aims and aspirations of these women for Sikkim and for themselves and how particularly Hope and *Kazini* had influenced the political minds of their respective husbands, *Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal* and *Kazi Lhendup Dorjee*.

*The Sikkim Theory of Land-Holding and the Darjeeling* by Hope Cooke Namgyal detailed about the ownership of the land by the Queen of Sikkim in the past.<sup>55</sup> In this article, she writes about the history of Sikkim, not only the king but the queen also had an ownership over the land and once upon a time, the place called Dzongu, Lachung and Lachen belong to the Queen of Sikkim. She has not mentioned the detailed name of the queen but through this article, she had given the proof that women also have ownership over the land.

On the other hand, D.C. Roy in his work, *Status of Women Among the Lepchas*, highlighted the socioeconomic and political status of the Lepcha women and their role and contribution in the history of Sikkim.<sup>56</sup> Roy especially focused on the religion of the Lepchas and showed the higher status of the women within the Lepcha community. He even talked how position of women among the Lepcha community derogated when Lepchas were started converting into the Buddhist faith.

*The Bhutia–Lepcha Women of Sikkim: Tradition and Response to Change* by Arpana Bhattacharya talked about the socioeconomic status of the Lepcha and the Bhutia women in Sikkim.<sup>57</sup> She mentioned both the Lepcha and Bhutia women enjoy equal position with their male counter parts in the society and there was no discrimination between the girl and the boy within the community, instead women were considered as a supreme head in the family. She highlighted the higher position of the Lepcha and Bhutia women in the society. In spite of all the restriction in Sikkim, women

enjoy more freedom economically, socially and politically as compared to the other parts of India. But she wrote this article in a contemporary context even though it will be helpful to understand the position of the Lepcha–Bhutia women in the society.

Rajen Upadhyay in his article, *Khas-Brahmin Women in Feudal Sikkim as Reflected in the Folk Compositions*, detailed about how Khas-Brahmin women became the victims in the society by their social norms during the feudal era.<sup>58</sup> He wrote women's contribution in the household economy along with several other feminine duties have never been recognized in the pages of the history of Sikkim. Therefore his article is the modest attempt to find out the neglected aspect of the Khas-Brahmin women of Sikkim as reflected in the oral composition during the feudal era.

*Gendered Participation in the Buddhist Himalayas Sikkim and Bhutan: A Comparative Study on Visions of Female Participation* by Winnie Bothe and Swati Akshay Sachdeva discussed the status of the women during the pre-Buddhist period.<sup>59</sup> They explained that people in Bhutan and Sikkim still practise female Shamans, who performed old rituals. In both the countries, Buddhist women enjoy more prestige and freedom as compared to other countries. But patriarchy was present in every sphere of their social life, exclusion of female participation in every spheres. As such, both the countries hold similar historical disposition for patriarchal in the political arena as well.

Similarly, Indira Awasthy in her book, *Between Sikkim and Bhutan (The Lepcha and Bhutias of Pedong)*, did the comparative study on the position of women in Bhutan and in Sikkim in a religious prospective.<sup>60</sup> She also mentioned women in Sikkim enjoy equal position with their male counterpart as compared to women in Bhutan. Author described that in Bhutan, only the nobility and higher class of women have the



right to get education with their male counterparts and hold important position in the government offices. But in general, Bhutanese society is certainly male dominated. The paradox between the position of women in Bhutan and Sikkim with cultural and religious similarities is very difficult to explain, she stated. All the arguments that could be put forth to make women have an inferior status in Bhutan are true for Sikkim with the reverse effect. For instance, women were not allowed inside the innermost chapels. There was no order of nuns in a *Lama* (Monk) predominated social system. Inheritance is not excluded for women but in generally, perpetuated in the male line. But in Sikkim, all these religious disabilities pertain to women, though they are not strictly enforced. Though this book is not based on the historical prospective, but it is helpful to understand the position of women in Bhutan as well as in Sikkim in general prospective.

Rosden Tshering Bhutia's article, *Legal Rights of Sikkimese Women*, deals with the Sikkimese women's rights in different fields such as citizenship rights, property or inheritance right, rights relating to marriage and divorce and other various rights conferred to Sikkimese women.<sup>61</sup> Author stated that the status of the women's rights was one of the basic indicators of human development and gender equality but Sikkimese women were not confronted such legal rights in the past. His work mainly focused on the gender biassness in the socioeconomic and political status of the women during the monarchical period.

Bitu Subba's article, *Women Quest for Empowerment in Sikkim's Society*, highlighted the position of Sikkimese women during the monarchical period.<sup>62</sup> He discussed about how women were treated in the past and showed how gender inequality occurred in the history of Sikkim. He further explained the illiteracy rate among the Sikkimese

women and how women were possessed a low literacy rate as compared to men. Author highlighted how women were actively participated in the economic activity especially in the rural areas like men but their contribution was neglected and not written by any authors in the history of Sikkim. His article is much more helpful to understand the socioeconomic and political status of women during the monarchical period.

Mowsume Bose Roy Datta's book, *Women in Handicrafts Industry*, detailed about the Bhutia, Lepcha as well as the Nepalis women, who are engaged in traditional handicraft production.<sup>63</sup> She said women have been playing the predominant role in producing number of handicrafts in Sikkim. Besides that, this book reflects the case study of a situation of Sikkimese women in terms of their role and status with reference to some empowerment issues in Sikkim. Though this book only highlighted the women participation in the handicraft industry to sustain their livelihood but it gives more information on the women's situation particularly in the arena of gender studies.

### **1.2.1. Women in the Travelogues**

Travelogues reveal the higher status of the women within the tribal communities of Sikkim. Most of the works on its society and physical features are in the form of government reports or travelogues written by British officials like H.H. Risley, editor of the first and only *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, detailed about the historical, geographical and zoological accounts of Sikkim.<sup>64</sup>

L.A. Waddell travelled the Himalayan range during the beginning of eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. His travelogue, *Among the Himalayas: Bibliotheca Himalayica* (first edition 1899, second 1900 and the reprinted 1978),<sup>65</sup> defined the community-wise differentiation in regard to physical appearance of men and women and also the sexual division of labour. He explained that if men used to work as coolie, women also do the same and there was no sexual division of labours in Sikkim. Women carry the loads as heavier than men. Mostly it defined that women are equally involved in their economic activities with their male counterparts and socially women status was higher in Sikkim during the monarchical period.

Photographers Alice S. Kandell and Charlotte Y. Salisbury in their work, *Mountaintop Kingdom: Sikkim*, published in 1972 was considered as one of the prime works on the history of Sikkim that showed the socioeconomic life style of the people of Sikkim.<sup>66</sup> They found that within the tribal communities of Sikkim, there was no sexual division of labour. Authors described the gender relation among the Bhutia family and highlighted women have equal position in the society, if man used to work outside, women used to do all the household work but in the field of agricultural, there was no division of sex. But regarding the property inheritance rights, women have no right in the family property and women are less handsomely dressed than the men. Apart from that, they highlighted lower status of women within the Nepalis community and women from this community are mostly labours.

Apart from that, a plethora of books and articles are available on Lepchas, written as early as 1840 to the present day. These writings are mainly of British scholars like A. Campbell, Superintend of Darjeeling, in his travelogue, *Note of the Lepchas of Sikkim*,<sup>67</sup> mostly talked about the social status of the Lepcha women in Sikkim.

Similarly, Geoffrey Gorer, Halfdan Siiger as well as Indian writers like Anita Sharma, Veena Bhasin and P.N. Chopra have contributed to the stock of literature on the Lepchas and all had given similar views regarding the socioeconomic and political status of the Lepcha women during the monarchical period. They give ethnographic profile of the indigenous people of Sikkim.

These all works highlighted the emergence of women and its role in the entire historical context. However, it has been found that the writings on the women's history of Sikkim are inadequate. Most of the historical works do not focus much on the women's history in Sikkim. History written by different scholars in Sikkim mostly focused on political, religious, social and economic aspects, which were centred on androcentric prospective. In this context, this research will try to fill the gap and try to reconstruct the history of women from the past through consulting the different historical texts. It will also focus on how women were represented in the history of Sikkim. As there is very little information on women and that, which is available pertains to only elite women. Therefore, it is important to construct the position of the common women in the history of Sikkim as well.

### **1.3. Objectives**

This thesis has four objectives to study and analyse the status of women in Sikkim during the *Namgyal* period.

1. To explore the life of women in the private sphere.
2. To study the politics of gender in the royal court of Sikkim.
3. To analyse the role of common women in public sphere.
4. To focus on the religious status of women in Sikkim.

#### **1.4. Methodology**

This study largely depends on the methodologies of gender history. The official documents and older history books often do not include much of what women were doing in different periods of history. Women's history was used to supplement the official documents with more personal items such as journals, diaries, letters and other ways that women's stories were preserved. Sometimes, women wrote for journals and magazines too though the materials may not have been collected as rigorously as writing by men. Therefore, this research will be based on both secondary and primary sources.

The primary sources include diaries, autobiographies, personal letters, newspapers and documents present at the Sikkim State Archives and the documents kept in the royal family's house as well as sources available in Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, which were assessed and studied to understand the socio-economic and political status of the women as well as their power and contribution for the development of Sikkim. The sources in the languages of Nepali and Tibetan are extensively used in this work. These works will be accessed and used as sources in order to understand the women's history in Sikkim. The secondary sources, books, articles, journals and government reports will be used in this work.

Both primary and secondary information will be assessed and analysed to understand this topic. Sources were also collected in the form of oral narratives.

## **1.5. Chapterization**

The present study is divided into six chapters.

### **Chapter -I: Introduction**

This chapter introduces the statement of the problem, review of literature on various works done on the socio-economic and political history of Sikkim and the issues related to the position of women. It will also discuss the objective and the methodology. The last part of the chapter entails the chapterization of the work in brief.

### **Chapter – II: Women in the Private Sphere**

This chapter discusses the historical perception of women within the three different communities of Sikkim, such as the Lepcha, Bhutia and the Nepalis. This chapter focuses on the women and rituals, puberty rites and marriage institution among the three communities. It also looks the sexual division of labour and the inheritance rights of the women during the monarchical period.

### **Chapter - III: The History of the Royal Women of Sikkim**

The third chapter explains the political and socio-economic structure of the *Namgyal* dynasty in Sikkim. It will further explore how *Namgyals* rise to power in Sikkim through marriage diplomacy. It analyses the royal women and their power relationship in the royal court of Sikkim. It also vividly lists out some prominent women in the royal court of Sikkim and their contribution to the development of Sikkim.

#### **Chapter - IV: Women in the Public Sphere**

The fourth chapter discusses on those women who played an important role to bring the democracy in Sikkim. It will also focus on women who worked for the various social causes by organizing different Women Welfare Associations. It further details about the women and education in Sikkim.

#### **Chapter - V: Women and Religion**

This chapter details about the status of women with the primitive religion. It looks the condition of women within the Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim. The conclusion of this chapter is highlighted women in the monastic education of Sikkim during the *Namgyal* period.

#### **Chapter - V: Conclusion**

This chapter gives a valedictory note of this work and summarizes the argument mentioned in the above chapter.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Yadav, Haridai R. *Women Empowerment, Vol. I, History, Policy and legislation*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd. 1957: 50.

<sup>2</sup> Downs, Laura Lee. *Writing History: Theory and Practice*. Edited by Stefan Berger, Heiko Feldner and Kevin Passmore. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2017: 295.

<sup>3</sup> Chettri, Durga P. *Sikkim Chronicle*. Siliguri: Impact, 2010: 1.

<sup>4</sup> Kharel, Sunita and Jigme Wangchuk Bhutia. *Gazetteer of Sikkim*. Gangtok: Home Department, Government of Sikkim, 2013: 115.

<sup>5</sup> Bhutia, Rosden, Tshring. “Legal Rights of Sikkimese Women”. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Vol. no 8, Issue 12, December 2017: 22111*.

<sup>6</sup> The term “Sikkimese” indicates the resident of Sikkim and has little linguistic and ethnological implication. (Debnath, J.C. *Economic History and Development of Sikkim: Before and After Independence*. Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, 2009:15.)

<sup>7</sup> Bhattacharya, Arpana. “The Bhutia–Lepcha Women of Sikkim: Tradition and Response Change”. Mahendra P. Lama. Ed. *Sikkim, Society, Polity, Economy, Environment*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1994: 38.

<sup>8</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. *A Short Political History*. New Delhi: S. Chand, 1974: 148.

<sup>9</sup> Roy, D.C. *Status of Women Among the Lepchas*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2010: 232.

<sup>10</sup> Das, B.S. *The Sikkim Saga*. Delhi: Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1983: 96.

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## CHAPTER – II

### **WOMEN IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

Women are an essential component of human society. However, women did not get their respect and rights in the ages, due to the deeply institutionalized patriarchal values. Historically, a public sphere is that of male and private sphere is that of women and children. Moreover, women's place is in the home. Consequently, tend to be defined by what they do and women are associated with nurturing relationships. The classical Brahmanical text of *Manusmriti* also advised that men must make their women dependent day and night, and keep them under their own control. Women should be kept busy attending to their duties such as cooking, looking after their children/home and always perceived women's place in the home.<sup>1</sup>

In the existing social distinction between men and women, men always held the higher position than the women in society. Regardless of a women's status or wealth, her primary role was to take care of the family as she was meant to. Caring for family members required a lot of efforts. Social stereotypes that identify women with emotional selves weaknesses. The private sphere appeared adversely affect and prevent women's participation in public life away from business and politics. On the other hand, the biological, physiological and anatomical differences of the female body, led by the anatomical structure that makes it possible to give birth to children, have caused women to categorised differently from men and given a lower status in society.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of patriarchy has become the main problem to women's advancement and development. In a patriarchal society, men are in control over women. The nature of this control may be different in every society. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the system, which keeps women dominated and subordinated. Patriarchy creates obstacles for women to go forward in society. Because patriarchal institutions and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women. Patriarchy society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent, limits women's human rights also. Patriarchy refers to male domination both in public and private spheres.

Sikkimese societies, like other societies, are patriarchal and patrilineal in nature, where no women have property inheritance rights. Masculine values dominated in the public sector. In addition, women are placed in a private sphere. But in the private sector, women have equally participated in every work of their life. However, the participation of women in all types of work from home to agriculture, along with their male counterparts, was not recorded in written form. The role of women is not only important in economic activities but also in non-economic activities is equally important.

During the *Namgyal* period, Sikkimese society was broadly classified into three main ethnic communities: the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalis. The status of women varies from one community to another. Therefore, it will be impossible to understand the status of women in the past without knowing the proper history of the ethnic communities of Sikkim. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the brief historical background of the three different communities of Sikkim and tries to understand the status of the women within it.

## **2.2. Perception of Women in different Ethnic Communities of Sikkim**

### **2.2.1. Lepcha Community**

Historically, the Lepchas are considered the “original inhabitants” of Sikkim.<sup>3</sup> They called themselves “Rongkup or Rumkup” or in short, “Rong”, which means “the children of the snowy peak or the children of God”.<sup>4</sup> In the primitive society of the Lepchas, women were respected and men did not have any superiority over women. In fact, the matriarchal structure prevailed within the community and the mother’s relations are considered to be much nearer kin than the father’s relations. Therefore, they trace their descent from patrilineal while giving importance to matrilineal relations.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, a scholar like L.A. Waddell showed the family relations of the Lepchas trace from a matriarchy and children trace their descent through their mother’s side and not through their father’s side,<sup>6</sup> but only daughter in some exceptional cases.<sup>7</sup> The Lepcha believed that father was the only one who transmits bone to his offspring, while from the mother they obtained flesh and blood.<sup>8</sup>

Traditionally, in the Lepcha society, marriage institution was unknown to them. Sex was more or less free.<sup>9</sup> Women have the liberty to choose their own partners. On the demise of the male members in the family, his widow can live with any other male relation. However, marrying their own blood relation was a punishable offence. Similarly, any male member could copulate with any female member with her consent and anything like incest was unknown to them. A man was entitled to copulate with all his female relations excluding his own sisters or mother. The sisters of all female relations could be copulated with. Under such a social order, there was no chance of a fight over women. They had no material belongings to fight for, and the land was abandoned and so was food also.

A similar view has been placed by the Lal Bahadur Basnet, a pioneer historian from Sikkim, opines that in the primitive society of the Lepchas, a man inherited all the widows of his patrilineal relations who were brothers, uncles and even granduncles, the sisters of all such women relations could be copulated with, but, with their consent, whenever time and opportunity permitted to a couple, sex was no problem for the men and women and a major cause of strife was removed.<sup>10</sup> However, besides blood relations, sexual connection with the following relations by marriage was considered as incest. For men, to sleep with any of the women he called mother-in-law or daughter-in-law and the same for the women as well. Such children result from such connection or union, they would be allowed to live, but they would either be of an evil mind or idiots and would be short-lived.<sup>11</sup>

This showed that Lepcha had no proper social order before the coming up of the Bhutia in Sikkim. Therefore, A.C. Sinha in his book, *Politics of Sikkim: A Sociological Study*, defined that before the establishment of the monarchy in Sikkim, the social system of the Lepchas retains a tribal affinity of its own and a strong sense of territorial unity in social relations.<sup>12</sup> Men and women in the Lepcha society had the liberty to choose their own life partners. Even C. De Beauvoir Stocks in his work, *Folk-Lore and Customs of the Lepchas of Sikkim*, stated that sexual freedom exists among the Lepchas, but being a tribe, they are polygamous as well as they are a polyandrous race. But marrying their own blood relation was not allowed and severe punishment was given to those who break this rule.<sup>13</sup>

### **2.2.2. Rules for women during pregnancy**

There was strict customary law that was enforced upon the Lepcha women during the time of pregnancy. Firstly, women must not eat the flesh of any animal whose throat

has been cut, from the fifth month itself and if she does so, a child will be born with a red mark on the neck and the child will die. Secondly, an animal must not be either eaten that has been killed in her presence and if a woman by any mistake has eaten such animals, the bones are kept until the child was born and then rubbed on his throat. Thirdly, women should not eat distorted plantains that are twisted and out of shape or else it was believed that the child's fingers and toes will resemble them. Lastly, if the basket she carries falls off her back when containing food, she may not eat any of the contents. She was also expected to lead a homely life and must not go out at the night otherwise the child will be died. Women during their pregnancy go often to a river and protect themselves against evil spirits by sacrificing two fowl.<sup>14</sup>

However, regarding the birth of the girl child within the Lepcha family, girls are equally accepted and welcomed. Parents will be happy if they get a girl child as their first issue. They have faith if the first child will be a daughter, she will bring good luck to their parents. Though the expectation of a male child had always been in calculated among the Lepcha society and boys are desirable to carrying their forward. However, in general, the Lepcha parents take equal care of the daughter and give them equal protection and affection as that of a son.<sup>15</sup> However, illegitimate children are not accepted in Lepcha society. When such children were born, the mother was known to have thrown the corpse into a river at night, hiding her wrong from the villagers. It is believed that when a child was thrown into a river, a demon takes him. When deformed children were born, they are instantly killed, but the mother was well treated by her husband and she will be ill-treated by society or neighbours.<sup>16</sup>

Though, Lepchas followed the patriarchal family system. Father is the head of the family and his decision was final. But, the mother also equally occupied a respectable



position in the family, she was the centre of the household. The wife was never exploited by the husband. Both the husband and the wife share the responsibility of the maintenance of the house and children equally.<sup>17</sup> If there would be no adult male members in the household, women were also regarded as the head of the family. Labour was divided among household members by sex and age. The various labour tasks were grouped into three categories: domestic work, agricultural work and miscellaneous work. Household work used to be done by the women, while men do the agricultural work and provided wood and water. Sometimes, the women equally shared agricultural work, but ploughing was considered as the man's job.<sup>18</sup>

While after the coming up of the Bhutias and the Nepalis, the Lepcha organized themselves in a proper social order which was similar to the Bhutias in many forms.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.2.3. Bhutia Community**

Apart from the Lepchas, the Bhutias are the next important ethnic group of Sikkim, who took refuge and settled down in Sikkim during the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> The word Bhutia, sometimes spelt and pronounced as "Bhotia", was derived from their original homeland called "Bhot", i.e., Tibet,<sup>21</sup> to which the Bhutias of Sikkim originally belonged. Looking at the origin of the Bhutia community in Sikkim, there are different historical narratives and one most popular narrative is that during the thirteenth century, descendent of the first king of Sikkim, Khye-Bumsa, came down to Sikkim via Chumbi Valley, Tibet in search of the Lepcha priest to seek blessing from him. Khye Bumsa's wife Jomo Guruma was barren and the couple are advised to seek blessing from the Lepcha priest called the The-kong -Tek, who ruled Sikkim at that period. Having received a blessing from the Lepcha priest, Khye Bumsa and his wife were blessed to have three sons. Thereafter, Khye Bumsa had

signed a blood brotherhood treaty with the Lepcha priest at Kabi Longstok, (at present north Sikkim) which signifies the eternal friendship between the Lepchas and the Bhutias.<sup>22</sup>

With this friendship, there was the start of the incoming of the Bhutias into Sikkim. According to Arpana Bhattacharya, in her article, *The Bhutia-Lepcha Women of Sikkim: Tradition and Response to Change*, stated that; it has been accepted that the people of the “Kham” province of eastern Tibet first started to come down and settle down in Sikkim from about tenth to eleventh centuries, due to various socio-political, economic and religious reasons.<sup>23</sup> Thereafter shortly, Sikkim became the colony of the Tibetan settlers and by the middle of the seventeenth century, three venerable Lamas of Tibet came to Sikkim and established the *Namgyal* dynasty in 1642 C.E.<sup>24</sup> The Bhutia’s of Sikkim, as history says, are of Tibetan origin, having same cultural pattern, language and scripts as the Tibetans. It is believed that when they migrated to Sikkim from Tibet, they also brought the Tibetan culture along with them, which was still followed by the Sikkimese Bhutia.

Bhutia women enjoy a social status equal to that of men and women are free to enter into business or to become shopkeepers. Both men and women work hard and both have equal responsibility in running the house. Women usually weave at home and do the household chores, while men used to work in the field, tend cattle and go away to serve in trade caravans or became merchants. In the rural areas, where the Bhutias are mostly inhabited, about 80% of women have participated in the agricultural fields. Women are involved more in the agricultural field than men and there was no hard and fast division of labour between the sexes. Both men and women have equally participated in economic activities.<sup>25</sup>

Traditionally, Bhutia women also work as porters, labours and vendors. But the decision-making power always goes to the menfolk and such kind of gender discrimination are widely prevalent in the *Dzumsa*<sup>26</sup> system, as this village council was composed of each household head and only men are qualified to become members of the *Dzumsa*, and no women are officially authorized to attend the meetings. However, a widow can take her husband's place until their son is old enough to take charge or if they had no son or until she adopts one.<sup>27</sup> Such a system was established in the northern part of Sikkim, where the major inhabitants of the Bhutias lived, and they are known as the Lachenpas and the Lachungpas.<sup>28</sup> They have their own traditional legal system called *Dzumsa* headed by the *Pipon* (village headmen).<sup>29</sup>

This unique system of self-governance was established during the first half of the nineteenth century in order to provide structure and cohesion for these societies and their activities.<sup>30</sup> *Pipon* was elected every year by the elders of the villagers and every household was competent to send an adult member to represent it, otherwise, a fine was imposed. But the women are not entitled to vote or to stand for election.<sup>31</sup>

*Dzumsa* norms are silent on women holding the position of *Pipon* because till now, no female *Pipons* have ever been elected so far. The deep nature of gender discrimination was also reflected in the adherence to the strict traditional code for women during the *Dzumsa* meeting, whereas men are exempted from these norms. Women only attended the meeting in the absence of the male members.<sup>32</sup> From each family of the village, one person enjoys voting right for selecting *Pipon* and other board members from the *Dzumsa*. But women have no power of voting. If in a family there was a widow, the voting right will go to her son, even if he is young. These showed the

decision-making power in the public sphere was given to the men, not to the women. This self-governing system does not encourage the Bhutia women to engage in and till now, *Dzumsa* consists of only male representatives that clearly show the secondary position of women in public affairs and in the community decision-making process.<sup>33</sup>

Bhutia women's style of dress is purely Tibetans and distinct from the other communities in Sikkim. They used to wear *Kho* or *Bakhu*<sup>34</sup> with a silken full-sleeve blouse called *Honju*. In the front portion, they tie a loose sheet of multicoloured woollen cloths made of a special design called *Pangden*.<sup>35</sup> The women are very fond of heavy jewellery made of pure gold. There was no system of putting vermilion within the Bhutia community; the married woman wears a striped apron called the *Pangden* as a sign of marital status.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, L.A. Waddell described that the Bhutia women, especially those from Tibet, are great awkward figures, most of them neither very clean nor comely, nor over-burdened with false modesty, but all are beaming with good temper, and they wear massive amulets and charms like breastplates of gold and silver filigree work set with turquoises, and their prayer-wheels and rosaries are also be-jewelled. The richer women wear chaplets of large coral beads, costing as much as ten to twenty pounds a set, and many wear, hanging from their girdles, various silver ornaments and Chinese chopsticks.<sup>37</sup>

#### **2.2.4. Nepali Community**

The third and the most numerous inhabitants of Sikkim were the Nepalis. The Nepalis appeared on the Sikkimese scene much after the Lepchas and the Bhutias. Nepalis is

just an umbrella term under which various tribes and communities find a homogeneous representation.<sup>38</sup> The Nepalis community in Sikkim is inclusive of the three sub-cultural stocks: the Kiratis, the Newaris and the Gurkhas (Bahun and Chhetri). The Kiratis groups included Limbus, Rai, Manger, Gurung, Tamang and a host of marginal tribal stocks and they are different from the Newaris and the Gurkhas in terms of their religion, language and culture. Therefore, A.C. Sinha in his work, *Politics of Sikkim: A Sociological Study* defined that the; Nepalis are divided into two groups: the *Tagadhari*, those who wear the sacred thread, and the *Matwali*, those who do not put sacred thread and have the habit of drinking.<sup>39</sup>

The Nepali's presence in Sikkim has a different history. The Limbu and Manger were among the earliest settlers of the land along with the Lepchas. Gurkha elements in Sikkim came as a part of the invading Gurkha armed forces and settled down in their conquered land in course of time. The Newar came to Sikkim at the invitation of the *Namgyal* courtiers for the purpose of developing a thinly populated southern district so that agriculture could be encouraged and cash revenue could be generated. Therefore, A.C. Sinha stated in his work *Sikkim Feudal and Democratic*, that there are two waves of Nepalis immigration in Sikkim. The first one was the Gurkha incursion from 1770–1815 and the second one was British-induced settlement efforts from 1861 onwards.<sup>40</sup> When they migrated to Sikkim, they retained not only their language and religion but also their dress, social customs and manners.<sup>41</sup> The Nepalis followed a distinct culture as compared to the Bhutias and the Lepchas in Sikkim. Most of the Nepalis are Hindus, while some of them also followed Buddhism.<sup>42</sup> But, all the Nepalis speak their own language “Nepali”, which is not the official language but the *lingua franca* of the state.<sup>43</sup>

Traditionally, Nepalis women were engaged in fetching water, carrying loads and working as labours. Therefore, photographers Alice S. Kandell and Charlotte Y. Salisbury, in their work, *Mountaintop Kingdom: Sikkim*, stated that the Nepalis women, who do so much of the repair work on the roads, carry their babies in the baskets, hanging down their backs, held by a strap that goes across the forehead. Many babies sleep soundly in these baskets on the edge of a cliff while their mothers hammer rocks into small stones to be used for fill at the next washout or landslide.<sup>44</sup> Even Satyendra R. Sukla in his work, *Sikkim: The Story of Integration*, stated that most of the peasant women who worked in the field covered their heads with a scarf were Nepali women.<sup>45</sup>

During the monarchial period, the condition of the women used to be deplorable during their husband's departure as *Kalo Bhari*<sup>46</sup> or porters or in some cases, as a worker in a distant land. Apart from the *Kalo Bhari*, the males were often asked to work as *Jharlangi* and *Kuruwa* (forced labour) porters to promote the Tibetan trade of the British. During their husband's absence, it was a wife who took care of the house and children alone. Apart from that, women had to visit the farm of the *Mandal*<sup>47</sup> as a *Bethi Khetala*<sup>48</sup>, in replacement of their husbands and whatever food she gets from such work, she used to bring home for her children without eating anything.<sup>49</sup>

During such a period, some of the village officials like *Mandals* and *Karbaris* (dealers between peasants and higher officials) visited the house and asked for a sexual favour from the wife in the absence of her husband. Under such circumstances, women were sandwiched between the feudal pressure and their love, care and concern towards their husbands. To protect themselves from the lust desire of such officials, some of the

women even had to hide in cowsheds and even behind the bushes of their agricultural fields. There was a maximum probability of women getting raped at the hands of such officials. However, in fear of losing their honour and dignity, such cases disappeared along with the flow of time. At that juncture, women had to struggle on three fronts, firstly, their household affairs; secondly, the psychological disturbance of the separation from their husbands; and thirdly, to protect their chastity from the lustful behaviour of the village officials.<sup>50</sup>

L.A. Waddell described in his travelogue that the Nepalis women, as they have seen have bright and pleasant faces and are picturesquely dressed in close-fitting bodices and kilted skirts, with bright-coloured girdle and sash and a gaudy silk handkerchief thrown negligently over their head. They overload themselves with massive jewellery, enormous gold or silver earrings, nose rings, bracelets, anklets, fingerings and necklets of huge size made of coral or thinly beaten gold or massive silver or strings of coins reaching down to their waist. Most of the women wear all their wealth as well as that of their husbands on their necks and faces and whenever they get hardship in their life, they pawn or sell their jewellery.<sup>51</sup>

## **2.3. Women and Rituals**

### **2.3.1. Puberty Rites**

Among the tribal communities in Sikkim, such as the Lepchas and the Bhutias, puberty rites were unknown to them. Girls usually marry after puberty and especially those who followed Buddhism, such practices were not applicable to women. It was also from the foreign source that the Lepchas learned that the presence of menstruating women would blight the plant in flower; this is a completely alien idea,

for otherwise menstruating women are paid no attention to. The Lepchas have modified this notion by saying that the plant dislikes any strong smell, soap or excreta would have just the same effect; they will not accept the prevalent Hindu idea of women being essentially unclean.<sup>52</sup>

But, puberty rites within the Nepalis communities were observed. They were very ritualistic and superstitious in terms of the menstrual cycle. Especially within the Khas-Brahmin (Chhetri-Bahun) communities, during the first menstrual time of the girl or the bride, she was sent to her sister's place or another cousin's house for 2 to 3 weeks. She was not allowed to visit her parent's home owing to a threat of destruction to her parent's family. If she did not have her female relatives in her locality, she was asked to hide for some weeks in a secluded room and was not allowed to enter the kitchen. For almost a month, as justified to keep others pious, the bride was not permitted to cook or to serve meals and even she was forbidden from going into the orchards. In every monthly cycle, she had to keep herself away from the kitchen and the orchards for 4 or 5 days. After only a bath, she had to undergo a *Suddhi* process in which she had to sprinkle *Gaut* (cow urine) in the entire house and in the orchard. Such practices of women to keep themselves away from the kitchen and orchard during their monthly cycle are still practised among some of the Nepalis communities in Sikkim.<sup>53</sup>

Among the Newar community, girls between the ages of 5, 7, 9 and 11 years undergo a marriage ritual with God Shiva, symbolically represented by a wood apple (*Bel*) and it was known as *Bel-biya* (marriage with the wood apple). A Newari girl child was required to undergo this ceremony before she reaches puberty. This custom was



known as *Suvarna Kumar Vivah*, *Ihi* or *Bel-biya*. This ceremony performs like a grand marriage function with all divinity.<sup>54</sup>

After this marriage, it is not a compulsion for the Newari women to get married to any male members. They can put vermilion (*Sindoor*) in the name of the *Bel* itself. Traditionally, it was believed that the *Bel* fruit must look rich and must not be damaged in any kind. It is also believed that if the *Bel* is damaged, the bride will be destined for an ugly and unfaithful husband after her real marriage. However, the most important reason for marrying the girl with the *Bel* was that once she was married to Lord Shiva, she will remain pure and chaste and she would not be considered a widow even after the death of her real husband, because she is already married to the Lord, who is still believed to be alive. If in case, the *Bel* broke down somehow, the Newari woman would be considered a widow. But if she was married to a man and her husband died in between, she will not be considered a widow. Such a system is still practising among the Newar community in Sikkim. This showed the higher value attached to the women folk in the Newar community.

There are myths and historical reasons behind the practice of such rituals. It is believed that during the time of *Rana* dynasty<sup>55</sup> in Nepal, the dignity of Newari girls was under threat. The *Ranas* and his men used to see the Newari girls with lustful eyes. Therefore, to protect their chastity from such lustful men, the Newars arranged marriage of their daughters to *Bel* fruit in order to save their future generation. The *Ranas* had the tradition of respecting and protecting married women. Therefore, the *Ranas* became conscious of not disturbing the married girls because *Bel* marriage involves god and had religious sanction. Marring with a *Bel* fruit saved the Newari

girls from the evil men and also saved the Newari community and such practice is still prevalent.<sup>56</sup>

#### **2.4. Marriage System Among the Lepchas**

Marriage was an important social institution that leads to the formation of a universal primary group. It played a vital role towards the establishment of primary, social as well as physical relationships between men and women.<sup>57</sup>

Among the Lepchas, the practices of monogamy, polygamy and polyandry were widely prevalent. Among them, monogamy was the fundamental type of marriage, and it was one of the most common marriages within the community.<sup>58</sup> The Lepcha practised bride price because the wife was purchased. Sometimes groom had to render the service to the future father-in-law in the hope of marriage. In cases of intermarriage with the other caste or communities, the children belong to the father.<sup>59</sup>

In the Lepcha society, widow remarriage was allowed but the widow must live for 3 years after her husband's death, then only she will be given in marriage to her late husband's younger brother. Similarly, a widower must remain unmarried for 3 years in honour of his deceased wife, and then he will be given his deceased wife's younger sister in marriage. If his deceased wife has no younger unmarried sister, then it was his father-in-law's duty to find a girl from among his own relatives and arrange marriage for him with her. If his father-in-law cannot find any such girl, he must be called *byek-bo* (go-between) to arrange for the cancellation of the last marital ties. In such cases, the father-in-law has to give one scarf and Rs. 5 to his son-in-law by stating, "I am ashamed that I have no girl to give you for a wife, therefore now you are free and can choose any girl and be happy".<sup>60</sup>

Majority of the scholars stated that the Lepcha did not follow the system of polyandry marriage before the coming up of the Bhutias in Sikkim. A. Campbell in his travelogues *Note on the Lepchas of Sikkim* stated that the Lepchas hated polyandry.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, L.B. Basnet writes Lepchas are polygamous and detest polyandry.<sup>62</sup> J.D. Hooker, in his book *Himalayan Journal* point out that polyandry was unknown to the Lepcha and even polygamy was rare.<sup>63</sup> H.H. Risley in his work, *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, pointed out that polyandry though comparatively rare in the Lepcha society, but not entirely unknown.<sup>64</sup>

On the other side, scholars like A.C. Sinha believed that the polyandry was largely practised among the Lepcha community and marriage was considered a social contract between the two parties.<sup>65</sup> Even P.N. Chopra's work, *Sikkim*, explained that both polyandry and polygamy were prevalent among the Lepcha society. A man can have four or five wives at a time and four men can marry one woman.<sup>66</sup> In the case of polyandrous marriage, the elder brother only marries the woman who was shared by his brother. The other brothers also had the status of a husband.

Similarly, Anita Sharma, in her work *The Lepchas of Dzongu Region in Sikkim: A Narrative of Cultural Heritage and Folklore*, stated that the elder brother's wife was common to all the brothers and when the second brother takes a wife, she was common to all the brothers younger than himself. But elder brothers are not allowed to cohabit with the wives of younger brothers. It was only the wife of the younger brother to whom no one can have access. If the younger brother dies, his wife returns to her home or she will marry someone else but she will not live with any of her late husband's elder brothers.<sup>67</sup> However, with time, polyandrous marriages, however,

have become rare due to the lack of agreement among the family members; along with it, polygamy has also become extremely rare.<sup>68</sup>

Traditionally, the wife was considered as being purchased by the husband's group. She has no right to refuse the man offered in place of her demised husband. If she refused, her group must supply a second woman to replace her. Similarly, if a husband wished to refuse the wife he had inherited, he must supply another man in his place. A Lepcha man can inherit the wives of any of his elder brothers, real or classificatory, the wives of all his paternal and maternal uncles, real or classificatory, and all the younger sisters of his wife, real or classificatory, if he is unmarried. However, the practice of junior levirate was less common than that of junior sororate.<sup>69</sup>

In the Lepcha society, during the marriage ceremony, when girls leave the home for the first time with their husbands, the maternal uncles bid them farewell by giving them all important boons. The reason for that is defined by A.R. Foning, author of the *Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe*; in the custom of the Lepchas, maternal uncle plays an important role in the matrimonial alliances. It was he who negotiated for the marriage and gives away the bride. The father, the paternal uncles, brothers and others always take a secondary place because the Lepchas are the followers of both patriarchal and matriarchal family systems. Whichever clans the girls are married into, they continued to be the same clan as their mothers and their grandmother's side. They do not take up the clans of the husband. But as a whole, they followed the patriarchal family system.<sup>70</sup>

While travelling in the Himalayan region, L.A. Waddell narrated one story in his travelogue that was related between eggs and marriage. He stated that an old Lepcha

woman presented one basket of eggs to the travellers, and it was believed that to present one basketful of eggs to the stranger during those times in Sikkim was a common way of proposing for marriage, and the acceptance of the basket of eggs by the object of one's affections settled the questions.<sup>71</sup> A circumstantial story was told by the sister of the king Thutob *Namgyal*, named Tshring Buthi, as how when she visited Darjeeling in June 1873, along with her stepbrother Sidkeong *Namgyal* (eighth king), for the first time. She was so captivated by the charms of a European present there, she wished to marry one of them. Therefore, when one European accepted her present of eggs, she bluntly asked him to marry her right away. But she was only made to understand with difficulty that he already had a wife and could not marry another one according to their custom.<sup>72</sup>

## **2.5. Bride Price (*rith*) and Lepcha**

Lepcha practised bride price before the migration of the Bhutias into Sikkim. In the Lepcha community, the boy had to work in the bride's father's field for 1 or 2 years, unless he can pay the full amount asked by the bride's family. The groom had to pay sometimes Rs. 300 for his bride and had to work for a minimum of 3 years in his father-in-law's house. But during such a period, a man was allowed to cohabit with his wife and sometimes children were born before the man brings his wife home. The husband was being treated more or less as a slave and his services were considered an economic factor.<sup>73</sup> Usually in polyandrous marriages also, the younger brother shared the burden of the bride price within a family. Due to the isolated nature of the early settlements and the high rate of female mortality, women were paid for by the prospective of bridegrooms.<sup>74</sup>

During the arranged marriage, the groom had to place several rupees in front of the bride's family, which was eventually deducted from the bride price. If a woman had a child before her marriage, he/she is taken over by the present husband. The marriage tie was very slight and can be dissolved at any time by the woman or a man especially in the case of childness.<sup>75</sup>

Traditionally, if a couple had a daughter only, the son-in-law was brought at home, all the expense of the marriage was bore by the girl's parent and no bride price was paid. The son-in-law would live in the village and inherit the land of his father-in-law, but retain his own clan's name. The children born to the couple inherited their father's clan name.<sup>76</sup>

## **2.6. Marriage Systems Among the Bhutias**

Among the Bhutias of Sikkim, as like the Lepchas, polyandrous, polygamous and monogamous forms of marriage were prevalent.<sup>77</sup> It has been stated that along with the Bhutia migration from Tibet to Sikkim, the practice of polyandry entered into this region. In the polyandry system, two or three men marry one woman. There are several reasons for polyandrous marriages: firstly, one important reason was that traditionally in the pastoral country, such marriages were arranged to protect the joint family when its head was away for a week for herding cattle. Secondly, to keep the common property within the family.<sup>78</sup>

In Sikkim, however, it was usually a fraternal polyandry, where the conjoint husbands are usually brothers. If the elder brother takes a wife, she was common to all his brothers. If the second brother takes a wife, she was common to all the brothers younger than himself.<sup>79</sup> Earlier, the Bhutias with more sons and limited resources

went in for fraternal polyandry as the dominant form of marriage. Though the fraternal polyandry functioned to conserve land and labour in the family, yet it managed to produce a pool of unmarried females.<sup>80</sup>

On the other side, the practice of polyandry amongst the Bhutia community could be one of the variables explaining the higher value attached to women. Marriage bounds gave a special position to Bhutia women in Sikkim. Because in a family, wife stays 6 months at a higher altitude with one husband in their pastoral work and another 6 months at a lower altitude with another husband in their agricultural work. In the polyandrous society, every woman had a dual house— one was at a higher altitude and the other one was at a middle or lower altitude.<sup>81</sup>

However, J.C. Debnath stated in his work, *Economic History and Development of Sikkim* that the custom of polyandry was a direct result of the custom of bride price. When several brothers saved money that was enough only for a single bride. Traditionally, people think it was reasonable to go for polyandry marriage. However, it had led to a reduction in population, that is why the Lepchas and the Bhutias who had settled down in Sikkim long before the Nepalis are now numerically smaller than later.<sup>82</sup> Another factor was that polyandry marriages led to the immobility of the members within the family, which means also the immobility of labour. This led to the concentration of the Lepcha–Bhutia communities in the smaller area of north Sikkim. Thirdly, it hinders the incentive of work. While a brother earns, other polyandrous brothers may sit idle or even work within the family.<sup>83</sup>

There were several disadvantages that women have to face in a polyandrous marriage; for that reason, in 1912, *Chogyal* Sidkeong Tulku, the tenth King of Sikkim, drafted one order to abolish the polyandry system of marriage in Sikkim. In the notification,

he stated, “take notice, all you *Kazis* and *Thikadars* (landlords) of Sikkim of our subject. Though we ought to be ruling over a prolific race and populous country without diminishing in number as we are the inhabitants of the sacred hidden land of Guru Padmasambhava. Yet the Bhutia and the Lepcha races are dying out owing to the evils of the marriage customs prevailing amongst us, which allows polyandry, the custom of several brothers marrying one common wife.”<sup>84</sup> *Chogyal Sidkeong Tulku* also pointed out that the prevailing bride price system among the Lepchas-Bhutia is too steep for men and the poor men are unable to pay the price, do not marry at all.<sup>85</sup> He further stated that the abnormal custom of marriages amongst the Lepchas and the Bhutia seems without the disparity in age of the men and the women and sometimes so bad that an old Grey-headed man is matched to a girl in her teens or a boy hardly out of his teens matched to an old woman fit to be his grandma. All these militate against the prolific reproduction of healthy children. The real cause of the present scarcity of birth amongst the Bhutia and the Lepchas can be traced to the above evils.

In this draft, he has ordered eight sets of rules to be followed by the Lepchas and the Bhutia communities of Sikkim. Out of the eight rules, six are the most important and they are as follows:

1. Henceforth, with a view to increasing the birth rate and the number of the race, the Lepcha and the Bhutia must marry each brother one wife to himself and should not have a common wife.
2. If the first wife proves to be barren, a man may take another wife or as many as he can support according to his means. But the eldest wife must not object to this.



3. Amongst the Lepchas, there should not be vast differences between the ages of husband and wife. Boys and girls of the same age should be permitted to marry.
4. During the lifetime of the eldest brother, the younger brother must not regard the wife of the eldest brother as a common wife, nor does the eldest brother regard the wife of a younger brother as a common wife. But should any of the brothers die leaving a widow, the surviving brother must maintain her or one of them may take her to his wife.
5. The Bhutias and the Lepchas must not intermarry with the *Paharias* or *Madhyasias* (Nepalis or Plainsman). Intermarriage between the Bhutias and the Lepchas may be allowed but as a rule, Bhutias should marry among Bhutias and the Lepchas should marry among Lepchas only in order to preserve the purity of the race.
6. Amongst the *Kazis*, when a daughter is given out in the marriage as he has been done hitherto except the customary preliminary offerings of rupees, they should not take any further price. Similarly, for the Bhutia and the Lepchas, the price of the girl should not exceed Rs. 20 minimum to Rs. 100 maximum including feast, etc. As regards to a dowry from the girls' parents that will depend on the circumstances of the parents. It is their wish if they want to give to their daughters. But it is not compulsory.<sup>86</sup>

And the rest was regarding the issue of the marriage certificate that was not practised among the people of Sikkim and the last one was the payment by the unfaithful party to the faithful one. Though the polyandry system was abolished in 1912, by the tenth *Chogyal* of Sikkim, but in reality, it is still in practice in some areas of Sikkim.

## **2.7. Bride Price and Bhutia**

Bhutia people followed the patriarchal family system, but the position of the women within the Bhutia community was not as deteriorated. Bhutia women have a great position in the family. At the time of the daughter's marriage, her mother gets the milk price that comprises one *Khada* (scarf), a pot of *Chhaang* (local drink) and other commodities. Mothers give milk in childhood, so when the daughter goes to her in-law's house, her in-laws pay the milk price to the bride's mother. They have no dowry system, instead, they have a bride price where the son-in-law has to stay in the father-in-law's home almost for 1 to 2 years by giving them free service and if the girl's parents were satisfied and think that he will keep their daughter happy, then only marriage will be fixed, otherwise it may be cancelled also. Older women were highly respected within the Bhutia community. Widow remarriage was freely allowed but the inheritance and decision-making power always goes into the hand of the menfolk.<sup>87</sup>

Marriages among the Bhutias are not contracted in childhood, as among the Hindus, nor do the men generally marry at a young age. This may be occurred because of the difficulty in paying the bride price as expected from the girl's parents. Traditionally, the sum of the prices varies from Rs. 40, Rs. 400 or Rs. 500, according to the rank of the parties. It was not customary to allow the bride to leave her parent's home because of her husband until the payment has been paid in full. It was not uncommon that the husband worked in his father-in-law's home until he won the heart of his bride.<sup>88</sup>

## **2.8. Marriage System Among the Nepalis**

Polygamy and monogamy were widely prevalent among the Nepalis communities in Sikkim. But polyandry was not an accepted norm. A man could marry four or five

women at a time. Because within the Nepalis community, having more wives was considered a greater asset for a man, because all the wives used to work in the fields and other places to earn their livelihood, therefore expenditure on them was quite insignificant.<sup>89</sup>

Within the Nepalis community, married women wear *Sindoor* (Vermillion) and green *potey* (the green colour glass bead necklace) to show their marital status.<sup>90</sup> But their traditional dresses were varied from one community to another and are distinct from the Lepcha and the Bhutia communities. Mostly the Khas-Brahmin women wear *Chobandi Cholo* as blouse and *Dhaka Sari*<sup>91</sup> as their traditional attire and the men wear *Doura-Suruwal*.

Gender discrimination was a well-known phenomenon among the Nepali community of Sikkim during the monarchical period. According to Rajen Upadhyay, women have a subordinate position in the society and child marriage was encouraged. Generally, a girl's marriage was fixed at a very young age around 5 to 14 years. The girl child was never considered as an asset rather she was taken as a burden in the family and because of this, their marriage was arranged during the early ages. Girls were usually married before puberty, at the age when they were not even in a position to understand the true meaning of marriage.<sup>92</sup>

Traditionally, the custom of dowry (*Daijo*) was very popular among the Khas-Brahmin (Chhetri-Bahun) communities. The bride was asked to get *Daijo* from her parents in the form of livestock and costly utensils. If some families failed to arrange due to the deplorable condition of her parents, she had to be the victim of domestic violence. Even threatened to the bride by their in-laws that they will marry their son

to another woman if they failed to fulfil the *Daijo* demand.<sup>93</sup> In contrast, the marriage of the Nepalis community was very simple and no conspicuous consumption or expenditure was made.<sup>94</sup>

If the first wife failed to fulfil the *Daijo* demands or if she was incapable of physical work or if she failed to bigot a male child, in such cases a man could usually remarry another woman. Akin to her male counterparts, widow remarriage was allowed in Nepalis communities, a woman can also remarry another person if she felt to do so. But, some specific term was assigned to the woman who married a second time was known as *Dui Gharey* (two houses) and if she married the third time, she was known as *Tin Gharey* (three houses) and inter-dinning with the *Tin Gharey* women was not allowed and especially Khas-Brahmin male could not marry their girl children.<sup>95</sup>

The condition of the widows seems to be very pathetic as remarriage was not so common among the Nepalis communities. Traditionally, the parents of a girl would hardly take care of the age gap between the groom and the bride. In some cases, the grooms were to the age of the girl's father. Under such circumstances, if her husband died, the girl had to spend her entire life at the mercy of her brothers and nephews. Upon the death of her partner, her *Sindoor* (Vermillion) was to be washed away and her green *Potey*<sup>96</sup> was taken out from her neck and had to isolate herself until the thirteenth day, till the death rites get over. Further, she had to cover her head with a white scarf for her entire life and have to wear only white and simple clothes.<sup>97</sup>

Even widows were forbidden to wear bright clothes, especially red, and pieces of jewellery. She had to be abandoned from all other worldly pleasures. Widow was asked to keep herself secluded and was not allowed to participate in social occasions.

The young widow was not allowed to speak and giggle with other male person in the locality.<sup>98</sup>

## **2.9.The Sexual Division of Labour**

In the history of Sikkim, there was no hard and fast sexual division of labour between the sexes. There was no distinction between men's work and women's work. Both men and women equally participated in their work from home to agriculture. Besides that, women also engaged in their traditional skills such as weaving and spinning. Women also have a major role in the earning of the family. Both men and women equally participated in their work such as fetching water, carrying loads, cooking and ploughing. If women carry their children in a basket slung over their backs, men also carry their loads in a basket similarly strapped over their foreheads. Therefore, L.A. Waddell described that while carrying their loads and distributing work equally, they enjoyed themselves and men used to sing a song like:

*Travelling with a pretty maid*

*The road seems very short and charming,*

*And so, seems life with a lovely wife.<sup>99</sup>*

Though inheritance right was not given to women, but there was equal involvement of both men and women in all forms of labourers. Within the family, men used to do outside work and women used to do household work. But women even go out to gather wood, bamboo or fodder or even helped their husbands in the field of agriculture. Sometimes they look at their animals or the herd of goats in the upper pastures.<sup>100</sup> Traditionally, many men who worked as a coolies even brought their

wives along with them, and women carry heavier loads than men.<sup>101</sup> The women also work as porters and any outsider will be surprised to see the women carrying a heavy load on their backs while walking up the upward slope of the mountain road. The Bhutia–Lepcha women are strong and hardworking, practically they constitute the main power force in the family as well as in society.<sup>102</sup>

Women in Sikkim have a major role in the earning of the family. Sikkim was a feudal state till its merger with the Indian union and the main source of income was the land and forest. According to Arpana Bhattacharya, the women in rural areas take an active part in the cultivation of the land. Besides that, they also engaged in other activities such as carpet weaving or knitting wool. Women also run a small businesses in the market such as selling vegetables. The women never felt any disgrace in maintaining a shop in the marketplace or on the roadside.<sup>103</sup> Documents entitle “*Sikkim*”, directed by Satyajit Ray in 1975, highlighted the women working as manual labourers during the construction of the road to reach the far-flung places of the north district; not only that, women also fetch wood for cooking and water for the household, actively engaging in agricultural activities, the existence of women vendors in the market that signifies the active involvement of women in the economy of the state.<sup>104</sup>

L.A. Waddell narrates the story that the Bhutia woman carried a cottage piano on her back for many miles up to the mountain slopes, still, no coolie can go at a decent pace, about 14 miles a day, on a sustained tour in these mountains, with a heavier load than about sixty pounds inclusive of his bedding and wraps.<sup>105</sup> Even K.P. Tamsang, the author of “*The Unknown and Untold Reality about the Lepchas*” stated that the Lepcha women are deft weavers. They weave cloths for their daily use and also

weave multicoloured blankets for their men's dresses. They also weave materials for handbags, moneybags, etc. to sustain their livelihood.<sup>106</sup>

A.C. Sinha quoted that in Sikkim, women enjoy a position of equality with men. When men leave their families in search of jobs in the cities, women were quite capable of acting as the head of the family and taking decisions.<sup>107</sup> Women used to drink *chi* or *tumba* or *rakshi* (fermented drinks) just as openly and freely as men. Traditionally, a lot of tobacco was grown that was wrapped in corn leaves to make cigarettes. The Kirati women smoke as much as the men smoke, as do the other Nepali women as well.<sup>108</sup>

## **2.10. Inheritance Rights of the Women**

In the primitive stage of society, the people of Sikkim have no true concept of private property. Everything belongs to the chief. The cultivator has no title to the soil. They may cultivate any unoccupied land without any formal permission.<sup>109</sup> This situation clearly refers to the vast areas of Sikkim, which were worked under a slash and burn technique of agriculture by which the farmer continually leaves a plot of land to clear new ground.<sup>110</sup>

Until Lepchas came in contact with the outsiders, individual had no motive for amassing property, as they could not expect to keep it.<sup>111</sup> When Tibetans came and established the new government in the land of the Lepchas, thereafter, all the land was held by the king. Even *Kazis* (landlords) have no real right to the land.<sup>112</sup> The concept of land in Sikkim was for a man to have a compact unit of land, to be able to feed himself, to be able to buy what he needs and to sell what he does not need.<sup>113</sup>

Even Geoffrey Gorer in his work, *The Lepchas of Sikkim*, stated that land could only be owned by men; a family without male offspring adopted a son to inherit the family property.<sup>114</sup> Scholars like A.C. Sinha stated that the Sikkimese concept of property was patterned on the traditional patriarchal feudalism, where no women hold their rights on land in Sikkim before the nineteenth century.<sup>115</sup>

However, after the nineteenth century, there are few special cases in Sikkim, where women were claiming their rights over their land and such cases were registered in the documents. A case of a woman named Kali Kamini, who was from the lower Daramdin, now in west Sikkim, asked for the restoration of her land from the Bishwananda Kami in 1954. In the complaint letter, Kali Kamini stated that “the land is still in my possession and I am enjoying quite peacefully for the last 30 years till 1954.”<sup>116</sup> But Biswananda Kami of Lower Daramdin possesses a registration deed of sale relating to my lawful holding situated at Lower Daramdin. He had dishonestly cheated my signature and possessed such a forged document beyond my knowledge and consent. Later, the land had been given to Kali Kamini by the court.

Secondly, another case happened in 1920, a woman called Mairani Tamangni of Namthang (now in South Sikkim) claiming for the estates of her deceased son Rifleman Kaziman Lama.<sup>117</sup> Thirdly, the involvement of the Sukhrani Limbuni, in the estates of her husband sepoy Harkabir Limbu in 1920.<sup>118</sup> Fourthly, Dawa Lhamo claimed her land against the Bkichi Bhutani for the restoration of a paddy field which was presented to her by her Guru Takehi Shampo in 1923.<sup>119</sup>

Apart from that, women also used to get pieces of land as a gift to sustain their livelihood from the king of Sikkim. Therefore, on 9 April 1963, a woman named



Thinley Ongmu Bhutia get a piece of land for the construction of a house and shops in the market area to earn her livelihood.<sup>120</sup> There were other cases where royal women also held their land in Sikkim (details in Chapter III).

The above incidents clearly mark that in Sikkim, women have property rights but they do not have inheritance rights. It was the fact that as per the rules of inheritance, traditionally the property was inherited only by the sons and sons used to get equal shares in the family. On the whole, the succession has been by the eldest son, while women have no right to inheritance in general. This has been common among all the communities in Sikkim including the Lepcha–Bhutia and the Nepalis.<sup>121</sup>

All the communities in Sikkim followed the patriarchal family system in which the father is the supreme decision-maker. Regarding the Property Inheritance Right, all the property, either moveable or immovable, was traced through the male line, which is the son, and grandson, who succeeded their father and grandfather's property.<sup>122</sup>

Women were entitled to inherit property neither in their father's family nor in their husband's family. If the husband takes a second wife during the lifetime of his first wife, the first wife has the right to claim a separate residence, provided she has already born a children to her husband. The widow could inherit the property of her deceased husband only for her life and after her death, the property will be reverted to the male members of her deceased husband, but not to the daughter. She was not entitled to sell, transfer or mortgage the property of her late husband.<sup>123</sup> If a man dies without any male issue, his property will descend to his brother's sons or collaterals.<sup>124</sup>

In the past, there were no such laws in Sikkim that legally safeguarded Sikkimese women's right to inherit their ancestral property, but among the tribal communities such as the Bhutia and the Lepcha, a common practice known as *Pewa*, giving the daughter gift and assets, that included livestock, utensil, ornaments and sometimes the land will be given if they married within their own community.<sup>125</sup>

Though women can not inherit from their father's property, but they can inherit from their mother's personal property such as jewels, ornaments, etc. Anthropologist H. Siiger in his work, *The Lepchas: Cultural and Religion of a Himalayan People*, suggested that except from such things, their personal property that included their wedding gifts known as *Stridhana*, which will be inherited by their daughter.<sup>126</sup>

When a daughter remained unmarried, parents customarily transfer some property in her name. Sometimes if their parents are rich enough, they were given a piece of cultivated land or a house to the daughter or sister. But they were given out of compassion, not as per law. The women usually take those gifts along with them when they marry and go away from their paternal house.<sup>127</sup>

Traditionally, when girls go to their husband's villages, they take with them their private animals and the last year's harvested grains as a sort of dowry. When a wife settled into her husband's home, she was generally given small portions of rice terrace and cardamom field, from the proceeds of which she can buy jewels. In this manner, everybody, even the youngest children, was given the appearance of being self-supporting feeding and clothing themselves with their own work. So, women usually took the moveable property along with them when she was married.<sup>128</sup>

Women can cultivate the piece of land as long as their parents are alive and earnings from such land could be utilized to buy jewellery and clothes, which she can take as her dowry. But they have no rights over the land. Basically, after their marriage, women lose their importance in their natal families. A father with no son can transfer his property to his brother or either to nephews or to his son-in-law, if the son-in-law was willing to move into his home with his daughter. Such a son-in-law inherits all his wife's father's property. But the property would not transfer in the name of the daughter.<sup>129</sup>

Inheritance of property in Sikkim was usually guided by the customary laws of each community. In many communities, the inheritance of property was decided by the village elders. The property was normally inherited by the sons. Succession was usually done by the eldest son. However, in most cases, the property was divided among the sons after the death of their father. Since the widow and the daughters do not receive any share of the father or husband's property, and as they usually live with the eldest son of the deceased person, he gets an extra share of the property for maintenance. In the event of a woman or group of women being left sole possessors of a property, they must acquire, either by marriage or adoption of a male who can inherit the property. Some childless couples adopt a son to look after them in their old age and to be their heir because the adopted son has the same right to inherit as a natural son.

Regarding Property Inheritance Rights, all the communities in Sikkim followed similar patterns and practices. Women acquire property by way of gift under a will from their father or other relations, but she does not have the right to claim their father's or their husband's property. According to "Married Women's Property

Regulation Act, 1962” under such proclamation, the king of Sikkim had made the following regulations:

1. Firstly, if Sikkimese women who hold immovable property in Sikkim at the time of their marriage, shall continue to hold such property and shall have the power to dispose of such property either by the mortgage or by sale during her lifetime, but if she gets married to a non-Sikkim subject holder, she will lose such right on her properties.
2. Secondly, if a Sikkimese woman married a person who is not a Sikkim subject holder, shall have no right to acquire any immovable property in any interest in the territory of Sikkim.
3. Thirdly, if a Sikkimese woman gets married to a person who is not a Sikkim subject holder, the husband and any offspring born of that marriage shall have no rights in any immovable property that she holds in Sikkim by virtue of Section 1 of this regulation.<sup>130</sup>

Again in 1968, when the ruler of Sikkim issued a royal proclamation stating that “Sikkimese women would lose their Sikkim subjectship if they married to non-Sikkimese”.<sup>131</sup> Further, this edict was applied only to Sikkimese women and no such law applied to Sikkimese men who married to non-Sikkimese women. After such a proclamation was issued by the *Durbar* to the general public, from that day onwards women had no rights over property inheritance legally, this was a social injustice in the form of gender inequality.<sup>132</sup>

When *Durbar* proclaimed the scrapping of Sikkim citizenship from the women who marry non-Sikkimese men. One of the victims was Ruth Karthak Lepchani. The issue

of Ruth Karthak Lepchani was political in nature, but on the ground of equal rights, her case challenged the rules and regulations of the *Namgyal* dynasty, which was based on discriminative perspectives. Under these two proclamations, Ruth loses her property rights in Sikkim and was not considered to be the subject of the Sikkim state. She became the victim of the existing old law of Sikkim.<sup>133</sup>

Similarly, Princess Pema Choki (Coola) also became the victim. Princess Coola was the second daughter of the eleventh king of Sikkim married to Mr Prithvi Raj Iyer, who belongs to one of the eminent South Indian families.<sup>134</sup> Due to her marriage to an Indian man, princess lost her citizenship and property rights in Sikkim.<sup>135</sup> The above-cited incident clearly marked that women were dominated and barred politically, economically and socially during the monarchy. It showed that women's rights have been overshadowed within the patriarchal society. There was a socioeconomic and political injustice in the form of gender inequality in Sikkim.

Sikkim's subjectship has come to an end when Sikkim became a constituent state in the Indian Union in 1975. This law has now lost all its effect and has no longer to be operational. But the "Married Women's Property Regulation Act" is still functioning in Sikkim. This regulation has not yet been replaced by the legislature and continued to be in force.

## **2.11.Conclusion**

Firstly, this chapter defines the perception of women within the different communities of Sikkim such as the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalis. The status of women varies from one community to another. They have different rules and regulations regarding marriages, puberty rites, etc. Secondly, this chapter talked about the sexual division of

labour where women have equally participated in all types of work along with their male counterparts. Thirdly, this chapter talked about the property rights of women, where it define during the monarchical period. Sikkimese women have property rights but they did not have inheritance rights.

Traditionally, in Sikkim, tribal women are considered to be an asset in the household because they command a bride price, but they have no rights of inheritance even when there are no sons.<sup>136</sup> The oldest form of bride price was still maintained by the Lepcha and the Bhutia communities in Sikkim. The custom of bride price symbolized the higher value attached to the women within the tribal communities.

But within the Nepalis community, as it was a patriarchal society, the position of women was not always on par with men and this notion of women's inferiority in the society was further aggravated by the desire for a son over a daughter. This can be understood by a saying in Nepali "*Chori Chelli arka ko gar thalny jat ho*", which means women are going to their husband's places after they get married, whereas males keep their lineage for the upcoming generation. Child marriage, widowhood and the dowry system are the common practices of women's exploitation that were seen within the Nepali communities in Sikkim.

Sikkimese society was based on the patriarchal family system where no women have the Property Inheritance Right even when there are no sons; only when a daughter remains unmarried can parents customarily transfer some property to her and also the decision-making power was always in the hands of the men. Women seem to have a secondary position both in private and public affairs as the traditional local self-government did not encourage women to participate. In Sikkim, many customary laws

bound women in many spheres. The customary law shows the gender biases in Sikkim during the early period.

Women are free to participate in social events such as dancing and other recreational programs.<sup>137</sup> There is no dowry system that prevailed among the tribal communities. But they practised bride price showed the higher status of the women. Women performed household work and, in the field, along with the men, women equally participated.

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- <sup>47</sup> *Mandal* means village headmen, who collects revenue from the public and submit to the government and also settles minor disputes.
- <sup>48</sup> A mendatory help especially during the hervest season to be rendered annually by a household to a local village headman.
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## CHAPTER – III

### **HISTORY OF THE ROYAL WOMEN OF SIKKIM**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

King and Queen are both like two sides of the same coin. In general, the royal women were treated better than the common women and were provided great services in the royal court of Sikkim. However, references to the royal women in history were almost nil. They were marginalized and always kept in a subordinate position. History writing in the past was in a biased form because women's involvement and their contribution to the course of history had been overlooked by historians and more focus has been given to male-centric history. History always pondered upon the rise and growth of the kingdom and the success and failure of individual rulers. Queens, princesses and other court women's names were not taken individually, they were addressed along with the names of the powerful king or men. The royal women of Sikkim were always addressed as Empress to the powerful king, daughter of a powerful father, mother of a powerful son or sister of a powerful brother.

It described women as worthless without men and urged men to guard their wives in order to keep his progeny clean. It recommended that it was impossible to restrain women forcefully, she should be kept busy by attending to their duty like cooking food and looking after the home.<sup>1</sup> *The Laws of Manu* even advised that during her childhood, a woman must be protected to her father, during youth by her husband and during her old age by her son. A woman is never fit for independence.<sup>2</sup>

The powerful states in ancient and medieval times used all fair means or foul to enlarge their kingdom and strengthen their status. Besides conquest and aggression, marriage alliances formed an important part of their diplomatic policies to expand and defend their territories. Women played an important role in such policies. They were often used, exploited and carried off for the benefit of the state.<sup>3</sup> The royal women of Sikkim were also, in general, used as a tool in the matrimonial alliances to extend their political power or to end the rivalry between two powers. Therefore, this chapter discusses the political and socio-economic structure of the *Namgyal* dynasty. It will further discuss how the *Namgyal* rose to power in Sikkim through matrimonial alliances and how women were discarded with the right of succession. It will further discuss some prominent women in the royal court of Sikkim.

### **3.2. Political and Socio-Economic Structure of the *Namgyal* Dynasty in Sikkim**

To understand the political and socio-economic structure of the *Namgyal* dynasty and its uniqueness, one has to first look into its historical background. The ancient history of Sikkim still lies in obscurity.<sup>4</sup> There are insufficient sources to re-construct the political and socio-economic history of Sikkim before the formation of the *Namgyal* dynasty. The history of Sikkim dated back to 1642 CE. when the horde of Tibetans overran the region that was inhabited by a small tribe of the Lepchas.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the Lepchas, it is believed that Limboos (Tsongs) were residing in the western part of Sikkim, and they were the people of Limboowan (territory bordering western Sikkim, now in Nepal).<sup>6</sup> The Tibetans used the term “Beyul Demo-jong” or “Denjong” for Sikkim, which means the Hidden Rice Valley or Hidden Fruitful Valley.<sup>7</sup> The Tibetans started entering Sikkim from Tibet in the beginning of the thirteenth century.<sup>8</sup> However, they took absolute control over the land in the mid of seventeenth



century, when three *Lamas* (Buddhist Monks) converted the Sikkim people to Buddhist faith and crowned Phuntsog *Namgyal* to be the first *Chogyal* (*Dharmaraja* or religious king) of Sikkim at Yuksom (the first capital of Sikkim) in 1642 CE.<sup>9</sup>

Phuntsog *Namgyal*, the founder of the *Namgyal* dynasty, was the direct descendant of the prince of the Minyak dynasty, in Kham province of Eastern Tibet.<sup>10</sup> The kingdom of Sikkim in those times was very extensive, which included the *Thang La* (a place near Phari, Tibet) in the north, *Tagong La* (a place near Paro, Bhutan) in the East, *Titalia* (a place near the border of Bihar and Bengal) in the south and Timar Chorten (a place near to Arun and Dub Kosi River, Nepal) in the west.<sup>11</sup> Phuntsog *Namgyal* divided Sikkim into 12 *Dzongs* (District) and under each *Dzong*, he appointed 12 *Dzonpons* (governor) from the Lepcha community and 12 councils of ministers (*Kahlons*) from the Bhutia community. During his reign, Buddhism was consolidated as the established religion in Sikkim.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.3. Political Power Through Matrimony**

Matrimonial alliances between royal families for political purposes have been prevalent at all times, in most countries, especially in India. These alliances formed an integral part of the diplomatic foreign policy of several dynasties during ancient and medieval times. By marrying in contemporary royal families, the kingdoms increased their power, prestige and political influence and helped each other in their time of need.<sup>13</sup> Women were even offered in marriage not only to end the protracted rivalry between the two dynasties but also to buy peace and save the dynasty. In fact, in several instances, marriages were being used as instruments for ending enmity and hostility between the two sides.<sup>14</sup>

Every kingdom needed political allies to survive, and they created alliances with others by using different political tools like matrimonial alliances, where women were often being used as political tools.<sup>15</sup> Matrimonial alliances occupied a prominent place in the politics of Sikkim as well, where women were also used to rise in power, extend their kingdom and strengthen their friendship within or outside the country in order to save the dynasty. It was also believed that before the advent of the Tibetans, there was no central political power in Sikkim. There were only local tribal chiefs like the Lepchas, Limboos and the Magars, who ruled different parts of Sikkim.<sup>16</sup>

To run the kingdom smoothly and systematically, to have economic and political control over Sikkim and to expand its territory, the Tibetans needed the cooperation of these local chiefs. Thus, they started matrimonial alliances with the Lepchas at first because the Lepchas were considered the original inhabitants of the state and were animists in nature. They lived with no strong organization and cultural tradition and they were ill-prepared for outside contact.<sup>17</sup> When the *Namgyal* dynasty was established by the Tibetans and Phuntsog *Namgyal* became the first king of Sikkim, their main motive behind was to convert the people of Sikkim to the Buddhist faith and to have socio-economic and political control over Sikkim.

#### **3.4. Matrimonial Alliances with the Lepchas**

At first, Phuntsog *Namgyal* and some of his other Tibetan friends married the *Rongs* (Lepcha) women. The Tibetans gradually came to be known as the Bhutias and the *Rongs* as Lepchas.<sup>18</sup> The intermarriage between the Bhutia and the Lepcha provided an opportunity for the Bhutia warriors to bid for and secure a higher status in the social hierarchy. The social situation remained fluid in Sikkim during the initial stage for the Bhutias because of the constant warfare with the other tribal groups. In such a

situation, the number of Bhutias who had some savings turned to traders; they bought some cattle and land, gathered some people around them, married Lepcha chief's daughter and, consequently, they were recognized as *Kazis* (Landlords) in Sikkim.<sup>19</sup>

The Bhutias played a very significant role in the formation of the kingdom of Sikkim. Inter-marriage between the Bhutia and the Lepcha contributed to their assimilation process by strengthening the control of Bhutia's chief in Sikkim. The matrimonial alliances between the Lepcha and the Bhutia not only gave new respectability to some notable Lepchas but also evolved many common customs among them.<sup>20</sup> Like both the tribes have the practices of polyandry with polygamy and the system of bride price.<sup>21</sup> The Lepcha religion had a great deal of similarity with the pre-Buddhist and Shamanistic religion of Tibet called *Pon* or *Bon*. This common cultural tie between Tibet and Sikkim was not an insignificant factor in the matter of racial integration between the Lepchas and the Bhutias.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the social customs of the Bhutias are generally similar to those of the Lepchas due to the religious similarity and close contact for centuries, and now the two communities inter-marry freely.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in the book, *The Coinage of Sikkim*, Pranab Kumar Bhattacharyya stated that the kingdom with its system of bureaucracy was formed by the immigrant Bhutias in cooperation with the local chiefs.<sup>24</sup>

L.B. Basnet, a pioneer historian from Sikkim, and D.C. Roy, writer of the Lepcha community, stated: When the *Namgyal* dynasty was established by the Tibetans, they were successive indrawing the Lepchas under their control. With the support of the *Chogyal*, the *Lamas* (Monks) worked hard for the spread of Buddhism among the Lepchas of Sikkim. They made an admixture of Buddhism and Nature worshippers so that it can be accepted by the Lepchas easily. The task of the conversion was not so

easy.<sup>25</sup> D.C. Roy further asserted that 14 Lepcha priests and priestesses were killed by the king of Sikkim with the help of black magic. Even the old manuscripts of the Lepchas were burnt into ashes by the order of the Tibetan king.<sup>26</sup>

Matrimonial alliances were another method of religious conversion. Therefore, both *Chogyal* and some elites of the society married Lepcha women. The alliance helped the rulers to administer, and there was open access for the Lepchas to become elites. These Lepchas-turned elites took advantage of the royal relations and accelerated the process of conversion of the Lepchas into Buddhism in Sikkim.<sup>27</sup> Even today, Bhutia–Lepcha are jointly called as Bhutia–Lepcha, the indigenous people, because of their matrimonial alliances in the past, as some of the Lepcha families reached the aristocratic level and arranged their daughter’s marriages with the ruling class.

Nari Rustomji in his book, *Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy*, also stated: The Tibetan immigrant was accepted by the Lepchas, as they pose no threat to the indigenous community. The immigrants entertained no territorial ambition, nor were they imbued with any sense of mission to uplift the backward Lepchas. The Lepchas and the Tibetans lived as equal partners, and it was by choice that the Lepchas accepted the Buddhist faith and became conversant with the Tibetan Language.<sup>28</sup> The Lepchas were attracted by the Buddhist faith of the Tibetans and adopted many of their social practices.<sup>29</sup> B.S. Das mentioned that the new religion and the ruler made a deep impression on the social and political life of the Lepcha community.<sup>30</sup>

So, both the Bhutias and the Lepchas enjoyed equal rank in the court of Sikkim.<sup>31</sup> Later, the influential Lepcha chiefs were not only drawn into the system of administration, but matrimonial ties between the two communities were also growing, which resulted in the formation of the state of Sikkim by the Bhutias.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.5. Matrimonial Alliances with the Limboos

Matrimonial alliances with the Lepchas helped the *Namgyal* to rise in power in Sikkim and strengthen their friendship with the Lepchas; however, the other two tribal groups, such as the Limboos and the Magars, were constantly challenging the Bhutia's supremacy over Sikkim from the western part of Sikkim.<sup>33</sup> When Phuntsog *Namgyal* was consecrated as the first *Chogyal* of Sikkim by the three *Lamas* at Yuksom, there were a number of autonomous chieftains belonging to the Lepcha, Tsong and Magar community and they ruled this territory of "Greater Sikkim".<sup>34</sup>

The Limboos, also known as Tsongs in the earlier time in Sikkim, had a stronghold in the western part of Sikkim and challenged the Bhutia ruler. Before the establishment of the *Namgyal* dynasty, the Bhutias, Lepchas and Tsongs had signed a Tripartite treaty called *Lho-Men-Tsong Sum*.<sup>35</sup> The treaty signifies the friendship bond between the three communities, *Lho* (Bhutia), *Men* (Lepcha) and *Tsong* (Limboo), and pledges that "Lho-Men-Tsong Sum" will have one destiny and one government. They will fight together with their enemy and will feast together with their friends. If there will be any community not obeying the pledge of this treaty, they will be punished accordingly and the punishment could be a death penalty. Further, this treaty mentioned that it will not have a separate government and all three communities will abide by one order only. They will abide by the commands of the king and his son and will never let arise a bad thought against Sikkim.<sup>36</sup>

But when Bhutia's supremacy was established in 1642, the Limboos were given lower-level administrative posts known as *rTa Sa* (village-level official), responsible for collecting the taxes in a village, and a few of them were also appointed as *Nagzen* (courtesan) and were allowed to use *chyabroong* (drum) in their festival and religious

ceremonies. Even when the kingdom of Sikkim was divided into 12 *Dzongs*, by the first *Chogyal* of Sikkim, they were not appointed in a higher position, though Tensung *Namgyal*, the second king of Sikkim, accorded land grants to some of the influential Limboos. Thus, the Limboos were not happy with such posts and status which were given to them by the king and they believed the Bhutias betrayed their friendship. Therefore, some of the Limboos even blamed the theocratic regime of the *Namgyal* dynasty for discriminating against the Limboos, and they were reduced to a minority in their own homeland.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the Limboo chief Yong-Yong-Hang, who was ruling in the Arun Valley (west of Sikkim) at that time, challenged the Bhutia supremacy from a place called Limboowan.<sup>38</sup> Thereafter, the Limboos fought a battle with the second king of Sikkim, Tensung *Namgyal*, at a place called Aryn Tambor at Limboowan, in which Sikkim emerged victorious.<sup>39</sup>

To give a new shape to that hostile relationship and to establish peace with the Limboos from Limboowan, Tensung *Namgyal* extended matrimonial alliances with the Limboo's chief Yong-Yong-Hang and married his daughter Thung-wa-mukma or

Yo-Yo Hangma.<sup>40</sup> The Limboo queen gave birth to a son, named Zhalngo Guru and a daughter named Pande Tshering *Gyalmo* (Tibetan title for the queen).<sup>41</sup> Limboo queen became the third wife of the *Chogyal* Tensung *Namgyal* as he had already married one queen from Bhutan and another from Tibet in 1670.<sup>42</sup>

The afore mentioned incident clearly marked that the daughter of the royal family always marries an enemy king in order to end the rivalry between the two sides. Therefore, King Tensung *Namgyal* married Yong-Yong-Hang's daughter from Limboowan. George Kotturan, in his work *The Himalayan Gateway: History and Culture of Sikkim*, makes a short comment that, along with the Limboo queen, there

are other seven Limboo women who came to Sikkim, and in due course, they were taken as wives by the highest *Kazis* of Sikkim in order to strengthen their future bond between these two communities.<sup>43</sup> Historical narratives claimed that this Limboo queen was responsible for the name of Sikkim. When she arrived for the first time in Sikkim, she pronounced the word *Song-Khim*, which means the “New Palace or New Place” in the Limboo language.<sup>44</sup> Later, the word *Song-Khim* was corrupted to “Su-Khim”, which means “Happiness” or the place of happiness in the Nepali language.<sup>45</sup> Thereafter, the word “Su-Khim” was again in course of time mispronounced by the British as Sikkim which is still used as the name for the state.

Similarly, the Magars,<sup>46</sup> from the Mangsari at Magar Dzong in west Sikkim, were not happy with the Bhutia’s supremacy over Sikkim. Around 1600 CE, the chief of Magar, Sintupati Sen, fought a battle with the Bhutia king. But unfortunately, Sintupati Sen died in a battle at a place called Tharpu, now known as *Raja Tar* (King’s Place) in west Sikkim. Therefore, to avenge her husband’s death, the Magar chief’s wife invited Bhutias for the last rite of her husband. Rajen Upadhaya, in his book *Peasants’ Resentments and Resistance: A Glimpse on Rural Past of Sikkim 1914–1950*, stated that many of the Bhutias were killed due to the consumption of poisoned brew served at the order of the Magar queen during cremation. Later, to save herself and her heir, the queen fled on horseback along with the baby boy. However, she could not save herself from the Bhutia’s fury, which compelled her to jump into a waterfall leading to her death. The place where she got killed is still known as *Rani Kholsa* or the queen rivulet.<sup>47</sup> One of the reasons why the Magars fought against the Bhutias was when the famous inter-ethnic Tripartite treaty *Lho-Men-Tsong Sum* compact supporting the foundation of the *Namgyal* dynasty pointedly did not support or include the Magar people, where as the local Lhopos, Tsongs and the Lepcha

chieftains agreed to subordinate themselves under this compact to the Tibetan Buddhist lineage of *Chogyal Phuntsog Namgyal*.<sup>48</sup> This event suggests that the Magars, unlike the Limboos, did not want to accept the overlordship of the Tibetans and resisted till the end. However, their resistance against Tibetans failed after the death of their chief, and their petty reason is the prevalence of the Magar Dzung or Magar Fort at Mangsari in the Soreng subdivision in present west Sikkim, which confirms that their presence over those tracts got submerged into the Tibetan oceans that flooded all over Sikkim.<sup>49</sup>

### **3.6. Matrimonial Alliances between Sikkim and Bhutan**

Apart from the tribal struggle within the country, there was a border struggle between Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan since the time of Phuntsog *Namgyal*.<sup>50</sup> From the eastern part of Sikkim, there was a threat to the ruler by the Bhutanese forces because it seems that during the Phuntsog *Namgyal*'s reign, eastern Sikkim lay outside his territory. Gangtok (the present capital of Sikkim) fell under the Bhutanese control.<sup>51</sup> When Phuntsog *Namgyal* died in 1670, and his son Tensung *Namgyal* (second *Chogyal* of Sikkim (1644–1700)) ascended the throne, border disputes were continued. However, Saul Mullard, in his book, *Opening the Hidden Land – State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History*, stated that eastern Sikkim, or more importantly the area around modern Gangtok, did not fall directly under Phuntsog *Namgyal*'s control. At a place called Takse, just north of Gangtok, lies the remains of Bhutanese fortification.<sup>52</sup> Later during the period of 11th *Chogyal* Tashi *Namgyal*, a palace was built at Takse for his wife, queen Kunzang Dechen.

Therefore, in order to end the hostility between Sikkim and Bhutan or to extend his territory over the eastern part of Sikkim and make friendly relationship with Bhutan,



Tensung *Namgyal* married the Bhutanese princess from Bhutan named Nambi Ongmo, who gave birth to a daughter, named Pande Wangmo.<sup>53</sup> However, border disputes continued after the death of Tensung *Namgyal* also and finally it was settled down after the death of the fourth *Chogyal* Gyurmed *Namgyal* (1717–1733). During this period, Sikkim was temporarily ruled by an able administrator sent from Tibet, named Rabden Sherpa.<sup>54</sup>

### **3.7. Matrimonial Alliances between Sikkim and Tibet**

Marriage alliances between the royal family of Sikkim and Tibet were a common phenomenon, which began from the early thirteenth century onwards when the ancestor of the first king of Sikkim, Khye-Bumsa, married a daughter of the Tibetan hierarch from the Sakya monastery.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, in order to secure that historic connection between Sikkim and Tibet, Tensung *Namgyal* married a Tibetan woman named Lhacham Padma Buthi, who was the daughter of the Tibetan Governor of Zamsar named Dragkye, a noble family residing near Tingkye Dzong in Tibet, in the north-west of Sikkim. She gave birth to a son named Chagdor *Namgyal*, who became the third *Chogyal* of Sikkim at the age of 10 years.<sup>56</sup>

After this marriage, *Chogyals* and the many noblemen of the royal family of Sikkim mainly depended on Tibet for matrimonial alliances, and almost all the kings of Sikkim had Tibetan wives, except the first and sixth *Chogyal*.<sup>57</sup> After Tensung *Namgyal* married a woman from Tibet, the Tibetan influences in the political and religious spheres were established in Sikkim and the political and religious bond between Sikkim and Tibet was also growing. The king and the monastery's head looked at Tibet for guidance in the political and religious spheres and *Chogyals* of

Sikkim established a practice of finding brides from Tibet to further substantiate the connection between Sikkim and Tibet.<sup>58</sup>

Conversely, some of the princess of the Sikkim royal family were given in marriage to the Tibetan nobleman. Among them, the eldest daughter of the seventh *Chogyal*, Tsugphud *Namgyal*, was married to Darding Shentsang (official of Tashilunpo monastery in Tibet). In 1906, Princess Seymo Kunzang Wangmo, daughter of the ninth *Chogyal*, married Ngawang Lhundup Gyaltzen of the Sakya Hierarch, Trichen Jigme Wangyal, undoubtedly in the idea of renewing the old alliance between the two lineages, which was inaugurated by the Khye-Bumsa, founder of the lineages of the royal palace of Sikkim during the thirteen century.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, these marriages were now hailed as an act that would renew old alliances between the two lineages which had been lost in the intervening period. Finally, two daughters of the eleventh *Chogyal* Tashi *Namgyal*, Princess Pema Tsedeun *Namgyal* married the Tibetan Governor named Sey Kusho Gompo Tshring Yapshi Pheunkhang, who belonged to the family of 11th Dalai *Lama*, in October 1941 and Princess Coola, whose official name was Pema Choki (1925–1969), married Yuthok Rigdzin Tseten *Namgyal* in 1950.<sup>60</sup>

There were exchanged of women from Tibet to Sikkim and from Sikkim to Tibet in order to preserve the political, social and cultural ties between these two countries. The tradition of marrying Tibetan women was even followed by many other men within the royal family of Sikkim. Thus, it was found that Sikkim's royal house was filled with the descendants of the Tibetan women, who became the queens of Sikkim. Sikkim also witnessed various public welfare works that were contributed by the Tibetan queens. Therefore, Alice Travers cited in her article *A Women in the*

*Diplomatic Game: Preliminary Notes on the Matrimonial Link of the Sikkim Royal Family With Tibet (13th to 20th century)* that the matrimonial alliances between the royal family of Sikkim and the major Tibetan, religious and secular families have structured the relationship between these two countries over the past 16 generations.<sup>61</sup>

Matrimonial alliances always helped the *Namgyal* rulers to strengthen their political power with their neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal. But it also witnessed many internal and external problems within the dynasty. A matrimonial alliance was considered an important political strategy to maintain a good relationship with different countries. Therefore, Saul Mullard mentioned in his book, *Opening the Hidden Land*, that it can be assumed that these different marriages served to balance the competing power in the region. The marriage of Tensung *Namgyal* with the Bhutanese woman was to hold the Bhutanese influences in eastern Sikkim. Bhutanese influences extended to what is now eastern Sikkim. To marry a Tibetan woman was no doubt to secure the historic connection between Sikkim and Tibet and to get married to the Nepali princess from Limboowan was to strengthen their friendship with the Limboo chief and to get control over the state of Limboowan.<sup>62</sup>

It was clearly shown that marriage alliances were economically and politically beneficial to the king of Sikkim. Economically, they got the extension of their territory and politically they can bring that territory under their control.

### **3.8. Religious bond between Sikkim and Tibet**

In the history of Sikkim, matrimonial alliances were not only fixed to establish political power or to enlarge the territorial region, but it was also created to enhance the religious bond between the two nations, where women played an important role.

Sikkim always proved its allegiance towards Tibet and always had a close relationship with Tibet in terms of religious and matrimonial alliances since the establishment of the *Namgyal* dynasty. Therefore, in order to enhance the religious bond between these two nations further, *Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal* (fourth king of Sikkim) married Mingur Drolma from Mindroling (Tibet). *Gyalmo* Mingur Drolma, the fourth queen of Sikkim, was the youngest daughter of the Terdag Lingpa, the abbot of Mindroling (Tibet), who fled to Sikkim from Tibet along with her mother and her elder sister Jetsun Mingur Paldron, after the Mongols invaded Tibet in 1718.<sup>63</sup> Mingur Drolma's family was a follower of the Nyingmapa sect of Buddhism.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, while in exile in Sikkim, *Gyalmo* (Queen) Mingur Drolma's elder sister Jetsun Mingur Paldron became a noted religious personage and disciple of her father's religious teaching. She and *Lama Jigme Paw*<sup>65</sup> frequently exchanged teachings on religious topics. *Lama Jigme Paw* mentioned "although she was a woman, but she was a very accomplished spiritual practitioner".<sup>66</sup> In some measures, Buddhism may have helped the Tibetan women to be strong, intelligent and capable of maintaining their position, but it did not give them such power in religious affairs as it did to the men. In some monasteries, women held lower positions than men and in some, women held higher positions than men.<sup>67</sup> Very few monasteries had been constructed for female monks (*Annila*) in Sikkim.

Sometimes later, *Lama Jigme Paw*, on behalf of the entire monk population of Sikkim and officials, asked the Terdag Linpa's consort for permission for the younger daughter Mingur Drolma to become the royal consort of the fourth *Chogyal* of Sikkim. *Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal* (1707–1733) ascended the throne at the age of 10 when his father Chagdor *Namgyal* died in 1717. At his early age, the Tibetan government appointed *Lama Jigme Paw* as a regent. It is said that the appointment of

the Tibetan regent led to the increase of more Tibetan influences in the Sikkimese court.<sup>68</sup> The marriage proposal which was placed by Jigme Paw was accepted by all the *Lamas* and *Kazis* of Sikkim, and the young woman was married to the king of Sikkim in 1721.<sup>69</sup>

Mingur Drolma was unaware that her marriage was fixed with a 14-year-old boy. Perhaps it could be, because, in the Tibetan society, a girl does not, as a rule, choose her own husband. The choice rests with her parents.<sup>70</sup> Shortly after the marriage took place, in 1722, Mingur Paldron, queen's elder sister, and her mother returned to Tibet leaving behind Mingur Drolma all alone in Sikkim. However, Mingur Drolma's family left a remarkable impression on the religious traditions of Sikkim.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, Saul Mullard, a pioneer historian of Sikkim history, stated that the marriage between Gyurmed *Namgyal* and Mingur Drolma was just created to enhance the religious bond between Mindroling and Sikkim as one of the branches of the Mindroling monastery was established in Sikkim and named as Pemayangtse monastery (now in west Sikkim). Thereafter, the Pemayangtse monastery came into effect under the guidance of *Lama Jigme Paw*, where monks of the monastery regularly travelled to Mindroling for study and to receive initiation.<sup>72</sup>

Mindroling monastery was located in central Tibet and it was one of the foremost monasteries of the *Nyingmapa* sect of Buddhism. Sikkim, whose founder saint *Lama Lhatsun Chenpo* belonged to this lineage and *Lama Jigme Paw* was the third incarnation of Lhatsun Chenpo. Jigme N. Kazi, one of the prominent writers from Sikkim, wrote that *Lama Jigme Paw* had helped establish Buddhism and other patterns of religious worship in Sikkim.<sup>73</sup> In 1709, Jigme Paw took his first step in Sikkim at the invitation of the third *Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal*. He attended

Pemayangtse monastery for the first time. He introduced the practice of making *gtorma* (butter statue) and the ritual of *Gu Ru drag dmar*, which are still performed over the last five days before *Lo gsar* (Tibetan festival).<sup>74</sup> It proved that there was a historical tie between Sikkim and Mindroling, as all the essential requirements were borrowed from the Mindroling monastery when Pemayangtse monastery was established during the time of the third *Chogyal*.<sup>75</sup>

However, the marriage between *Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal* and Mingur Drolma did not last forever, but the visit of Mingur Drolma's family (Terdag Lingpa) and the subsequent marriage only added to the prestige of *Lama Jigme Paw*, who was responsible for arranging the marriage.<sup>76</sup> The marriage event between *Chogyal* and Mindroling woman created an important alliance between Sikkim and Mindroling. It is from that time onwards that *Lamas* of Pemayangtse monastery started performing a periodical ceremony for the sake of the deceased and ruler's future welfare.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, Mingur Drolma's marriage with *Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal* benefitted Sikkim. Thereafter, the Pemayangtse monastery was free from paying house tax to the government. Pemayangtse became the prime head monastery and had the right to collect tax from the peripheral area for its upkeep.<sup>78</sup>

*Lama Jigme Paw* reshaped the religious map of Sikkim and Lhabtsun Chenpo was considered a religious and historical hero credited with the formation of the Sikkimese state and the introduction of Buddhism.<sup>79</sup> In the meantime, *Lama Jigme Paw*, who kept himself busy with various tasks in Sikkim, died after a short trip to Tibet. The death of *Lama Jigme Paw* was a great loss to the *Chogyal*, who was fed up with his personal life and dissension within the kingdom, so disguised himself as a commoner and went on a pilgrimage to Tibet.<sup>80</sup>

Later, eventually, the king returned to Sikkim but remained eccentric in his behaviour. He even refused to take a second wife as his former wife, queen Mingur Drolma, had already fled to Tibet. The king was in great concern for his court and his subject, as there was no direct male heir to the throne.<sup>81</sup> In 1733, *Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal* fell ill. Thereafter, the minister and the attendants assembled together and questioned the king about the succession since he did not have a successor. *Chogyal* gave an oral testament to his ministers to seek out for a nun of Sanga-choling Monastery named Cho Lhamo, daughter of Tagchungdar clan. After that the *Chogyal* passed away.<sup>82</sup> After the death of the king, his attendants went to enquiry and they found a nun at a mountain ridge called Zing-gyang, which is now known as Onge Kyesa (it means the birth place of the infant). She was pregnant by an unofficial liaison with the late king and gave birth to a son named *Namgyal Phuntsog II*, who became the fifth ruler of Sikkim.<sup>83</sup>

Historians said that the *Namgyal* dynasty was saved from its extinction, but Sukhdev Singh Chip asserted that Gyurmed *Namgyal*, descendant of Phuntsog *Namgyal*, died issueless at the age of 26 and in this way, the *Namgyal* dynasty came to an end.<sup>84</sup> However, Satyendra R. Shukla in his book, *Sikkim: The Story of Integration*, discussed that in order to keep the *Namgyal* dynasty growing, the Sikkimese *Lama* rumoured a story that a nun was carrying the child of the late king and when that child was born, he was declared as the son of Gyurmed *Namgyal* and the royal dynasty continued.<sup>85</sup>

The confusion created internal trouble in the royal court because one of the *Chandzod* (Governor) named Zhalngo Tamdin, a very powerful Bhutia minister, and his brother Tshechudar *Chandzod* refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the nun's offspring.

Later on, *Chandzod Zhalngo Tamdin* assumed all the powers and ruled Sikkim for almost 3 years (1738–1741). He referred to himself as *Gyalpo* (king) Tamdin.<sup>86</sup> However, the Lepchas under the leadership of Chagzod Garwang, a loyal supporter of *Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal*, rose in favour of the nun's child, *Namgyal Phuntsog II*, and gained upper hand inside Sikkim. It forced Tamdin, the self-appointed king to flee to Lhasa and appeal to the Tibetan government for aid in re-instating himself as the ruler. However, the Tibetan government accepted the nun's son as the successor of Gyurmed *Namgyal* and declared him the fifth ruler of Sikkim.<sup>87</sup> Thereafter, the Tibetan government sent Rabden Sherpa to serve as a regent in Sikkim till the young *Chogyal* came to age.<sup>88</sup>

History always talked about the male child when they were born, but it kept eluding women who gave birth to the child. Women played an important role in the history of Sikkim to save the dynasty, but when history comes out, it is always focused on the mainstream history, escaping women's role from the main part.

The Bhutia society in general accepted the illegitimate child. However, the child would not get an opportunity to inherit the throne like Yugthing Arub, who happened to be the eldest son of the second *Chogyal Tensung Namgyal* from his affairs with the Nyumbong. Being an illegitimate son, he could not inherit the throne. But in the case of *Namgyal Phuntsog II*, he was accepted by the society and declared as the fifth king of Sikkim. This showed that decision was always in the hand of the superior class in the Sikkimese society. Decision was always in the favour of men's hand like the *Kazis* and the *Lamas* of Sikkim.

Women do not seem to be involved in the decision-making process. There was no elaboration of the nun who gave birth to *Namgyal Phuntsog II* and saved the *Namgyal*



dynasty from its extinction. It was not explained by any historians what happened to the nun after she gave birth to *Namgyal Phuntsog II*, who became the fifth ruler of Sikkim. Did society give any special status to her like other royal women or had she been treated like other elite women still remains a big question in the historian's mind when looking back at the history of Sikkim. History always represents powers of the elite class for the succession of the throne and decision was always in the hands of the men.

Matrimonial alliances between Sikkim royal family and Tibetan aristocratic have not always been successful, sometimes they failed to make an individual concern happy, whether for the girls of the Tibetan nobility or the princesses of the royal family of Sikkim.

Historically, it is stated that the marriage of Mingur Drolma with the *Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal* did not prove to be the happiest one and it was not very successful as well.<sup>89</sup> The king was engaged in state affairs and did not give priority to the queen.<sup>90</sup> There were frequent raids in Sikkim from the Gurkha and the Bhutanese forces. The king, therefore, set about to fortify Rabdentse palace (it means the second capital of Sikkim) against the Bhutanese incursion and also from the local adventures. The king employed many Tsongs (Limboos) as forced labours without any wages. Under such circumstances, the Limboos broke their alliances with the *Chogyal* of Sikkim and they permanently settled down in their homeland called Limboowan. This was a time when Sikkim lost the land of Limboowan to Nepal forever.<sup>91</sup>

Another reason the *Chogyal* generally avoided his wife was that he was not pleased with her unpleasant appearance.<sup>92</sup> The desired emotional bonding between the king and the queen failed to develop. Therefore, both the king and the queen started living

separately; the king used to stay in Dechenling palace just below the Rabdentse palace, while the queen resided in the main palace. History always described women's physical appearance by stating ugliness, unattractiveness, etc., but it failed to provide their contribution towards the society. It always showed male's power excluding women's role in the main part. Historically, it has been mentioned that queen Mingur Drolma was so unattractive and ugly that the king never had any relationship with her.<sup>93</sup> J.C. White in his work<sup>94</sup> explained that the king started spending his whole life alone as the woman, whom he married, was so exceedingly plain that rather than living with her, he abandoned his throne and fled disguised as a mendicant. Even V.H. Coelho, author of *Sikkim and Bhutan*, stated that the king did not find any feminine charm in his wife and left her all alone in the Rapdentse palace, and he himself retired to Dechenling monastery to be alone.<sup>95</sup> L.B. Basnet, a scholar from Sikkim, also stated that Mingur Drolma was so exceedingly plain that the king would not live or have anything to do with her.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Yeshe Dolma and Thutob *Namgyal*, the authors of *History of Sikkim*, stated that due to the queen's homely appearance, cold feelings arose among them, which compelled Mingur Drolma to return to her ancestor's home.<sup>97</sup>

Tibet's close matrimonial relationship with Sikkimese royalty continued even during the time of the seventh *Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal*. The five women whom he married were all from Tibet. The three wives belonged to the *Lamoi* family of Tibet, who were the sister of the then Tashi *Lama*, Tenpai Nyima, the fourth Panchen *Lama* of Tashilhunpo. Rest two wives were from Tanag in Tibet.<sup>98</sup> His fourth wife was a woman from Tanag Dingka Byatshang in Tibet. But this wife remained childless. His last queen was chosen by the *Lamas* of Sikkim. She was a lady from Tanag Mankyid also known as Dowager Rani in the history of Sikkim, who gave birth to Thutob

*Namgyal* in 1860, the ninth king of Sikkim and two daughters, Jetsunma Tenzing Buthi, who became a nun, and another Tshring Buthi, who became the second wife of Donyer *Namgyal*.<sup>99</sup>

According to *The Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal*, Princess Tshring Buthi, daughter of the queen Mankyid, accompanied her stepbrother *Chogyal Sidkyong Namgyal* (eighth king) on his visit to Darjeeling in June 1873. Princess Tshring Buthi was the one among the most interesting persons in a group, perfectly free from affection and any ideas on seclusion, she appeared on all public occasions, visited the sights of the place under the escort of the Deputy Commissioner and other officials and expressed the most naïve delight with every novelty that was brought to her notice. But she died at a very young age.<sup>100</sup>

### **3.9. Succession and Transfer of Power**

Sikkimese society was totally based in the patrimonial system, where succession and the transfer of power always goes in the men's hand. The question of enjoying equal political rights among the men and the women was not raised at that period and honourship of women was not accepted by the society. But women had the privilege to challenge the throne. Therefore, Pende Wangmo, being the eldest daughter of the *Chogyal Tensung Namgyal* (second king of Sikkim), challenged the throne, which was occupied by her half-brother *Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal* with the help of Bhutan.

Matrimonial alliances with three different women from different countries had given *Chogyal Tensung Namgyal* power, position, prestige and influence among all the sections of his people. He even succeeded in sealing Sikkim from both external and internal threats. But soon it led to signs of internal problems after his death in 1699.<sup>101</sup>

He left behind a disputed throne involving his son and daughter as its aspirant. Dispute ultimately culminated into war of succession between his daughter, Pende Wangmo, and son, Chagdor *Namgyal*. Pende Wangmo, being the eldest daughter of the *Chogyal*, Tensung *Namgyal*, from his first wife, who was from Bhutan, challenged the succession of the throne and later invited Bhutanese forces to intervene in Sikkim. Bhutan supported the claim of Pende Wangmo and overthrew the *Chogyal* Chagdor *Namgyal* from Sikkim for a brief period of time.<sup>102</sup> According to L.B. Basnet, historian from Sikkim, Tensung *Namgyal*, by his three marriages, seems to have prepared the ground for the beginning of external incursions into Sikkim.<sup>103</sup>

### **3.9.1. Princess Pende Wangmo and her role in the History of Sikkim**

In general, Bhutan's traditional society was based on both patrilineal and matrilineal rights. Because of that, many times, the right of succession from the matrilineal order has survived in Bhutan.<sup>104</sup> Maternal family had influenced much on Pende Wangmo's life. On the other hand, Sikkimese society was totally based on the patrimonial system, and there was no tradition of inheritance rights or succession of the throne by women.<sup>105</sup> In a patriarchal society, women's voices are always subdued and inheritance rights were not given to the women. The basic value of the term "patriarchy" and the importance of its use by women is that it denotes a structural system of male dominance.<sup>106</sup> During that period, the Sikkimese court comprised many leading *Lamas* and landed aristocrats, who among themselves divided into pro-Bhutanese and pro-Tibetans sections to affirm their claim on the Sikkimese throne.<sup>107</sup> It seems that the war of succession started in this way between the two groups who allied with the crown prince and in favour with Tibetans, and those supporting the Bhutanese were allied with Princess Pende Wangmo.<sup>108</sup>

Throughout the history of Sikkim, this kind of power struggle related to the succession to the throne was very much common among the royal family of Sikkim. Therefore, Pende Wangmo claimed her right to the succession by virtue of her seniority and considered that she was the elder in the family and the throne should be entitled to her. But in such circumstances, the accession of the throne by a woman showed the robustness to the Sikkimese *Lama's* mind by accepting women as a ruler in the court of Sikkim.<sup>109</sup>

According to the tradition of the Sikkimese society, male had the right of succession over the throne after his father's death. Patriarchal society gave absolute priority to men and in some extent limits women's human rights also. Male are always in control over the women. The *Namgyal's* government was monarchical in nature; there was no women representative in the royal court. Therefore, Pende Wangmo's stepbrother Chagdor *Namgyal* (1700–1717), whose mother was from Tibet, was crowned as the third *Chogyal* of Sikkim at the age of 10 years in 1700.<sup>110</sup> Shortly after his accession to the throne, a quarrel broke out between the brother and the sister. As Pende Wangmo was discontent of the decision taken by the Sikkimese *Lamas* (monks), she invited Bhutanese forces to invade Sikkim and attack her brother *Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal*.<sup>111</sup> On the invitation of Pende Wangmo, the Deb Raja of Bhutan sent forces to assassinate the king. Thereafter, the Bhutanese attacked on Rabdentse palace. Meanwhile, the king along with his loyal councillor, Yugthing Teshe, fled to Tibet via Elam (Nepal).<sup>112</sup> The Bhutanese forces occupied Rabdentse palace and built many forts in Sikkim during the king's stay in Tibet. The Bhutanese rule was established almost for 8 years in Sikkim.<sup>113</sup>

During that 8 years of tenure, the Bhutanese fortified the palace with new surrounding walls and constructed a new wall building connected to the palace by a secret underground pathway. The Bhutanese forces proceeded towards Gar and Dzongu (name of the place in north Sikkim) where they built *Namgyal Thonpoi Dzong* (palace in the Bhutanese language) and Wangdu Phodrang *Dzong* near modern Pakyong (in eastern Sikkim). They also built a monastery near Pemayangtse called Para Gon and other Bhutanese forts such as Taktse *Dzong* on the Taktse ridge near Gangtok.<sup>114</sup>

Later, the Tibetan government successfully settled the conflict between Sikkim and Bhutan. While the king was in Tibet, the Tibetan government send a mutual agreement to Deb Raja of Bhutan mentioning Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim as one family and one nation.<sup>115</sup> With these mutual agreements, the Bhutanese welcomed Chagdor *Namgyal* in 1707.<sup>116</sup> On the return of the *Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal*, the Bhutanese evacuated Sikkim from the west of Teesta. But they maintained their position at the fort of Dumsong, now in Kalimpong district, West Bengal, and retained their hold.<sup>117</sup>

Meanwhile, Pende Wangmo's position was greatly weakened in the royal court of Sikkim, as it has been mentioned in the history that she formed a liaison with the third *Lama* of *Rabjunpa* sect named Lha tshen Khenrap Wongchuk Rinchen Gon Palzangpo also known as Rinchen Gon, who was the grandson of Nga-Dag Sempa Phuntshog Rinzing .<sup>118,119</sup> The *Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal* stated that Pende Wangmo became the consort of *Lama* Nga-Dag-pa Rinchen Gon. As penance for breaking his monastic vows by forming liaison with Pende Wangmo, he erected a temple at Silnon monastery.<sup>120</sup> H.H. Risley mentioned that the vows of the Nga-Dag-pa sect were very strict, ought to have maintained the strictest celibacy, and in marrying Pende Wangmo committed a mortal sin. As an

expiatory offering of Pende Wangmo's share of the offence, in hope of reduction of his spiritual punishment, she built Guru Lhakhang monastery at Tashiding in a year about 1716.<sup>121</sup>

However, bitter tension between the sister and the brother was not yet ended. She was still looking for an opportunity to overthrow her brother and to grab political and administrative powers. In 1717, when the king was unwell and went to Ralang hot spring, Pende Wangmo conspired with some medical doctor and by her order, the doctor opened the king's vein which led him to death.<sup>122</sup> Immediately afterwards, the late *Chogyal's* attendants went to Namtse *Dzong*.<sup>123</sup> The *Chogyal's* attendants killed Pende Wangmo by stuffing a silk scarf down her throat. The *Chogyal's* attendants thereafter returned and Pende Wangmo's body was cremated at a place called Laptse, which is called Pende Laptse even today.<sup>124</sup> With her death, her dream to become the "queen of Sikkim" also ended.

Though she was not successful in occupying the throne and becoming the queen of Sikkim, it can be noticed that she is always remembered as a brave woman in the history of Sikkim. She was the one who created the women's history in Sikkim, which gives a lot of interest to the scholars to work on it. Pende Wangmo's incident reflected the active involvement of the royal women in the political history of Sikkim as she was the first woman in the *Namgyal* dynasty to challenge the male-dominated society. However, women were not accepted as a ruler in the history of Sikkim since the monarchical period onwards. Historical narratives looked upon her as an evil spirit, who was the incarnation of the Tsum-moZa-mar-gyan, a wicked Rani of king Khri-srong Deu-tsan of Tibet, and was credited causing the solar eclipse.<sup>125</sup>

She had not only fought for the interest to become the queen of Sikkim but apart from that, she wanted to protect what was rather beloved and close to her heart from the rigid norms of the society and the palace. Because the *Lama* whom she had fallen in love with, was from the Nga-Dag tradition and he was the grandson of Nga-Dag Sempa Phuntshog Rinzing, and the royal family of Sikkim worshipped Nga-Dag Sempa Phuntshog Rinzing as a spiritual leader, and marriage with the guru's lineage was not acceptable. However, Pende Wangmo might have thought that if she herself became the queen of Sikkim, she could have set new rules and regulation for the country. As the decision taken by the kings and queens that will be the final one and no one will raise the question against it. This could be one reason why she fought against her brother Chagdor *Namgyal*. It is hard to believe that she had married Rinchen Gon, because if she could have married then she might have had some children from him.

Historical narratives explained that her position was greatly weakened because she married Nga-Dag Rinchen Gon, but actually, there was a power struggle between Nga-Dag Sempa Phuntshog Rinzing and Lachung Chenpo, and the royal family was in support of Lachung Chenpo as Lachung Chenpo had given the title called *Namgyal* to the royal ruler. Thereafter, the Bhutia dynasty in Sikkim which was established in 1642 C.E was known as the *Namgyal* dynasty. However, Pende Wangmo was in support with the Nga-Dag tradition, and in marrying with the Nga-Dag tradition's male lineage was not very acceptable in the royal family. Therefore, it could be one reason why her power in the royal court of Sikkim was greatly weakened. Even though, she was in a move to be the queen of Sikkim; a woman being a queen was accepted by the society, but it was not accepted within the royal family of Sikkim.



The story about her leadership quality where she led the Bhutanese forces is presented in Appendix no. 11. Thanka painting painted by Rinzing Lhadripa *Lama* and published by *Namgyal* Institute of Tibetology showed the life of the third *Chogyal* of Sikkim (Appendix no 12). Pende Wangmo's palace where she was assassinated still exists in Namchi, south Sikkim, and the style of the whole palace is exactly in Bhutanese style. Later, it was converted into a monastery and named Nga-Dag monastery ( Appendix no 13).

### **3.10. Prominent Women in the Royal Court of Sikkim**

#### **3.10.1. Yeshe Dolma, the ninth Queen (*Gyalmo*) of Sikkim (1890–1910)**

Throughout the history of Sikkim, all the highest administrative powers were held by the king and the other male officers in the royal court of Sikkim. They enjoyed all the socio-economic and political power. But from the mid-nineteenth century, Sikkim *Durbar* scenario changed when queens started getting involved in the administrative work of the *Durbar* and started showing their power and supremacy. *Gyalmo* Yeshe Dolma, the ninth queen of Sikkim, belonged to the *Lhading* family of Lhasa in Tibet. She was the daughter of *Namgyal* Dorje and Losang Dekyi Sonam. Her father was an officer in the court of Dalai *Lama* in Lhasa. In 1882–1883, *Gyalmo* Yeshe Dolma married the ninth king of Sikkim, Thutob *Namgyal*, and his half-brother, Lhasey Kusho Thinley *Namgyal*, in a polyandrous alliance, which was then commonly practiced in Tibet as well as among the Bhutias of Sikkim.<sup>126</sup>

Empress Yeshe Dolma stepped in Sikkim at a time when Sikkim *Durbar* was facing political disturbances due to the influence of the British Government. The main motive of the British was to use Sikkim in order to build a trade relationship with

Tibet. Due to these circumstances, Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* and Empress Yeshe Dolma faced many challenges during their lifetime.

As she came down to live in her new home on the borders of British India, Sikkim, located on the southern slopes of the Himalayas, the Tibetan Buddhist Kingdom was facing boundary issues with a link with the mountain passes that link British India to Tibet and to China and beyond. During such circumstances, she made an effort to find peace for her family and the kingdom of Sikkim. She embraced her circumstances while facing tremendous hardships, she acted as an advisor to her husband, as a quiet rebel in the face of the empire and as an informal mediator.<sup>127</sup>

Before Empress Yeshe Dolma came down to live in her new home (Sikkim), *Chogyal* Thutob *Namgyal* was already married to queen Pending,<sup>128</sup> a woman from the Palding estate belonging to Tashilhunpo (Tibet), but she died within a short period of time in 1880.<sup>129</sup> During the time of the king's elder half-brother, the Tibetan epithets of *Chogyal* and *Gyalmo*, which were used for the kings and queens of Sikkim were removed and they began to address the Maharaja and Maharani of Sikkim, which was akin to all the Indian rulers.<sup>130</sup>

After the death of Thutob *Namgyal's* first wife in 1880, the king had no desire to marry again, but in 1881, he was pressured by the lay ministers and *Lamas* (monks) of Sikkim to marry again.<sup>131</sup> It is also stated in the *Royal History of Sikkim*, on the sixth day of the first month of 1881 (6 March 1881), the Iron Snake year of the 15th Tibetan era, the Ministers and *Lamas* of Sikkim jointly submitted a request in writing to the *Chogyal* and his mother queen Monkyid Lhayum, requesting that His Highness should think of marrying a new queen.<sup>132</sup> This address was accompanied by a sevenfold *Nazar* (gifts).<sup>133</sup> Therefore, the queen mother Monkyid Lhayum discussed

the matter with the *Chogyal* and his half-brother Lhasey Kusho Thinley *Namgyal*, and they both agreed to propose for the hand of a single wife in accordance with the custom of two brothers sharing one wife jointly. *Chogyal* Thutob *Namgyal* consented to marry a wife in this manner.<sup>134</sup>

Finally, the marriage proposal was accepted by the Lhading house of Tibet and the marriage ceremony was conducted at Lhasa. The bride was publicly announced to be the joint wife of the two men and when the marriage was conducted, only the king's half-brother Thinley *Namgyal* was present. Later Yeshe Dolma was conceived by him and gave birth to three children while living in Chumbi Valley.<sup>135</sup> In fact, she had three children from Thinley *Namgyal* before Emperor Thutob could see her for the first time.<sup>136</sup>

### **3.10.2. The Conspiracy behind the Marriage of Yeshe Dolma and Thutob *Namgyal***

L.B. Basnet, a pioneer historian of Sikkim, stated in his book, *Sikkim: A Short Political*, that queen Monkyid Lhayum<sup>137</sup> lost her title "Queen" due to her marriage with her husband's illegitimate son Chanzod Karpo.<sup>138</sup> Therefore, she planned that her husband *Chogyal* Tsughud *Namgyal* should appoint Lhasey Kusho Thinley *Namgyal* as the new king of Sikkim in place of her legitimate son Thutob *Namgyal*. But things did not go according to her plan. Therefore, she decided to conspire with Tokhang Donyer *Namgyal*.<sup>139</sup> Both worked together for the removal of Thutob *Namgyal* from Sikkimese *gaddi* (throne) in a succession of Lhasey Kusho Thinley *Namgyal*. With such an idea, both had planned for the second marriage of Thutob *Namgyal* along with his stepbrother with a Tibetan lady named Yeshe Dolma,<sup>140</sup> so that the Tibetan

bride will remain with Thinley *Namgyal* and Thinley will get a chance to succeed his brother.

When Thutob *Namgyal* was young, the power of the state reverted to his mother queen Monkyid and Dewan *Namgay*, both were anti-British factions. From their long residence in Chumbi Valley and close connection with Tibet, both Monkyid and Dewan *Namgay* were in the favour of Tibetan interest, and their efforts were securing the succession of Lhasey Kusho Thinley *Namgyal* to the throne of Sikkim.<sup>141</sup> But their plan failed when Thutob *Namgyal* was consecrated to the throne of Sikkim in 1874. With the coronation of Thutob *Namgyal* as the ninth emperor of Sikkim, the anti-British and pro-Tibetan faction in Sikkim once again directed all efforts towards securing Thinley *Namgyal* in direct succession to the throne. However, after Dewan *Namgay's* death in 1888, the anti-British elements in Chumbi palace became less strident in their bid to propagate Thinley *Namgyal's* cause.<sup>142</sup> It seems that behind all the events was a sinister design to overthrow Thutob *Namgyal* and place Thinley *Namgyal* on the throne.

According to the *History of Sikkim*, written by Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma and Chogyal Thutob *Namgyal*, the main objective of Thutob and Thinley's marriage with a Tibetan woman Yeshe Dolma in a polyandrous alliance was to grant an extension of Sikkim's property into Tibet as that request was not yet answered from 1874 onwards. The second one was to marry a Tibetan woman for the emperor of Sikkim to maintain the old Sikkim–Tibet relationship and the third one was to visit the sacred places of Tibet. Sikkim *Durbar* (Sikkim Government) even issued a request for two elephants from the British Government, so that they can be sent to Tibet. Two elephants and some buffaloes were sent up as presents to the Tashi Lama and the Dalai Lama from

Sikkim.<sup>143</sup> After the finalization of the marriage, the Lhasa Government gave compensation for the delay in finalizing the settlement of the Sikkim state extension in Tibet.<sup>144</sup>

In 1885, however, under some circumstances, Thutob *Namgyal* went to Chumbi palace. This was the time when Empress Yeshe Dolma got an opportunity to exercise all her feminine charms and switch to Thutob *Namgyal*, her co-husband, who had been neglecting her since her marriage more than 2 years ago because Thinley *Namgyal* and Yeshe Dolma were living at the Chumbi palace. It was reported that Empress Yeshe Dolma was bearing a child, and one of the officers named Drungyig Ngodrup sent a confidential report to the Khangsar *Dewan* (Minister) who was a pro-British. He took advantage of this situation and tried to sow seeds of discord between *Chogyal* and Yeshe Dolma; however, the Khangsar was not successful, though this coldness lasted for many years. Later *Chogyal* Thutob *Namgyal* realized that he himself had given the consent to marry in a polyandrous form.<sup>145</sup>

Yeshe Dolma was an ambitious woman and a good conversationalist, an accomplished calligraphist and had a deep knowledge of the Buddhist religion. Therefore, it was not difficult for her to win the favour of the king who was young and lonely with considerable power at his command. She even realized that she would not live like a lay woman, being the wife of someone, she needed power and prestige and wanted to be a part of the kingdom of Sikkim. For some time, she managed to carry on with both husbands, but after a year, she deserted Thinley and threw herself completely with Thutob and remained with Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* until her death. Empress Yeshe Dolma and Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* were to remain on the best of

understanding, and Yeshe Dolma was to combine her wifely duties, alongside the role of a friend and counsellor through all thick and thin situation of Thutob's rule.<sup>146</sup>

Therefore, L.A. Waddell, in his travelogue, *Among the Himalayas: Bibliotheca Himalayica*, mentioned that she was unique as compared to other queens in the history of Sikkim. She had a striking personality, small and slight, beautifully dressed in brocades, velvets and silks, with much jewellery of rough turquoises, pearls, coral and amber. Her hair was decorated with strings of pearls, which reached to the hem of her gown and wearing the curious Tibetan head-dress which was adopted by the other queens of Sikkim.<sup>147</sup>

Later, Empress Yeshe Dolma gave birth to two children from *Chogyal* Thutob *Namgyal*, one son named Tashi *Namgyal*, who became the 11th *Chogyal* of Sikkim and a daughter Choni Wongmo. Emperor Thutob *Namgyal*, the ninth *Chogyal* of Sikkim was 28 years of age by the time, of medium height, typically Mongolian in appearance and disfigured by a bad hare-lip. He was weak and easily led and possessed a good deal of common sense.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, Sunanda K. Datta-Ray in his book, *Smash and Grab*, stated: Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* was "a man of indolent disposition, whose inclination was to live in retirement and aloof from the worries and the government of his little state". And the British too thought that he was entirely under the thumb of two Tibetan women, one was his mother queen Monkyid and the second one was his second wife Empress Yeshe Dolma.<sup>149</sup>

Even Nari Rustomji, in his work *Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy*, described Emperor Thutob's wife as no cypher. Thutob suffered from a curious morbidity and feeling of embarrassment, arising it seems from the misfortune of his having been born with an ugly hare-lip. But his wife, however, more than compensated for his diffidence and

had no hesitation, if so inclined, in fully upbraiding the British representatives in Gangtok for the supposed injustice and humiliations inflicted upon Sikkim's royal house, and she was a protector of her husband and royal house against the British.<sup>150</sup> Therefore, it is relevant to note the significant role played by the consort of the ruler in the politics of Sikkim.

L.A. Waddell again mentioned that she was the woman, who had been credited with intriguing political matters and causing Britain's troubles with Tibet.<sup>151</sup> She was bright and prepossessing and rather inquisitive. She asked so many personal questions to the British. Her husband Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* was a puppet in the hands of his crafty priests, who made a sort of priest-king of him. They encouraged him by every means in their power to leave the government to them, while he devoted all his time to degrading rites of devil worship and the ceaseless muttering of meaningless jargons, the Tibetan form of Buddhism chiefly consisted of. They declared that he was a saint by birth and that he was a direct descendant of the greatest king of Tibet.<sup>152</sup>

Therefore, Alice Travers in her work, *A Women in the Diplomatic Game: Preliminary Notes on the Matrimonial Link of the Sikkim Royal Family With Tibet (13th to 20th century)*, considered the marriage of Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* with the Tibetan woman Yeshe Dolma as a turning point in relation policies to Sikkim, Tibet and British India. As Travers refers J.C. White<sup>153</sup> described Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* as totally under the influence of his consort Yeshe Dolma. Her marriage with the king of Sikkim was the main factor behind the decline of British influence in Sikkim, as she was responsible for the day-to-day administration of the kingdom. She had an exceptional ability and strength of mind as she belonged to one of the highly

respectable families of Lhasa.<sup>154</sup> Similarly, P.R. Rao stated: With Thutob *Namgyal's* second marriage, the influence of the Tibetan faction had increased and consequently, the British influence had declined in Sikkim.<sup>155</sup>

During the reign of Thutob *Namgyal*, Sikkim had to face a lot of challenges under the patronage of the British. The British had already taken their footsteps in Sikkim during his father's time. In 1861, the *Treaty of Tumlong* was signed between the British Government and Sikkim. This treaty cancelled all the former treaties signed between the British Government and Sikkim. By this treaty, the British secured valuable rights relating to trade, and the right to conduct geographical and topographical surveys in Sikkim. The relationship of Sikkim with her neighbours became the subject of British control. The kings of Sikkim would not be permitted to live in the Chumbi palace for more than 3 months in a year. Thus, Sikkim became a *de facto* protectorate of British India.<sup>156</sup> In 1861, conflict had left Sikkim with a major economic problem. Their tax-paying territory on the plains had been annexed to Bengal and the annual payment from Darjeeling<sup>157</sup> was in suspension.<sup>158</sup>

Therefore, in 1883, trade on the Sikkim–Tibet frontier, which was taken care of by the British, had been stopped by the Tibetans, and to investigate the matter, the British Government sent Colman Macaulay, Finance Secretary, Government of Bengal, to find the reason causing the fall of trade, but the mission was failed.<sup>159</sup> As soon as the Macaulay mission was withdrawn, Tibetans advanced 13 miles inside northern Sikkim across Jelap pass and occupied a place called Lingtu fort on Darjeeling road.<sup>160</sup> Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* was against the idea of a fort at Lingtu because this would increase enmity between Sikkim and the British Government. He was squished between the British and the Tibetans. On one side, Sikkim had a close tie with Tibet,



since the establishment of the *Namgyal* dynasty, and on the other, the British Government pressurized the *Chogyal* of Sikkim to mediate the problem between these two parties. Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* made a great effort to mediate between the two governments but he was not very successful. Therefore, Thutob *Namgyal*, instead of protesting against this, overlook the Tibetan action at Lingtu.<sup>161</sup>

In fact, the Emperor had entered into a secret treaty with Tibet in 1886, promising to prevent persons from crossing the Sikkim–Tibet boundary and agreeing that Sikkim was subject only to Tibet and China. This was a violation of the treaty of 1861, and the Emperor was asked to return to Sikkim by the British Government otherwise his allowance would be stopped. But Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* declined to return due to the opposition of the Tibetan authorities and informed that the Tibetans had constructed a fort at Lingtu and had also stopped the trade.<sup>162</sup>

However, scholars like A.C. Sinha in his work, *Sikkim: A Feudal Democracy*, defined that it was queen Yeshe Dolma, who undertook the champion in the favour of Tibet with the support of the Bhutia courtiers, which created a new problem for the emperor. Therefore, Tibetans occupied Lingtu at a point on the frontiers, which necessitated a British expeditionary force to be sent to evict Tibetans from Lingtu in March 1889.<sup>163</sup>

Therefore, J.C. White, the first British political officer while blaming Empress Yeshe Dolma for all these faults said: “Empress Yeshe Dolma was Born intriguer and diplomat, her energies were unfortunately, but naturally, owing to her Tibetan origin, misdirected for many years, until, finding out her mistake, she frankly confessed that she had been wrong, and turned her thoughts and attention to matters which should lead to the welfare of her husband’s state”.<sup>164</sup>

For such reason, British Government stopped the payment of Rs. 12,000 annually subsidy from the Indian estates. In 1885, when Emperor Thutob *Namgyal* was not able to manage even his household expenditure, he felt himself the object of his enemy's pleasure and the pity of his sympathisers. He saw no one among his people on whose honour or good faith he could trust. He felt it so keenly that he thought it was better for him to go away to some foreign country. It was during those moments, Empress Yeshe Dolma remained a constant source of his strength and hope for *Chogyal Thutob Namgyal*.<sup>165</sup>

She convinced him that he should not think of going out of his kingdom because leaving his own kingdom and going to some foreign land would only be a cause for sorrow. However, she persuaded the *Lonpos* (one of the clans of Bhutias) and *Lamas* of Sikkim, who were around her by suggesting that they should talk to His Highness on the above subject and persuade him to give some ideas. They once responded to her appeal by collecting a sum of Rs. 500, which they offered as a *Nazar* in support of their prayer that His Highness would remain in Sikkim and never think of going away elsewhere.<sup>166</sup>

In 1888, the New Sikkim Ruling Council was formed by J.C. White. The main aim of forming the new council was that the Emperor was insufficiently supportive of their mission during the battle with Tibet over Lingtu, and that he spent excessive time at his Chumbi palace in Tibet instead of focusing on government affairs in Sikkim proper.<sup>167</sup> Sometime around 1891, *Chogyal Thutob Namgyal* had no religious and administrative power in his own country, he was left with a limited monthly allowance of only Rs. 500, and he had no authority and involvement whatsoever in government administration.<sup>168</sup>

The defeat of the Tibetans at the hand of the British alarmed the Chinese and fearing to lose influence in Tibet, China began to negotiate with the British. After a prolonged discussion, an Anglo-Chinese Convention was signed at Calcutta on 17 March 1890.<sup>169</sup> With the 1890s convention, Tibetan hegemony over Sikkim had finally come to an end.<sup>170</sup> The 1890 convention fixed the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet, and exclusive British control over Sikkim was increased in both the internal administration and foreign relations of the state.

Since the ruler was in the habit of living in the Chumbi Valley, he was virtually cut-off from routine administrative responsibilities. And this time, it was an ideal situation for the anti-British intrigues to flourish with the support of the queen.<sup>171</sup> J.C. White forced the ruler to come back to Gangtok, but Thutob refused to cooperate with the British in their design; he was put under confinement and subjected to extreme deprivation.<sup>172</sup>

Due to Emperor Thutob *Namgyal's* attitude towards the British, the British got angered by the king and queen of Sikkim. Later on, in 1893, they were sent to Kalimpong and then to Kurseong for 2 years of house arrest. The actual administration was passed down in the hand of a political officer. During such hardship journey, Empress Yeshe Dolma remained her husband's sole companion. Later, when the king was allowed to return to Sikkim, he found that the administration was changed which was not much to his liking. The capital was shifted from Tumlong to Gangtok, which was not only the Political Officer's seat but also more centrally located. But then also, he always had a strong-minded supporter behind him as his consort Empress Yeshe Dolma, so he tried to oppose J.C. White as well.<sup>173</sup> Empress

Yeshe Dolma died in 1910, and 4 years later, *Chogyal Thutob Namgyal* also passed away in 1914.

### **3.10.3. Yeshe Dolma's Contribution to the History of Sikkim**

While living in Sikkim, she rebuilt her palace in a Tibetan style.<sup>174</sup> She was engaged in literary cultural work and remained as an active patron of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta for Tibetan studies.<sup>175</sup> In 1907, when a royal couple visited Nepal on tour for pilgrimage, Her Highness Yeshe Dolma sponsored some of the money to Buddhist *Newars* of Kathmandu to reconstruct the damaged temple of Svayambhu-Nath *Chorten* (temple) from the side of Sikkimese, as just to commemorate their visit to Nepal. On the west side of the Svayambhu-Nath *Chorten*, there was a smaller *Chorten* dedicated to the Indian Buddhist Pandita Vasu-ban-dhu, which she had paid to have repaired and plastered with lime. For this work, she spent an additional Rs. 100 and prayed for the firmness of faith and release from disease.<sup>176</sup>

*Denzong Gyalrab* (History of Sikkim) manuscript originally written in Tibetan over a century ago by the *Chogyal Thutob Namgyal* and his queen consort *Gyalmo* Yeshe Dolma was a pleasant gift for the Sikkimese scholars who wanted to study Sikkimese history. Yeshe Dolma was the principal author and the driving force behind the original *Denzong Gyalrab* manuscript. However, due to her early death at the age of 43, her *Denzong Gyalrab* manuscript and its English translation remained unpublished. Later her granddaughter, Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuk of Bhutan, released it, on May 2021 in the new form, *The Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicles of the House of Namgyal*.<sup>177</sup>

However, queen Yeshe Dolma, a woman from the Lhading family of Lhasa was exceptionally intelligent and charming. She had a strong will, while the king was easygoing. The queen was not disposed to bother about the administration, especially as in accordance with the policy of the British-Indian government of that period, she used to administer the state. She even kept the state seal. From time to time, the king asserted himself and took matters into his own hands, but in the daily round of affairs, it was the queen that governed.<sup>178</sup>

It was already mentioned above that queen Yeshe Dolma, Thutob *Namgyal's* second consort, was a gifted, intelligent, good calligraphist and a very ambitious woman. Therefore, J.C. White stated: She was extremely bright and well educated, although she will not admit that she has knowledge of any language except Tibetan, but she talked well on many subjects and wrote well. However, on the occasion of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, she personally composed and engrossed in beautiful Tibetan characters the address presented by her husband Thutob *Namgyal*. Many scholars pointed out that she was a most picturesque object, a harmony of gold and brilliant colours impossible to express in words.<sup>179</sup> She made a commendable contribution to the history of Sikkim and her work is still remembered when women's questions arise in the history of Sikkim.

#### **3.10.4. Queen Kunzang Dechen Tshomo *Namgyal***

Empress Kunzang Dechen Tshomo *Namgyal*, the 11th queen of Sikkim, belonged to one of the powerful and distinguished *Rakashar* family of Lhasa and was a strong-willed woman, much interested in religion and the administration of the monasteries. She married the 11th *Chogyal* of Sikkim, Sir Tashi *Namgyal*, on 1 March 1918.<sup>180</sup> She had six children, which included three boys and three girls. However, differences

arose between husband and wife on the birth of her seventh child and they decided to live apart.<sup>181</sup> As it stated that *Chogyal Tashi Namgyal's* half-brother, Tharing was declared as “*Rimpoche*” or an “avatar” (reincarnation) of Buddha, he gradually rose very high in the *Lama* hierarchy of Sikkim. Thereafter, Empress Kunzang Dechen, who was already very much interested in religion started supporting Tharing *Rimpoche* and came under his influence. She was suspected of having illicit relationship with him. Even though under Tibetan social order such relationship was not much uncommon nor was disliked by anyone. However, Emperor Tashi *Namgyal* being of modern outlook did not like this polyandrous relationship of his wife and ordered his half-brother to quit Sikkim.<sup>182</sup>

When Tharing *Rimpoche* quit Sikkim, Empress Kunzang Dechen also followed him and stayed in Tibet for a couple of years, showing no inclination either to defend her chastity or to return to Sikkim, which complicated matters further. During her stay in Tibet, her daughter Lhanzila was born. The Emperor, who had been hesitant for long under contradictory pressure from his advisors on the subject, finally closed the issue by deciding not to have any further relationship with the Empress. No doubt, she was allowed to return to Sikkim but the Emperor's palace was placed out of her bounds. A new place was built for her at Takse (ruins of the palace still exist at Takse village) about 5 miles away from Gangtok, where she lived with her youngest daughter, maintaining separate establishment from her husband.<sup>183</sup> But later, she was completely expelled from Sikkim *Durbar's* functions. However, no bar was held for her children.<sup>184</sup>

### 3.10.5. Queen Sangey Diki

During her absence in the royal court, her daughter-in-law, queen Sangey Diki, the first wife of the 12th *Chogyal* Palden Thondup *Namgyal*, acted as an official hostess at invitations and reception at the palace along with her father-in-law *Chogyal* Tashi *Namgyal* standing in for the Empress Kunzang Dechen, who had retired from the court.<sup>185</sup> However, queen Sangey Diki also limited her public activities and saw her prime responsibility in the loving mission of childbearing and raising a family. She presented herself once officially in a local-level function in the inauguration of the New Lall market at Gangtok in 1956, as just to mention a documented event. Therefore, in the book, *Son of Sikkim*, Jigme N. Kazi recalled “the prince Palden’s wife, Sangey Diki, was a girl of ineffable loveliness and charm. She was the one had been chosen for him from the house of Samdu Phodrang, one of the noblest families of Tibet. She moved with an inborn sense of dignity, gentle and patent, queenly in every sense”.<sup>186</sup> However, the short life of the princess at the palace saw a number of social and diplomatic highlights. When Palden Thondup *Namgyal* was highly presented in the media in connection with all the events, queen Sangey Diki was very rarely seen in official and press photographs of that era. Within the short journey, queen Sangey Diki passed away on 17 June 1957 due to inner bleeding caused by gestational complications. She was always remembered by the people of Sikkim.<sup>187</sup>

In the medieval period, many royal women were entitled with prestigious titles like *Maryam Makani* (of Mary’s Stature) for Hamida Banu, Akbar’s mother and *Maryam-uz-Zamani* (Mary of the world) for Jahangir’s mother, Harkha Bai.<sup>188</sup> Similarly, many queens of Sikkim were awarded with honoured titles such as *Gyal-yum Chenpo*

(queen mother of Sikkim), who was the mother of the present emperor. Kunzang Dechen and queen Monkyid Lhayum were entitled with such titles.

### **3.10.6. Queen Monkyid Lhayum/Dowager *Rani***

Queen Monkyid Lhayum was the fifth wife of the seventh *Chogyal* of Sikkim and the mother of Thutob *Namgyal*. The Captain Iggulden of the second Battalion Derbyshire Regiment, during the Sikkim expedition of 1888, provided a remarkable description of the *Chogyal* Thutob *Namgyal's* mother Monkyid Lhayum. He described queen mother Monkyid Lhayum as a very intelligent woman. She had a very loving personality and was always protective towards her servants. Throughout her life, she had engaged in meditation and religious devotions. During *Chogyal* Thutob's young age, she had carried out various duties of the state. She was often called as the *Dowager Rani* in the history of Sikkim.<sup>189</sup>

During the time when Thutob *Namgyal* was squished between the two powers, Sikkim and British India, he was fleeing from Sikkim, and the British in search of the *Chogyal* went to Chumbi palace with the intention to loot and burn the king's palace. During such period, instead of fearing with the British, queen mother Monkyid courageously remained at the Chumbi palace to receive Captain Iggulden and his troops. Queen was around 40 or 45 of age at that time and had evidently been good looking during her young age. She seemed of a cheerful disposition and accepting the destiny of fate, did not appear to mind in the slightest our ransacking the palace for the king's paper, laughing and cracking jokes with her attendants, while ever and anon she took a sip of "Craythur" or something uncommonly like it, to keep her spirit up. She hospitably handed around some of this liquor in beautiful small Chinese cups



for testing, but we found somewhat of the character of raw whisky. However, unfortunately, she died in 1895.<sup>190</sup>

### **3.10.7. Princess Seymo Jetsun Pema Yeshe Choden or *Mayum Choni Wongmo* (1897–1994)**

Princess Seymo Jetsun Pema Yeshe Choden was the youngest daughter of the ninth *Chogyal Thutob Namgyal* and *Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma*. She was born on 26 October 1897. She received a monastic education in the early years. Later, she received her modern education from Hampton Court, Mussoorie, India. She was a woman full of talent, fearless and independent minded, she quickly learned to blend the best that both British and Sikkim worlds had to offer.<sup>191</sup>

In 1904, she visited Phensang Monastery along with her elder sister, Seymo Kunzang Wangmo and various other ministers for the first time.<sup>192</sup> Phensang Monastery is located in the north of Sikkim. It was established in 1721. This monastery is a branch of Pemayangtse monastery which is located in west Sikkim. Seymo Jetsun Pema Yeshe Choden, later known as *Rani Choni Wongmo*, was installed as the head of the Phensang Monastery in 1907. Thereafter, she handled all the religious functions in the monastery as she became the in charge of the monastery. Her tutor was Gergan Lhondup Tharchin. He was a teacher of Phensang Monastery.<sup>193</sup>

In 1918, she resigned from the post as the head of the monastery. On 5 April 1918, at the age of 19, she married Sonam Tobgye Dorji, who was the Chief Minister of Bhutan. After her marriage with Sonam, she settled down at Bhutan House in Kalimpong (West Bengal). Her husband Sonam Dorji was the agent to the Government of Bhutan. His main function was to handle the country's relation with

India on behalf of the Bhutan's king. He was also responsible for the administration of the district on Bhutan's southern frontier with India. Her marriage to the Bhutan's Chief Minister had been, at one time, a cause of much heart-burning, as it had been the normal system for the Sikkimese princesses to find bridegrooms from the aristocracy of Tibet. However, Choni Wongmo was a strong-willed woman with a mind of her own, who despite pressure from various quarters went through with the marriage.<sup>194</sup>

Choni Wongmo had five children. In Kalimpong, she involved herself with the erstwhile Charteris Hospital established in 1893. She and her husband helped financially and personally assisted the nurses in their work and looked after the child patients.

When she was later moved to the Namseyling House in the Thimphu Valley of Bhutan, she put her medical skills in good use. She established a clinic for local villagers for the treatment. She was described as the life-giving force of the hospital.<sup>195</sup>

She was a deeply religious person and a scholar with keen interest in the history and culture of Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet. She also constructed many *Lhakhangs* (temples) and generously donated money for the renovation of monasteries and for the regular performances of rites and *Dubchhen* at Punakha, in Bhutan, in keeping with the traditional Bhutanese culture and also for the course of Mahayana Buddhism. She took active part in the organizational activities of Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Sikkim. In the year 1964–1965, her name was proposed for the election as the Vice-President of the Institute General Council and executive board of the Institute for crudities in the field of Buddhist scholarship. She was one of the

permanent founder members of this Institute which is devoted to the study and promotion of Buddhism. She passed away at Bhutan House in Kalimpong on 26 March 1994.<sup>196</sup>

### **3.10.8. Princess Pema Tsedeun *Namgyal*/Coocoola (1924–2008)**

During the end of the nineteenth century when monarchy was in an edge, Princess Coocoola and queen Hope Cooke *Namgyal* tried their best to retain Sikkim as an independent country. Princess Coocoola, the eldest daughter of *Chogyal Tashi Namgyal* and Empress Kunzang Dechen Tshomo *Namgyal* excelled with noted appearance events on the international stage, which includes India. Princess Pema Tsedeun *Namgyal*, her royal highness, the princess of Sikkim, best known to her friends and admirers as Princess Coocoola. She was born on 6 September 1924 in Darjeeling, when the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim, established by her ancestor in 1640s, was still a protectorate of the British Empire, and when Tibet was still ruled by the 13th Dalai Lama. Born in royal background, she educated herself from St. Joseph's Convent in Kalimpong (West Bengal).<sup>197</sup>

She wanted to go to university but was married off instead. Her father-in-law Sawang Chenpo Yapshi Phetuntsog Khangsar Kung was the descendant of the 11th Dalai Lama family, was the Foreign Minister in Lhasa (Tibet) and did not believe in university education for girls.<sup>198</sup> She was married to Sey Kusho Gompo Tshring Yapshi Pheunkhang, eldest son of the Pheunkhang family on October 1941. After her marriage, she was known as Princess Pema Tsedeun Pheunkhang Lacham Kusho. Her husband was the governor of Gyantse (Tibet).

When Pheunkhang family from Tibet wrote to the Sikkim palace, stating that they wanted a Sikkimese princess to marry their two sons at the same time, Princess Coocoola denied such offer and married with their elder son only. Anna Balikchi stated in her article, it seems that she was the first woman to go against the custom of polyandry which was widely prevalent in Tibet in those days.<sup>199</sup>

Princess Coocoola was a woman of many qualities and full of intelligence. Therefore, many historians praised her beauty and intellectual in various forms: Heinrich Harrer in his book “*Seven Years in Tibet*” mentioned her as “She was the more interesting than her husband, Tibetan by descent. She was to boot, one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. She possessed the indescribable charm of Asian women and the stamp of age-old oriental culture. At the same time she was clever, well-educated and thoroughly modern, and had been thought in one of the best school in India. She was the first in Tibet to refuse to marry her husband’s brothers because this did not conform to her principles. In conversation she was the equal of the most intelligent woman you would be likely to meet in European salon. She was interested in politics, culture and all that was happening in the world. When she was in Tibet she even talked about the equal rights for women but Tibet has a long way before reaching that point”.<sup>200</sup>

Similarly, Kayatyani Shankar Bajpai, the second last political officer in Sikkim called her the “dragon lady”.<sup>201</sup> Even Nari Rustomji described her in his book *Sikkim: The Himalayan Tragedy*: Princess Coocoola combined in herself the glamour and exoticism of the orient with all the sophistication and culture of the west.<sup>202</sup>

Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, author of the *Smash and Grab*, mentioned her as: “the princess was a formidable woman who never permit the least liberty with her rank as

the wife of a Tibetan duke. Her crest flaunted the cover of five yaks tails allowed only to a handful of Lhasa aristocrats. Durban officials in Gangtok were under orders to formally describe her as Her Royal Highness, the princess of royal".<sup>203</sup>

Andrew Duff, mentioned in his book *Sikkim: Requiem for a Himalayan Kingdom*, where Fasco Maraini, the Italian traveller and author of *Secret Tibet*, fell in love with her delightfully frivolous attitude while passing through Gangtok to Lhasa.<sup>204</sup>

Hope Cooke, in her autobiography named *Time Change*, mentioned Princess Coocoola was so strikingly beautiful and sophisticated that often she felt boorish in front of her.<sup>205</sup> She is a fantastic lady. She is in charge of the Tibetan refugees here and single-handedly directs all the work, taking into account even the minute detail from distributing supplies to designing grippers (they are made from old Indian Army Cartridge shells) of the silver hair clips the Tibetan artisans make for sale.<sup>206</sup>

Coocoola often travelled to her husband's house in Lhasa on the trade route back and forth between Tibet and Gangtok. Unlike other female travellers, she rode her own horse, a rifle slung across her shoulder and a revolver in her pocket to repel bandits. The route could be dangerous, especially from Gyantse in Tibet to Phari.<sup>207</sup> When her husband became the governor of Gyantse in 1943, Coocoola, besides throwing parties like her mother-in-law in Lhasa, started a small agricultural Cooperative and Welfare Society. Her social life in Lhasa (Tibet) was going well. But in 1950, when China intervened Tibet in 1950, Coocoola was on a family visit to Gangtok. She never went back to Tibet. Her husband takes a keen interest in the running of the picturesque Institute of Tibetology near Gangtok.<sup>208</sup>

When she reached Sikkim in 1950, she saw a quite different side of the situation. The urgency was Tibetan refugee problem and she controlled the issue by taking in charge as the chairman of the Sikkim Relief and Rehabilitation committee for Tibetan Refugees funded by the government of India in 1959.<sup>209</sup> The strong tie between Sikkim and Tibet was historical and there were family members who were affected by such events. Therefore, Coocoola in particular, being married to a Tibetan nobleman, felt a personal responsibility to help the large numbers of refugees who were now piling into the country. Documentary title “Sikkim” directed by Satyajit Ray highlighted her involvement in helping the Tibetan refugee personally in their camp providing medical aids and food to them.

When she arrived in Sikkim, the royal family was facing a lot of opposition and many political parties had come up against the monarchy. In 1957, her sister-in-law queen Sangey Diki passed away due to inner bleeding caused by gestational complications leaving behind her younger last-born daughter.<sup>210</sup>

After her sister-in-law’s death, she now took the role of being her brother Palden Thondup’s (the 12th king of Sikkim) partner at official functions. Prince Thondup heavily relied on her charming and brilliant sister. She functioned as the prince’s roving ambassador, whether in the corridors of power in New Delhi or socializing with the American President’s aides in Washington. She was the prince’s chief hostess at state functions, as well as the Chatelaine of his palace.<sup>211</sup>

When Tibet was facing difficulties after the Chinese aggression, she was equally bold in her attempts to put pressure on the Americans to give their full support to Tibet’s cause. She became the stern voice to her CIA (Central Intelligence Agency, USA)

contact, that when the time came then the United States would give material aid and moral support to Tibet.<sup>212</sup>

Coocoola entertained many foreign delegates far more than her homely brother. Her guests were more distinguished and conversation in her drawing room more sparkling. Only the best French wines were poured from her heavy decanters. Her style of table and her own place of set with golden coaster and cutlery to remind even the most honoured guest of the different rank. But for all this ostentation, Coocoola's fortune was her own creation, "money did not make me. I made the money",<sup>213</sup> was her justified boast. British politicians and American diplomats also paid court to the *Chogyal's* sister Coocoola. They were unable to put her down; India house also resented her prominence all the more, matters not being improved by Coocoola's air of cool disdain.<sup>214</sup>

Princess Coocoola and her sister Coola settle down in India with business interest in Calcutta and the neighbouring region. From Calcutta she started a business of importing turquoise from Iran. Later, she joined the boards of a company, which produced jewels for watches. When Indian Prime Minister Pandit Nehru offered her a pension, the princess turned it down, asking instead for trading right.<sup>215</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Heinrich Harrer often talked about equal rights for women when she was in Tibet. After returning back from Tibet, she continued it by forming the Women Welfare Association in Sikkim and worked for the upliftment of the deprived women. She became the chairman of the Women Welfare Association. When she was in London in 1963, in a press conference, she stated that women in Sikkim and Tibet had a very respectable position in the society. She further

mentioned, “In our country, Tibetans like many Buddhist are matriarchy and we have a better position than the women of the west”.<sup>216</sup>

She worked for many social causes in the society by establishing the Sikkim Welfare Society, a member of the Associated Country Women of the World. She also became the Director of Sikkim Jewels, Director of *Denzong* Co-operative Society, founding member of Rongli Higher Secondary School and board member of the State Bank of Sikkim. She was also one of the founder members of the *Namgyal* Institute of Tibetology.<sup>217</sup>

Princess Coocoola actively took part in the politics of Sikkim and became an active political leader of the “Sikkim National Party” founded by her father *Chogyal* Tashi *Namgyal*.<sup>218</sup> She always kept her ears very close to the ground as far as Sikkim’s local politics were concerned and even more forthright than Hope Cooke (Palden Thondup’s second wife) in speaking out her mind on delicate issues affecting India’s leadership with protectorate.<sup>219</sup> Princess Coocoola and her sister Coola had been determined that palace life should not suffer between them and they had ensured that Sikkim’s social life had continued.

Princess Coocoola took an active role in trying to retain Sikkim’s separate political status and unique character. But, unfortunately, her dream did not come true as Sikkim became a part of Indian union on 16 May 1975. The 333 years of monarchic rule ended forever in Sikkim. Even after Sikkim became the part of the Indian Union, Coocoola did not sit quietly. From Hong Kong she issued several strong statements to the press, absolving Mrs. Indira Gandhi (the then Prime Minister of India) by saying that, the Indian Intelligence Bureau is behind the takeover.<sup>220</sup> She wrote many articles



in Newsweek stating that Sikkim actually worked very hard and in the mud, but then also Sikkim lost its independence to India.

Besides politics, she represented Sikkim in many international events like the exhibition in Tokyo, Japan, and her contribution in cultural aspects of Sikkim was most accountable. She was awarded the decoration of *Peti Podar* in recognition of the devoted and unremitting services rendered by her to the *Chogyal* and Sikkim in all fields, touching the welfare, prosperity and advancement of the people of Sikkim.<sup>221</sup> See Appendix 24.

However, in December 2008, at the age of 84 years, the brave woman breathed her last at Calcutta. A large number of people from all walks of life attended the funeral procession that was taken out from her residence at Development Area to the royal crematorium at Luskhyama (the hill above Gangtok, place where royal family's members were cremated). The Sikkim government declared a state holiday to honour her excellence. Different prominent personalities of Sikkim expressed grief on her death and by condoling stated few words in her name. Governor of Sikkim Balmiki Prasad Singh said "a lady of enormous charm, grace and wisdom". Chief Minister of Sikkim Mr. Pawan Kumar Chamling stated "Sikkim has lost a very able, wise and a distinguished figure. The Sikkim Bhutia–Lepcha Apex Committee also expressed deep sorrow on her death."<sup>222</sup>

### **3.10.9. Queen Hope Cooke *Namgyal*, the last and the 12th queen of Sikkim**

Simultaneously, there was another woman who being a strong supporter of King Palden Thondup *Namgyal* was also his second wife, queen Hope Cooke *Namgyal*. Sarah Lawrence, nee Hope Cooke *Namgyal*, the 12th and the last queen of Sikkim,

was born on 24 June 1940 and grew up in New York, America. Her interest was in reading Asian history and culture at the prestigious Sarah Lawrence College, where she subsequently graduated and was extensive and thorough, and her thirst for travel and first-hand experience took her eventually to India and the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim, where she met her husband in Darjeeling, the 12th crown prince of Sikkim, and they tied the knot in March, 1963.<sup>223</sup>

There was unhappiness in some quarters in Sikkim when words went round that crown prince Palden Thondup *Namgyal* proposed to marry an American, because it had been the custom since time immemorial for the Sikkim ruler to seek his bride from Tibet. At first there was strong opposition. The prince was essentially a traditionalist and did not look kindly upon Sikkimese marrying outside their own community. He had his life dedicated to the preservation of his country's identity and integrity. Later, the proposal was eventually accepted by the *Lhadimedi* (the council of elders) *Lhadi* means (Monks) and *Medi* means (Lay People) and marriage took place in 1963. According to Nari Rustomji, after their marriage, Sikkim was making her debut on the world stage. This was the first occasion in the history of Sikkim that foreigners from distant continents were being invited to grace a Sikkimese royal wedding.<sup>224</sup>

A few month after her marriage to the crown prince of Sikkim, her father-in-law *Chogyal Tashi Namgyal* passed away on 2 December 1963. Thereafter, the responsibility of the administration fell on Palden Thondup's shoulder. *Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal* and his American bride were formally crowned as the *Chogyal* and *Gyalmo* of Sikkim at a ceremony held at palace chapel on 4 April 1965.<sup>225</sup> Thereafter, Sikkimese began to address them their Majesties, the king and

queen of Sikkim. Foreigners, those who visited Sikkim, too addressed them as such. But the government of India refused to recognize them with such titles as king and queen of Sikkim and treated them as the ruling Emperor and Empress of a protectorate of India.<sup>226</sup>

Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, journalist and the author of *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim*, stated that India house was not prepared to tolerate the growing Sikkimese practice of addressing the royal couple as Majesties, though New Delhi officially recognized the ancient Sikkimese titles of *Chogyal* and *Gyalmo* in 1965, when they ascended the throne.<sup>227</sup>

The coronation year marks the beginning of a new chapter in Sikkim, especially when Hope Cooke began to exert her influences in the tiny Himalayan kingdom. To be the king and queen of Sikkim, they constantly fought for the cause of keeping the status of their kingdom independent. Hope Cooke lent full support to her husband in his efforts towards this direction. Therefore, she took over the supervision of education in Sikkim. Every textbook of schools were revised which identified Sikkim as a distinct and separate race – culturally, ethnically and politically. The aspiration of Sikkim to have its own flag, system of government and separate identity was highlighted in a very subtle manner. She took the responsibility to examine textbooks from kindergarten to class VIII, where she formed the textbook curriculum committee and decided education in Sikkim should be more child-centric. She was the chairman of that committee and she wanted a good group of people together to serve on the committee who loved children, education and Sikkim. She tried herself to give the best education to the children of Sikkim.<sup>228</sup>

Hope Cooke set up a Youth Study Circle or Study Forum in 1966, where discussions of political nature were regularly held. Most of the young members were the children of the Bhutia families, who were close to the *Chogyal*. This forum was an anti-Indian organization and was used for brainwashing of foreign visitors. Outside Sikkim, they were used for anti-Indian propaganda and their main demand was independence of Sikkim. Besides that she also introduced night college and youth library in Sikkim.<sup>229</sup>

The Study forum's members were always searching for further symbols that would help demonstrate that Sikkim's identity was separate from that of India. In the search for symbols of nationhood, none were considered too small. In 1966, the Asia Society in New York was persuaded to establish a "Sikkim Council". In 1967, Princess Coocoola, Hope Cook's sister-in-law, arranged for two Sikkimese women to represent Sikkim at the "Associated country Women of the World" conference, displaying a collection of items to represent their country, including the national flag and a number of other artefacts, which stressed the Bhutia–Lepcha roots of the nation. In 1968, two Sikkimese women flew to Peru to represent the country in a world Craft Council Meeting.<sup>230</sup>

Hope Cooke also revolutionized the whole concept of cottage industry in Sikkim which was established by her husband in 1957.<sup>231</sup> Nari Rustomji, in his book *Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy*, described Hope Cooke's contribution towards Sikkim in an international forum. She gave a strong impetus to the development of traditional Sikkimese arts and crafts by paying frequent visits to the State's Institute for Cottage Industries and took initiative in applying traditional Sikkimese textile designs to articles of day-to-day utilities such as handbags, carpets and cushions. It was because

of her close and keen supervision that the quality of Sikkimese handicrafts was improved and maintained at a higher level.<sup>232</sup>

Apart from her interest in revivifying the traditional arts, Hope was also instrumental in gaining wider publicity for Sikkim outside the Indian subcontinent. She travelled extensively with her husband, and, as a handsome pair from a strange and exotic land, they attracted attention wherever they moved. The interest aroused in Sikkim by these visits gave the Prince the opportunity. He was seeking of clarifying his country's status as an independent entity having special treaty relations with India. He wished to dispel the notion that Sikkim stood on the same constitutional footing as the erstwhile princely states of India and could as summarily be absorbed by India whenever she chose. He wished Sikkim to be regarded in the same light as her two Himalayan neighbours, Bhutan and Nepal. Marriage brought Sikkim for a time into the limelight.<sup>233</sup>

Queen Hope Cooke even demanded scholarships for the Sikkimese students to study abroad, together with the desire to seek membership, representing organizations reflected the Sikkimese people's aspiration to outgrow Indian tutelage and get international recognition of Sikkim's separate identity. Bhutan became a member of the United Nations in September 1971. Sikkim too expressed the desire to seek membership in the UN.<sup>234</sup> *Gyalmo Hope Namgyal* had edited many Bulletins of Tibetology, which were published by *Namgyal* Institute of Tibetology yearly.<sup>235</sup>

During Hope's stay in Sikkim, Sikkim's scenario was not in the favour of her husband *Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal*, as there was a constant pressure from the different political parties as well as from the Indian government. Thondup *Namgyal* after being formally crowned as a king demanded the revision of the *Treaty of 1950*.

At a press conference in Gangtok on 8 February 1966, the *Chogyal* stated, “The Sikkim Government wants some changes in the treaty between India and Sikkim signed in 1950”.<sup>236</sup> According to the treaty, the government of India took control over the external affairs of Sikkim, including defence and communications. Internal subjects such as political, economic and financial matters were largely left to the Sikkim Government.

According to Kaul (the Indian official at that time), “the new ruler, Palden Thondup *Namgyal*, under the influence of his newly wedded American wife and her friends started giving pin-pricks to India on matters big and small”.<sup>237</sup> Because during the coronation of the *Chogyal* and the *Gyalmo*, the Sikkimese national anthem (in Sikkimese) was played for the first time instead of the usual Indian national anthem.<sup>238</sup>

In the same year, *Gyalmo* also had opened the question of Darjeeling and demanded the merger of Darjeeling to Sikkim based on historical grounds through an article published in the Bulletin of *Namgyal* Institute of Tibetology on 2 July 1966 under the title “*The Sikkimese Theory of Land-Holding and The Darjeeling Grant*” in which she further challenged the validity of the Indo-Sikkim *Treaty of 1950* calling it “unjust” and restoration of Darjeeling to Sikkim.<sup>239</sup> The article raised hue and cry in India. The Indian press took up as weapons on behalf of the Indian government and published a large number of nationalist writings that betrayed the *Chogyal* and the *Gyalmo*.<sup>240</sup>

As it was already mentioned above, in 1963, *Chogyal* Tashi *Namgyal* died. His death created another diplomatic incident in Sikkim. Sikkim was already in a protectorate under the Indian government through the Treaty of 1950. In 1963, Chinese government sent a message to Thondup expressing their condolence to his father’s

death. Indian government took up such issue very seriously and responded that Chinese government should be aware that Sikkim's external relation is all under the hand of Indian government. So, in future, any communication pertaining to Sikkim will be addressed to the government of India only. Due to the Treaty of 1950, Sikkim's external affairs were controlled by the Indian government. Even in 1964, Indian government saw the request from the king of Sikkim and his American wife to change their title from Emperor and Empress to their traditional title *Chogyal* and *Gyalmo*.<sup>241</sup>

Later, the most trouble was that the international press trained its spotlights on the court of Gangtok. Hope's arrival changed the quality of palace life, adding new dimension to perspectives. She aroused an awareness of the world in Sikkim and made the world conscious of her husband's tucked-away kingdom.<sup>242</sup> The extraordinary clash of cultures at the wedding put Sikkim well and truly under the spotlight of the world's press. Later in 1963, National Geographic ran a further feature, this time with colour pictures from the event. But it was the Time Magazine that caught the cultural clash in an article "*Where There's Hope*" a week after the wedding. With Hope's marriage to Thondup, Sikkim had been put well and truly under the spotlight in the international arena.<sup>243</sup> She was suggested by her sister-in-law to get on TV to reinforce Sikkim's identity. She had conducted a press conference in London on her husband's behalf during the crises of 1965. She was pleased to have played her part in representing Sikkim's cause.<sup>244</sup>

Andrew Duff in his book, *Sikkim: Requiem for A Himalayan Kingdom*, described: The self-styled "Queen" of Sikkim gave the inside of the building a makeover, ordering new soft furnishing that lent the home an international feel for the first time. It was by

her influence which helped the *Namgyal* Palace to turn into not only home, but the place to entertain and welcome visiting dignitaries from the different parts of the world, who can see the sun set over Khangchendzonga's five magnificent peaks.<sup>245</sup>

Post-1962, there was an atmosphere of conflict between India and China. In 1965, American debutante, Hope Cooke became the second wife of the *Chogyal* and the *Gyalmo* of Sikkim. Therefore, some Indians questioned Hope Cooke's motives for being in Sikkim. Intelligence agencies in India were very suspicious of her activities. Sikkim became the most talked about subject on the international chess board then, with rival armies facing each other at the Sikkim–Tibet border. In certain quarters, it was openly suggested by the Indian government that Hope was a CIA plant and was sent there to fish out the information as America also supported Sikkim to become an independent state. But India would not have entrained any proposal for independent Sikkim.<sup>246</sup>

These all are the issues which made Hope Cooke leave Sikkim on 16 August 1973 after the April 1973 agitation. The traditional Sikkimese never took to their foreign queen and she never made her place in the Sikkimese heart. As well as her sister-in-law Princess Coocoola could hardly stand with her. The royal family of Sikkim was of Bhutia–Lepcha stock, and therefore their backing is important for continued political support. In general, they are the most conservative force in Sikkim and are used to the custom of the king marrying someone from Tibet who was a Buddhist. This may be because of her not being a Buddhist, she found particularly ironic as she writes in her autobiography.<sup>247</sup>



### 3.11. Royal Women and Land

Royal women have the ownership over the land. However, Sikkim's history always established the supremacy of the kings and *Kazis* (Landlords) over the land since the establishment of the *Namgyal* dynasty. King was the sole owner of the land. Even though the *Kazis* had no proprietary right in the land, an internal system of the land division was the *Chogyal* at the highest level. The property belonged to the *Chogyal* called "Royal Lands". All lands were under the direct control of the king.<sup>248</sup>

However, land under a person could be transferred by the king to another party. The land was used to be given as a bride price to the queen of Sikkim and the same land was passed down through the successive *Gyalmos* (Queen) of Sikkim. According to *The Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicles of the House of Namgyal*, during the time of *Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal*, he made a deed signed and sealed himself that after the death of his fourth wife, queen Dingka, a place called Dzongu was transferred under the name of his fifth queen Monkyid Lhayum and thereafter, he himself made a grant of Dzongu land to his daughter-in-law Lhading lady *Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma* in lieu of marriage ornaments.<sup>249</sup>

Therefore, Dzongu became a part of the queen's private estate. The *Gyalmo* left the land in charge of the person who were honest and loyal to the palace establishment. Therefore, it was administrated once by the Mali *Kazi* and later by the Rhenock *Kazi*.<sup>250</sup> During the later period, the land came under the hands of the Prime Minister, and thereafter, it came under the heir apparent to the throne.<sup>251</sup>

Lands had been the private property of the successive queen of Sikkim and they also collected taxes and produce from their land. According to the local tradition, the

Chumbi Valley, on the side of the border, only came into the possession of Sikkim's king a little more than 100 years ago as a dowry from a Tibetan queen.<sup>252</sup> Lachen and Lachung valley were also assigned to the queen at the time of Superintendent Campbell and Hooker's visit to Sikkim in 1849.<sup>253</sup> In 1891, the place called Garjong in west Sikkim, which was the private property of the queen, was exchanged with the monastic land of the Kichaperi in west Sikkim and Melli in the South with the landholder Rizing *Kazi*.<sup>254</sup>

Even later, the Takshi *Dzong* was also assigned in the name of the 11th queen Kunzang Dechen during the time of her husband King Tashi Namgyal.<sup>255</sup> Therefore, it showed that the custom of bride price and dowry was widely prevalent among the royal family of Sikkim, and it also proved that royal women also hold their own land. In the history of Sikkim, not only the king but the queens also granted the land to the people if they were happy with their services. Therefore, queen Kunzang Dechen gifted a small plot of barren land for the construction of a small house to Ngwang Rabgey on 20 September 1967.<sup>256</sup> This showed that royal women hold their own land and queens of Sikkim also had ownership over the land.

### **3.12. Concubines in the History of Sikkim**

There was a system of keeping concubines by the kings in the history of Sikkim. Women were not safe in their homes. Traditionally, women were seduced by the kings when their husband was distanced from their home for their work. In the book, *History of Sikkim*, written by Thutob *Namgyal* and Yeshe Dolma, it was described that: apart from the three marriages, *Chogyal Tensung Namgyal* had an illegitimate son named Yugthing Arup, who was the son of Tasa Aphong or also known as Yuthing Deshey.<sup>257</sup> Tasa Aphong was serving under the king, *Tensung Namgyal*, who

resided at Barphak, located north of Rinchenpong (west Sikkim). Once when he was away on a short trip for a necessary task of King Tensung at Dobtra in Tibet, the *Chogyal* seduced his wife Nyumbong.<sup>258</sup> The offspring born to this relationship was named Yugthing Arup, who later was appointed as the head of the Lepchas and, subsequently, was appointed as *Changzod* (Prime Minister) Yugthing Arub, who became the ancestor of the powerful Barfung clan in the history of Sikkim, who rose to prominence in the eighteenth century.<sup>259</sup>

Apart from Tensung *Namgyal*, *Chogyal* Tsugphud *Namgyal* also had one favourite concubine named Tsering Putik, a maid of honour from his second wife. Tsering Putik bore him two illegitimate children, one was daughter named Pema La and a son named Chazod Tenzing *Namgyal*, commonly known as Changzod Karpo. Later Changzod Karpo married Tsugphud *Namgyal*'s fifth wife queen Monkyid Lhayum. They have a son named Lhasey Kusho Thinley *Namgyal*. *The Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal* stated that *Chogyal* Tsugphud *Namgyal* himself at the point of his death in 1863 united in marriage his own son Changzod Karpo with his own wife Monkyid Lhayum and directed them to jointly administer the state.<sup>260</sup> Therefore, Shukla stated that when members of the royal household had been following such practices openly and allowed so much negligence in such matters, it should not be surprising if the common people also followed them.<sup>261</sup>

The daughter Pema La was married to Tokhang Donyer *Namgyal* also known as *Pagla Dewan*, who was appointed as a *Dewan* (Chief Minister) from a councillor in 1847 by the king himself, in his zeal to keep Sikkim free from the British influence. Due to his marriage with the king's daughter, he became very close to the king. Therefore, Donyer *Namgyal* not only opposed the visit of British officers in Sikkim,

but he also got them arrested in 1849.<sup>262</sup> *Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal's* genealogical table is attached in Appendix 26.

Men who hold powerful status in society can do anything with women at any time and there was no sexual chastity within a Bhutia community in Sikkim. However, offspring from such relations were accepted in society. But such offspring cannot be the ruler.

### **3.13. Conclusion**

Throughout the history of Sikkim, the death of the ruler often causes succession disputes and armed conflicts. Similarly, Sikkim always stood into the anarchy and civil war as competing groups for political supremacy. There were all together 12 succeeding rulers in the history of Sikkim, who ruled Sikkim since 1642 till 1975. Each king had two, three and sometimes even five wives. Apart from that, they also kept the concubines. Matrimonial projects of the *Chogyals* with different countries gave prestige to represent Sikkimese kingdom in socio-economic and political stake, both internally and externally. Many kings of Sikkim went to Tibet for pilgrimage and received religious instructions and mostly the objective was triple: political, religious and marital.

In order to secure the historic connection between Sikkim and Tibet, there was an exchange of women between these two nations. The choice of the Tibetan wives from the secular families of Tibet was probably following a political goal conscious, aiming to counterbalance. Through matrimonial alliances, Tibet became the guide to Sikkim in matters of religious and political construction from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. But, after the mid-nineteenth century, with the involvement of the

British power in Sikkim, the historic relation between Sikkim and Tibet came to a closer end.

Royal women are equally participated in administrative work of the palace as being a regent of the king or the supporter. Even queens also had ownership over the land. But all the work which women had done in the past was hidden in the historian's eyes while writing history.

In the patriarchal family system, male folk gets much more importance than female folk. Both the polyandry and polygamy system was followed among the royal family of Sikkim, which gave women to choose their partners of their own will, but women were always blamed. There was supremacy of male domination over women in the society. The dominance of patriarchy has been achieved through historical forces because looking from the *Namgyal* period onwards, gender biasness occurred in the history of Sikkim in many forms. The customary laws were against women; if there would be a dispute over a child or any relationship, the law was always enforced upon women. Therefore, it showed when *Chogyal Tashi Namgyal* and his wife got separated, the queen was only allowed to take her girl child. Though, there was equal involvement of the royal women in the royal court of Sikkim and the queens always worked shoulder to shoulder with their male counter parts and completed all walks of life, but their work was found unimportant, and historians did not interpret it in their writing.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Buhler G. *The Law of Manu*, Chapter 13: The Laws Concerning Women. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Prabhat, Preeti. *Matrimonial Alliances and Ancient Indian polity (c. 600 BCE to c. CE 650)*. Delhi: D.K. Print world (p) Ltd., 2007: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Bhattacharyya, Pranab Kumar. *Aspect of Cultural History of Sikkim: Studies in Coinage*. Gangtok, 1981: 3.

<sup>5</sup> Das, B.S. *The Sikkim Saga*. Delhi: Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1983: 5.

<sup>6</sup> Upadaya, Rajen. *Peasants' Resentments and Resistance: A Glimpse on Rural Past of Sikkim 1914–1960*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2017: 41.

<sup>7</sup> Tran, Hong. "Chogyal's Sikkim: Tax, Land and Clan Politics". SIT Digital Abroad: 2012: 4.

<sup>8</sup> Khye-Bumsa, the ancestor of the first king of Sikkim, had signed a blood brotherhood treaty with the Lepcha chief the kongtek, at Khabi Longtsog, during the thirteenth century, which signifies the eternal friendship between the Lepchas and the Bhutias. (File no: EAP880/1/6/2. *History of Sikkim and its ruler*. British Archive Library)

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<sup>11</sup> Namgyal Thutob and Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma. *History of Sikkim Manuscript*. Translated by Kazi Dausandup: Typescript, 1908: 20.

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<sup>14</sup> Singh, Sabita. *The Politics of Marriage in Medieval India: Gender and Alliance in Rajasthan*. New Delhi: Oxford University press. 2019: 51-52.

<sup>15</sup> Gurung, Bishnu K. *The Ahoms Rise to Power: Matrimonial Alliances as a Factor*. Sawadana, Vol. II, issue I, 2020: 1, Accessed on 15/3/2022.

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- <sup>18</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974. *Op. Cit.*, 13.
- <sup>19</sup> Joshi, H.G. *Sikkim: Past and Present*. New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2004: 131.
- <sup>20</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974. *Op. Cit.*, 15.
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- <sup>22</sup> Debnath, J.C. 2009. *Op. Cit.*, 20-21.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>24</sup> Bhattacharyya, Pranab Kumar. 1981. *Op. Cit.*, 8.
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- <sup>26</sup> Roy, D.C. 2010: *Op. Cit.*, 102
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.
- <sup>28</sup> Rustomji, Nari. *Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1987: 5.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Das, B.S. 1983. *Op. Cit.*, 5.
- <sup>31</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. *Op. Cit.*, 1984: 20.
- <sup>32</sup> Sengupta, N. *State Government and Politics: Sikkim*. New Delhi: Sterling Publisher, 1985: 2.
- <sup>33</sup> Upadaya, Rajen. 2017. *Op. Cit.*, 42.
- <sup>34</sup> Subba, J.R. *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008: 1.
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- <sup>36</sup> Moktan, R. *Sikkim: Darjeeling Compendium of Documents*. Darjeeling: Gopal Press, 2004: 1.

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- <sup>43</sup> Kotturan, George. *The Himalayan Gateway; History and Culture of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1983: 35.
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- <sup>45</sup> Upadaya, Rajen. 2017. *Op. Cit.*, 18.
- <sup>46</sup> Magars were one of the many ethnic communities present in or near what is now western Sikkim, prior to the accession of the first *Chogyal* of Sikkim (Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 185).
- <sup>47</sup> Upadaya, Rajen. 2017. *Op. Cit.*, 42.
- <sup>48</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 185.
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- <sup>51</sup> Mullard, Saul. *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History*. Gangtok: Rachna Publication, 2019: 151.
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- <sup>55</sup> Travers, Alice. "A women in the diplomatic game: Preliminary notes on the Matrimonial link of the Sikkim royal family with Tibet (13th to 20th century)" (In French). Edited by Anna Balikchi Denjongpa. *Bulletin of Tibetology*. Vol. 42. No. 1 and 2. Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2006-2008: 2.
- <sup>56</sup> Coelho, V.H. 1971. *Op. Cit.*, 13.
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- <sup>59</sup> Travers, Alice. 2006-2008. *Op. Cit.*, 10.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>62</sup> Mullard, Saul. 2019. *Op. Cit.*, 151-163.
- <sup>63</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. *Son of Soil: The Rise and Fall of the Namgyal Dynasty of Sikkim*. Chennai: Notion Press, 2020:88.
- <sup>64</sup> Kotturan, George.1983. *Op. Cit.*, 38.
- <sup>65</sup> *Lama Jigme Paw* came from Tibet to Sikkim as a regent to guide *Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal*. He was the third incarnation of Lhatsun Chenpo. Lhatsun Chenpo was among the third *lama*, who was present during the coronation of the first *Chogyal* of Sikkim in 1642 CE at Yuksom.
- <sup>66</sup> Mullard, Saul. 2019. *Op. Cit.*, 151-168.
- <sup>67</sup> Bell, Charles. *The People of Tibet*. Delhi: Book Faith India, 1998: 136.
- <sup>68</sup> Chettri, Durga P. *Sikkim Chronicles*. Siliguri: Impact, 2010: 9.
- <sup>69</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 156.
- <sup>70</sup> Bell, Charles. 1998. *Op. Cit.*, 129.
- <sup>71</sup> Mullard, Saul. 2019. *Op. Cit.*, 151-170.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.
- <sup>73</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020. *Op. Cit.*, 83.

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- <sup>74</sup> Mullard, Saul. 2019. *Op. Cit.*, 151-166.
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- <sup>78</sup> Mullard, Saul and Hissey Wongchuk. *Royal Records: A Catalogue of the Sikkimese Palace Archive*. Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2010: 16.
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- <sup>81</sup> Coelho. V.H. 1971. *Op. Cit.*, 14.
- <sup>82</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 167.
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- <sup>88</sup> Mullard, Saul. 2019. *Op. Cit.*, 175.
- <sup>89</sup> *Namgyal*, Thotup and Yeshe Dolma. 1908. *Op. Cit.*, 35.
- <sup>90</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. 1976. *Op. Cit.*, 17.
- <sup>91</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974. *Op. Cit.*, 20 and Chib, Sukhdev Singh. 1977. *Op. Cit.*, 6.
- <sup>92</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020. *Op. Cit.*, 89.
- <sup>93</sup> Kotturan, George. 1983. *Op. Cit.*, 38.
- <sup>94</sup> White, J.C. *Sikkim and Bhutan: Twenty-One Years on the North-East Frontier 1887-1908*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publication, 1909: 17.

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- <sup>95</sup> Coelho, V.H. 1971. *Op. Cit.*, 14.
- <sup>96</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974. *Op. Cit.*, 20.
- <sup>97</sup> Namgyal, Thutob and Yeshe Dolma. 1908. *Op. Cit.*, 35-36.
- <sup>98</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020. *Op. Cit.*, 111-112.
- <sup>99</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 241.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.
- <sup>101</sup> Upadaya, Rajen. 2017. *Op. Cit.*, 45.
- <sup>102</sup> Coelho, V.H. 1971. *Op. Cit.*, 5.
- <sup>103</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974. *Op. Cit.*, 17.
- <sup>104</sup> Priyadarshini, Verma. "Women in Bhutan: Exploring their Socio-Cultural Status in the Late 20th Century". *Indian History Congress*, (2004): 922.
- <sup>105</sup> Bothe, Winnie and Sachdeva, Swati Akshay. "Gendered Participation in the Buddhist Himalayas Sikkim and Bhutan: A Comparative Study on Visions of Female Participation". *The Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. No. 66: 2-3, 2013: 297.
- <sup>106</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Patriarchy: The Analysis of Women's Oppression*. 1986: 30.
- <sup>107</sup> Upadaya, Rajen. 2017: *Op. Cit.*, 45.
- <sup>108</sup> Mullard, Saul. 2019: *Op. Cit.*, 151-163.
- <sup>109</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 18.
- <sup>110</sup> Coelho, V.H. 1971: *Op. Cit.*, 13
- <sup>111</sup> Risley, H.H. *Gazetteer of Sikkim*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Cooperation, 1895 (Rpt. 1985): 12.
- <sup>112</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 18
- <sup>113</sup> Namgyal, Thutob and Yeshe Dolma. 1908: *Op. Cit.*, 25.
- <sup>114</sup> Risley, H.H. 1895: *Op. Cit.*, 12 and Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 123.
- <sup>115</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974. *Op. Cit.*, 19.

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<sup>116</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. *Op. Cit.*, 2020: 78.

<sup>117</sup> Risley, H.H. 1895. *Op. Cit.*, 13.

<sup>118</sup> Nga-Dag Sempa Phuntshog Rinzing or Nadak Sempa Chempo, who was present during the coronation of the first *Chogyal* of Sikkim in 1642 CE. His son was Chempa Tenzing and his grandson name was Lha tshen Khenrap Wongchuk Rinchen Gon Palzangpo/Rinchen Gon, with whom Pende Wangmo was so fascinated.

<sup>119</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974. *Op. Cit.*, 19.

<sup>120</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 119.

<sup>121</sup> Risley, H.H. 1895. *Op. Cit.*, 13.

<sup>122</sup> Coelho, V.H. 1971. *Op. Cit.*, 13.

<sup>123</sup> Namtse *Dzong* is the name of Pende Wangmo's palace in Namchi, south Sikkim, which later converted into Nadak monastery in 1836. Her palace still exists.

<sup>124</sup> Namgyal Thutob and Yeshe Dolma. 1908. *Op. Cit.*, 32.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>126</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 320.

<sup>127</sup> Denjongpa, Anna Balikci and John A. Andrussi. "Editorial Introduction" *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 52, No. 1, Gangtok, Sikkim: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2021: 6.

<sup>128</sup> *Chogyal Thutob Namgyal's* elder half-brother's widow.

<sup>129</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 44.

<sup>130</sup> Upadaya, Rajen. 2017: *Op. Cit.*, 65.

<sup>131</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020: *Op. Cit.*, 136.

<sup>132</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021: *Op. Cit.*, 319.

<sup>133</sup> Namgyal Thutob and Yeshe Dolma. 1908. *Op. Cit.*, 81.

<sup>134</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021: *Op. Cit.*, 320.

<sup>135</sup> Chumbi Valley was the place in the northern part of Sikkim, where kings used to spend their time during the summer.

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- <sup>136</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. 1976: *Op. Cit.*, 31-32.
- <sup>137</sup> Queen Mother Monkyid Lhayum was the fifth wife of the seventh *Chogyal* of Sikkim (Tsugphud *Namgyal*) and the mother of Thutob *Namgyal*. She was often called as the Dowager Rani in the History of Sikkim.
- <sup>138</sup> Changzod Karpo was the son of *Chogyal* Tsugphud *Namgyal* (seventh king of Sikkim) from his concubine and later married his father's fifth wife queen Monkyid Lyayum. Changzod Karpo and queen Monkyid had a son named Lhassy Kusho Thinley *Namgyal*.
- <sup>139</sup> Dewan *Namgay* also known as *Pagla* Dewan in the history of Sikkim was an anti-British. He was the same *Dewan* whose expulsion the British had demanded 30 years earlier. His main interest was to get power in the administration.
- <sup>140</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 47-48.
- <sup>141</sup> Coelho, V.H. 1971: *Op. Cit.*, 20.
- <sup>142</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020: *Op. Cit.*, 137-138.
- <sup>143</sup> Namgyal, Thutob and Yeshe Dolma. 1908: *Op. Cit.*, 82.
- <sup>144</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021: *Op. Cit.*, 322.
- <sup>145</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020: *Op. Cit.*, 137.
- <sup>146</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur, 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 49.
- <sup>147</sup> Waddell, L.A. *Among the Himalayas: Bibliotheca Himalayica*. Series I, Vol. 18. Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1978: 147.
- <sup>148</sup> White, J.C. 1909: *Op. Cit.*, 22.
- <sup>149</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. 1984: *Op. Cit.*, 22.
- <sup>150</sup> Rustomji, Nari. 1987: *Op. Cit.*, 12.
- <sup>151</sup> Waddell, L.A. 1978: *Op. Cit.*, 146.
- <sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.
- <sup>153</sup> J.C. White was the first British Political Officer, who came to Sikkim in 1889.
- <sup>154</sup> Travers, Alice. 2006-2008: *Op. Cit.*, 16-17.

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- <sup>155</sup> Rao, P.R. *India and Sikkim (1814-1970)*. Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1972: 68.
- <sup>156</sup> Jha, P.K. *History of Sikkim (1817-1904): Analysis of British Policy and Activities*. Calcutta: OPS Publishers. 1985: 13.
- <sup>157</sup> Darjeeling is now in West Bengal and it was taken by the British from Sikkim in 1835.
- <sup>158</sup> Mckay, Alex. *The Mandala Kingdom: A Political History of Sikkim*. Gangtok: Rachna Book and Publication, 2021: 78.
- <sup>159</sup> Rao, P.R. 1972: *Op. Cit.*, 67.
- <sup>160</sup> Jha, P.K. 1985: *Op. Cit.*, 20.
- <sup>161</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020: *Op. Cit.*, 139-140.
- <sup>162</sup> Jha, P.K. 1985: *Op. Cit.*, 21.
- <sup>163</sup> Sinha, A.C. 2008: *Op. Cit.*, 55.
- <sup>164</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 60.
- <sup>165</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020: *Op. Cit.*, 142.
- <sup>166</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021: *Op. Cit.*, 351-356.
- <sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.
- <sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.
- <sup>169</sup> Jha, P.K. 1985: *Op. Cit.*, 22.
- <sup>170</sup> Sinha, A.C. 2008: *Op. Cit.*, 55.
- <sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>173</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 58-59.
- <sup>174</sup> White, J.C. 1909: *Op. Cit.*, 37.
- <sup>175</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020: *Op. Cit.*, 168.
- <sup>176</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021: *Op. Cit.*, 501-502.

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- <sup>177</sup> Denjongpa, Anna Balikci and John A. Andrussi. 2021: *Op. Cit.*, 6.
- <sup>178</sup> Bell, Charles. *The People of Tibet*. Delhi: Book Faith India, 1998: 133.
- <sup>179</sup> White, J.C. 2009: *Op. Cit.*, 23.
- <sup>180</sup> File No: EAP880/1/5/56. *Marriage of Tashi Namgyal (Chogyal r. 1914-1963) to Kunzang Dechen Tsomo Namgyal (Gyalyum)*. British Archive Library.
- <sup>181</sup> Rustomji, Nari. 1987: *Op. Cit.*, 13.
- <sup>182</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. 1976: *Op. Cit.*, 45.
- <sup>183</sup> Rustomji, Nari. 1987: *Op. Cit.*, 13.
- <sup>184</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. 1976: *Op. Cit.*, 45.
- <sup>185</sup> Tashi, Tenzing C. and Norbu Jamyang. *Princess from Tibet*. Collected from Princess Hope Lezum on 26/7/2019, (N.D.): 2.
- <sup>186</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020: *Op. Cit.*, 216.
- <sup>187</sup> Tashi, Tenzing C. and Norbu Jamyang. (N.D). *Op. Cit.*, 2.
- <sup>188</sup> Mukhoty, Ira. *Daughter of the Sun: Empresses, Queens and Begums of the Mughal Empire*. Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2018: xvii.
- <sup>189</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 360-361.
- <sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.
- <sup>191</sup> Bhutia, Lama T.D. "Obituary". *Bulletin of Tibetology*, New Series, No. 2, Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 12 July, 1994: 59.
- <sup>192</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 487.
- <sup>193</sup> Oral Narratives by Chultim Bhutia, General Secretary of Phensang Monastery, on 20 February 2022.
- <sup>194</sup> Rustomji, Nari. *Enchanted Frontiers: Sikkim, Bhutan and India's North-Eastern Borderlands*. London: Oxford University press, 1919: 27.
- <sup>195</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 570.

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- <sup>196</sup> Bhutia, Lama T.D. 1994: *Op. Cit.*, 59.
- <sup>197</sup> Denjongpa, Anna Balikchi. “Princess Pema Tesdeun of Sikkim (1924-2008) Founding Member, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology”. *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 44, No. 1 and 2, Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2008: 195.
- <sup>198</sup> Zinkin, Taya. *Princess of Sikkim*. (1963) Collected from Prince Jigme Wangchuk Pheukhang on 8 May 2019: 1.
- <sup>199</sup> Denzongpa, Anna Balikchi. 2008: *Op. Cit.*, 196.
- <sup>200</sup> Harrer, Heinrich. *Seven Years in Tibet*. London: Pan book Ltd., Third edition 1982: 131.
- <sup>201</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. 1984: *Op. Cit.*, 70.
- <sup>202</sup> Rustomji, Nari. 1987: *Op. Cit.*, 68.
- <sup>203</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. 1984: *Op. Cit.*, 70.
- <sup>204</sup> Duff, Andrew. *Sikkim: Requiem for a Himalayan Kingdom*. Delhi: Penguin Random House Company, 2015: 49.
- <sup>205</sup> Cooke, Hope. *Time Change: An Autobiography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980: 89.
- <sup>206</sup> Duff, Andrew. 2015: *Op. Cit.*, 90.
- <sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>208</sup> Zinkin, Taya. 1963: *Op. Cit.*, 3.
- <sup>209</sup> Sikkim Darbar Gazette, Vol. 15, Published by authority on 4 April 1967: 1.
- <sup>210</sup> Tashi, Tenzing C. and Norbu Jamyang. *Op. Cit.*, 3.
- <sup>211</sup> Rustomji, Nari. 1987: *Op. Cit.*, 68.
- <sup>212</sup> Duff, Andrew. 2015: *Op. Cit.*, 50-51.
- <sup>213</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. 1984: *Op. Cit.*, 70-71.
- <sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>215</sup> “Rose of Tibet Guarded Culture”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December 2008. Accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2019.
- <sup>216</sup> Zinkin, Taya. 1963: *Op. Cit.*, 2-3.



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- <sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>218</sup> Das, B.S. 1983: *Op. Cit.*, 41.
- <sup>219</sup> Rustomji, Nari. 1987: *Op. Cit.*, 68-69.
- <sup>220</sup> Cooke, Hope. 1980: *Op. Cit.*, 243.
- <sup>221</sup> Sikkim Darbar Gazette. 1967: *Op. Cit.*, 1.
- <sup>222</sup> “Sikkim Princess Passes Away”, *Telegraph India*, 10 December 2008. Accessed on 14 April, 2019.
- <sup>223</sup> Rustomji, Nari. 1987. *Op. Cit.*, 63.
- <sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.
- <sup>225</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974. *Op. Cit.*, 123.
- <sup>226</sup> Das, B.S. 1983. *Op. Cit.*, 89.
- <sup>227</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. 1984. *Op. Cit.*, 72.
- <sup>228</sup> Development of Curriculum and Textbook Grades Kindergarten-VIII in Sikkim (1967-1973), article send to me through email by Hope Cooke on 2/8/2019.
- <sup>229</sup> Das, B.S. 1983. *Op. Cit.*, 90.
- <sup>230</sup> Hiltz Jackie. Constructing Sikkimese National Identity in the 1960s and 1970s. *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 39, No. 2. Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2003: 81.
- <sup>231</sup> Chip, Sukhdev Singh. 1977. *Op. Cit.*, 49.
- <sup>232</sup> Rustomji, Nari. 1987. *Op. Cit.*, 65.
- <sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-68.
- <sup>234</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020. *Op. Cit.*, 222.
- <sup>235</sup> Namgyal Hope. Editor Note. *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. X, No.1. Gangtok, Sikkim: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 1973.
- <sup>236</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020. *Op. Cit.*, 219.
- <sup>237</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. 1984. *Op. Cit.*, 72.
- <sup>238</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. 2020. *Op. Cit.*, 221.

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- <sup>239</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. 1976. *Op. Cit.*, 70.
- <sup>240</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974. *Op. Cit.*, 125.
- <sup>241</sup> Duff, Andrew. 2015. *Op. Cit.*, 110-111.
- <sup>242</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. 1984. *Op. Cit.*, 75.
- <sup>243</sup> Duff, Andrew. 2015. *Op. Cit.*, 107.
- <sup>244</sup> Cook, Hope. 1980. *Op. Cit.*, 141.
- <sup>245</sup> Duff, Andrew. 2015. *Op. Cit.*, 133.
- <sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.
- <sup>247</sup> Cooke, Hope. 1980. *Op. Cit.*, 89.
- <sup>248</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021: *Op. Cit.*, 380-381.
- <sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.
- <sup>250</sup> Moktan, R. 2004: *Op. Cit.*, 199.
- <sup>251</sup> Namgyal, Hope. "The Sikkim Theory of Land-Holding and the Darjeeling Grant". *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. III, No. 2, Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, July, 1966: 48.
- <sup>252</sup> Bhasin, Veena. *Ecology, Culture and Change: Tribals of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Inter-India Publication, 1989 (Rpt. 1946): 86.
- <sup>253</sup> Namgyal, Hope. July, 1966: *Op. Cit.*, 48.
- <sup>254</sup> File No: 3/1908. *Reg. Garjong land settlement with Her Highness the Maharani and Malling Kazi*. Land Revenue Department, Sikkim State Archive.
- <sup>255</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 66.
- <sup>256</sup> File No: EAP 880/1/3/210. *Gift of Land to Ngawang Rabgey by Kunzang Dechen Tshomo Namgyal*. British Archive Library.
- <sup>257</sup> Lepcha headmen, who was the descendant of the former Lepcha chief The-kong-Tek.
- <sup>258</sup> Namgyal Thutob and Yeshe Dolma. 1908. *Op. Cit.*, 24.
- <sup>259</sup> Andrussi, John A, Anna Balikci Denjonpa, and Per K. Sorensen. 2021. *Op. Cit.*, 112.

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<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>261</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. 1976. *Op. Cit.*, 9.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

## **CHAPTER – IV**

### **WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

#### **4.1. Women and the Idea of the Democracy in Sikkim**

When politics comes, participation of women and their position are always in a subordinate position. People could not think women as a leader who can run the country, state or any kingdom. Historian narrated that the major roles of the women are caregiver and companion, which are more often expressed in private settings than in public. Women are treated less likely than men to become a leader. Due to the gender norms, women were confined to the household and are restricted in domestic roles. Politics was always seen as the job of men, because when we talk about politics, it is related to leadership and power and all these qualities according to the gender norms should be possessed by men and not by women in the society.<sup>1</sup>

Idea of democracy began in Sikkim when India got her independence in 1947, as different political parties started emerging in Sikkim, and their main demand was to abolish the feudalism and to bring subsequent development in Sikkim. Women were not seen in the political movement before nineteenth century and it did not throw light on those women who play an important role to bring the democracy in Sikkim. In this context, this chapter discusses the role of those women who played an important role to bring the democracy in Sikkim. It will also focus on those women who worked for the social causes by organizing different Women Welfare Association and it further deals with the education on women.

## 4.2. Political Scenario of Sikkim before 1975

When India got her independence in 1947, inspired by the idea of Indian independence and a consciousness of the need for political reforms in Sikkim, some educated Sikkimese came forward and started forming different political organizations in Sikkim. At Gangtok, the organization *Praja Sudharak Samaj* was formed by Tashi Tshering, Sonam Tshering and Kezang Tenzing in 1940s. The second one, *Praja Sammelan*, was formed at Temi Tarku (South Sikkim) under the leadership of Gobardhan Pradhan and Dhan Bahadur Tewari and the third organization, *Praja Mandal* at Chakung (West Sikkim), was formed by *Kazi* Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa.<sup>2</sup> Their main demand was to abolish the feudalism and to bring subsequent development in Sikkim.<sup>3</sup>

On 7 December 1947, all the three parties emerged together at Gangtok (the capital of Sikkim) and united to form Sikkim's first political party called "Sikkim State Congress" (SSC), intended to replace monarchy and to establish democracy in Sikkim.<sup>4</sup> The leaders of the "SSC" led a deputation to the late *Chogyal* of Sikkim, Sir Tashi *Namgyal*, and presented a memorandum demanding (i) abolition of landlordism, (ii) formation of an interim government and (iii) Sikkim's merge with India or accession of Sikkim to the Union of India.<sup>5</sup> However, the late king Tashi *Namgyal*, who was accustomed to rule Sikkim personally did not take kindly to the demands of the SSC. Therefore, in order to fight the democratic agitation and emphasize the communal and racial differences of the kingdom's population, Emperor Tashi *Namgyal* also formed a new political party called "Sikkim National Party", which was composed mainly of the minority communities of the Lepchas and the Bhutias. The party opposed the demand of the SSC.<sup>6</sup>

Later on, 9 May 1949, the popular ministry was formed and Tashi Tshering became the President.<sup>7</sup> However, the ministry was dissolved within a short period of 29 days. Thereafter, in 1953, the Emperor Tashi *Namgyal* created a legislature body called “Sikkim State Council”. It was given the power to enact, with the assent of the ruler, laws for the peace and order and good government of the state. It consisted twenty members, fourteen elected and six nominated. Out of the fourteen elected seats, six were reserved for the Nepalis, six were for the Bhutias and the Lepchas, one for the Sangha (Monk) and one for general seat.<sup>8</sup> The first general election in Sikkim was held in 1953, on the basis of this parity formula.<sup>9</sup>

Along with the State Council, the Executive Council was also formed. It consists of the principal administrative officer and four elected members of the council who are selected by the ruler and hold office during his pleasure. *Kazi* Lhendup Dorji also became the member of the executive councillor.<sup>10</sup> In 1953, *Kazi* became the President of SSC and held the post until 1958. During his presidentship, he led the delegation to Delhi to call on the Prime minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, where he met Mrs Elisa-Maria Langford-Rae and after few meetings, they both liked each other which converted to marriage in 1958.<sup>11</sup>

### **4.3. Eliza-Maria Langford-Rae’s Role in the Democratic Movement of Sikkim**

Eliza-Maria Langford-Rae, before she met *Kazi* Lhendup Dorji, she had been gone through two marriages. Born into an ordinary family in Edinburg, Scotland, she was a woman with an infinite capacity for reinvention. After a period in Belgium, she had emigrated to Burma with her first husband, who was an Anglo-Burmese man, Frank Langford-Rae, in the 1920s. Thereafter people began to address her Eliza-Maria Langford-Rae; through her husband, she got the opportunities to travel the entire

European continent except the U.S.S.R. (Nepal 74). When the marriage collapsed, she had a short marriage to Dr. Khan, a Muslim man. However, by the early 1950s, she was single again and in the Indian Capital. She was the well-known face in the cities socially and politically.<sup>12</sup>

After marriage with *Kazi* Lhendup Dorji, she moved to Kalimpong<sup>13</sup> first and then to Sikkim and started living in Chakung House.<sup>14</sup> Thereafter, she soon adopted the traditional title as *Kazini* and people began to address her *Kazini Sahiba* of Chakung in the social and political circle of Kalimpong and Sikkim.<sup>15</sup>

Sunanda Datta Ray, author of the *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim*, claimed that *Kazini* was an accomplished woman who had travelled the world. Known several European languages, whereas *Kazi* had never ventured beyond the subcontinent though his past was less inaccessible and he spoke only Sikkimese and somewhat broken Hindustani (Hindi language).<sup>16</sup>

As Elisa's husband, *Kazi* Lhendup Dorji, was already in a move to democrat Sikkim from the monarchical and feudal rule, along with her husband she played significant roles in the Sikkim Democratic Movement and Liberation from feudal order.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Sunanda Datta Ray again claimed that "Dorji's marriage with Elisa-Maria was the turning point in his life because he had been somewhat to write his petitions and proclamations with the help of his wife".<sup>18</sup> L.D. *Kazi* who had been always signed as L.D. *Kazi*, also adopted a western style territorial dignity of *Kazi Sahib* of Chakung.<sup>19</sup>

In 1960, when Dorji formed a new party called "Sikkim National Congress" (SNC), Elisa gave him full support for the promotion of the larger interest of the people of

Sikkim. Dorji's main approach was to form a non-communal party, which could give the Sikkimese peace, prosperity and progress.<sup>20</sup> The SNC later developed into a full-blooded opposition party and posed a tough challenge to the Sikkim *Durbar* and worked for the democratic reforms.<sup>21</sup>

With the support of her husband, Elisa-Maria was very much moved by appealing conditions of misery and destitute population of Sikkim. She took upon her task of social service and politics for better future of the people and always dedicated herself to her husband as being his friend, philosopher and guide during the journey of the democracy.<sup>22</sup> By marrying *Kazi*, Langford-Rae entered in a new phase of her remarkable life. The more she learnt about the situation in Sikkim, the more she recognized a new cause that she could associated herself with her husband's struggle to move Sikkim away from what she saw as its colonial hangover<sup>23</sup> towards becoming the functioning state with close links with India.<sup>24</sup>

Lal Bahadur Basnet, who became the SNC's Joint Secretary, recalled in his work, *Sikkim: A Short Political history*, that Elisa-Maria *Kazini* took over the charge of the publicity wing of the SNC and began producing a stream of written words that began to expose. For the first time, Sikkim political landscape came in a public view. Simultaneously, she began to build up the image of her husband as the leader of the SNC, in a public forum. He further stated that "if the activities of the party lacked colour, it was amply supplied by the fertile imagination of the *Kazini*, and where the party leaders failed to exhibit courage and determination, the *Kazini's* vigorous language lent all the fire needed".<sup>25</sup>

By the time *Kazi* build up his public image as a leader of the SNC, *Kazini* was already well established in Kalimpong, where she was known for her witty, amusing articles,



written on a typewriter in the black room of the house, in support of her husband's political aim.<sup>26</sup> *Kazini* entered the political fight with all her characteristic zeal and taken up the cause of the Nepalis masses, she became an acceptable factor without difficulty. Her clever move to adopt a young Nepali upcoming leader, N.B. Khatiwada as her son, lent considerable weight to her political standing. She was an influential woman who used to do most of the paper works from their home at Kalimpong.<sup>27</sup>

It had a local newspaper called *Himalayan Observer*, which came in handy for her to plant pro-*Kazi* and anti-*Chogyal* news reports.<sup>28</sup> *Kazini* took the precaution of able coming directly on the scene and acted through her husband and her adopted son. With her husband being a Lepcha and her son being a Nepali, the combination was ideal for the political appeal.<sup>29</sup>

Indian Journalist, Satyendra Shukla, in his account entitled *Sikkim: The Story of Integration* wrote that her opposition *Chogyal* of Sikkim became more powerful after he married an American Woman, Hope Cooke in 1965. Thereafter, a sort of Anglo-American tug of war was erupted between the two ladies as both trying to outdo each other as American for the *Chogyal* and the English for the people of Sikkim. The edge of the fight became even more sharp when *Kazi* was forcefully ordered to leave Sikkim. Thereafter, their house at Kalimpong became the frequent meeting place of the statesmen, journalists and politicians looking for facts or fiction about Sikkim, which she doled out with ease and poise with every peg of whisky.<sup>30</sup> All the political missions were directed from her residence.

Later *Kazini* gathered a number of educated young Nepalis men who were intoxicated by her and convinced that destiny had singled them out for a higher purpose. Among

them, Lal Bahadur Basnet, who had been an educated NCO corps and spoke French passably well, was an early protégé. Krishna Chandra Pradhan and N.K. Subeidi came later. But the most favoured was Nar Bahadur Khatiwada, a peasant led from near Geyzing (now in West Sikkim), whom *Kazini* adopted and put him in School and College in Kalimpong.<sup>31</sup> The SNC was kept alive and kicking, its image shining, almost wholly by the efforts of *Kazini*.<sup>32</sup>

With this scenario, the third general election was held on 1967, where SNC emerged as the major party by winning eight seats including the general seats. A six members' Executive Council was formed in which two members of the National Congress were admitted. Elisa-Maria was largely instrumental in building up the National Congress as a viable political party having its roots in the village and hamlets. She was in charge of the propaganda wing of the SNC and kept up a relentless campaign against the forces of reaction in the states. It was said that the revolution of the Sikkimese people started with her famous "Bulletin No. 2" published on 28 January 1972. This bulletin had become an important document with its proclamation, "a country can live without king, but a king cannot live without a country".<sup>33</sup> Bulletin No. 2 is a remarkable passionate document denouncing the *Chogyal* regime. It criticized the *Chogyal* and administration for alleged corruption, favouritism and malpractices. Therefore, on 28 May 1972, *Kazi*, who was one of the members of the Executive Councillor,<sup>34</sup> was dismissed from the post and the *Chogyal* apparently issued arrest warrants for *Kazi* and his wife, but by then they both were in Europe, on 29 May 1972.<sup>35</sup>

On their return, the *Chogyal* demanded apology, which was given. The *Kazi* re-emerged from his house in Kalimpong to Sikkim and the fight began all over the

Sikkim again, which lasted for ten days in orgy of violence, looting and arson. Law and order break down in Sikkim, and *Chogyal* sought help from the Indian Government to intervene in Sikkim. Central Government acted promptly and a senior officer Mr. B.S. Das, who was till then Commissioner of Delhi Municipality, was immediately deputed to Sikkim and took over the administration of the state. Thus, the situation brought under control for the time being. After four days of negotiation, a tripartite agreement providing for a democratic set up for Sikkim was signed on 8 May 1973 with *Chogyal*, leaders of the political parties and the Indian Government.<sup>36</sup> B.S. Das stated in his work, *The Sikkim Saga*, *Kazini* became the brain trust of the 1973 movement against *Chogyal*. As her entry to Sikkim had been banned by the *Chogyal*, she started operating from Kalimpong. It helped the movement a lot. Residing in India so close to Sikkim, her house in Kalimpong became the operational headquarters for the movement launched in April 1973.<sup>37</sup>

After this incident, many common people suffered a lot; they were brutally bitten up by the police but then also agitation did not stop. Finally, in 1974, SNC and Sikkim Janata Party, two mass organizations, merged together and formed “Sikkim Congress Party”. Sikkim Congress Party swept the polls under the leadership of L.D. *Kazi*, capturing 31 seats in the 32 members of the assembly. The *Chogyal's* party made no impact on the election.<sup>38</sup>

Thereafter, Sikkim Congress Party formed its government based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. In 1974, the first democratically elected government formed in Sikkim after the fall of monarchy, which ultimately led to the merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union on 16 May 1975.<sup>39</sup> The election result proved that *Kazi Lhendup Dorji* was a “national leader”. B.S.K. Grover, author of the *Sikkim and India*

1947–1974, stated that “much of the credit for the happy outcome must clearly go to the President of the Sikkim Congress Party, *Kazi Lhendup Dorji* and his wife *Kazini*, who had not only emerged as a national leader but also successfully rallied the three communities under the banner of his party”.<sup>40</sup>

L.D. Kazi became the first Chief Minister of Sikkim, the year before the official merger of Sikkim with India and served until 1979. Sunanda K. Datta Ray stated that woman behind *Kazi Lhendup Dorji*’s ascension in the politics of the tiny Himalayan kingdom was his wife Mrs. Langford-Rae.<sup>41</sup> She worked as the honorary publicity director of the opposition and kept bombarding the place with statements and bulletins exposing the acts of omission and commission on behalf of the opposition from her drawing room both in Gangtok and Kalimpong, where she often resided. According to Satyendra R. Shukla, she was a “suave, amiable, accomplished and a good conversationalist, the qualities which made her a P.R.O. par excellence”.<sup>42</sup> All credits should go to *Kazini* for the excellence propaganda’s work done on behalf of the opposition. She publicized the plight of Sikkimese people both in Indian and in foreign press.<sup>43</sup>

In the history of Sikkim, much has been said and written about *Kazini* and her role in the political developments of Sikkim as in a negative way. According to G.B.S. Sidhu’s work, *Sikkim Dawn of Democracy: The Truth Behind The Merger With India* stated that the *Kazi* was shy and spoke little English. However, *Kazini* was expert in both the things, she drafted party’s letter, manifestos and resolutions in English. She could write pro-party and anti-*Chogyal* articles for the local press. Therefore, by marrying *Kazini*, *Kazi* suddenly went from being a comparatively obscure person to

being noticed in New Delhi's social and political circles, owing to his wife's previous access. So did the cause for which he was fighting.<sup>44</sup>

Even, Andrew Duff, a Scholar from Sikkim, mentioned that Elisa-Maria *Kazini* had entirely changed her husband's political career. As a former journalist in Europe and a schoolteacher in New Delhi, much of her colourful past remains cloaked by conjecture. *Kazini* refers a statement, "wherever I am, there is a revolution", referring to her years in Turkey and China.<sup>45</sup> After years of political oblivion and struggle, she has got what she wanted. She was the woman behind *Kazi* Lhendup Dorji's success to become the first Chief Minister of Sikkim in 1974. Therefore, the history of Sikkim would be incomplete without mentioning the role played by *Kazini* in the democratic movement of Sikkim. She had been in the vanguard of Sikkim's movement for democratization and liberation from feudal order.

#### **4.4. Ruth Karthak Lepchani**

After the independence of India in 1947, when different political parties started emerging in Sikkim, amongst other political parties, "Sikkim Independent Front" (SIF) emerge as a party with their different political motives and agenda as the party was formed by a women named Ruth Karthak Lepchani in 1966.<sup>46</sup> The formation of SIF was considered as one of the most important political milestones as it brought the woman participation in party politics to fight against the *Chogyal's* rule. She formed the party, basically to fight against the tyrannical rule of *Chogyal* and to save the Lepchas. She strongly believed that the condition of the Lepcha could be improved only after establishing the democracy in the state.<sup>47</sup>

Ruth Karthak Lepchani, the lone heroine of the Sikkim Democratic Movement, was born to Chandra Lal Karthak and Chamji Yuthenpa on 12 May 1934 at Arithang, Gangtok, Sikkim.<sup>48</sup> Since from her childhood, she was interested in politics. In 1955, when she came back to Sikkim from Calcutta after completing her nursing training, a young, energetic nurse with the intension to serve the people of the state, particularly the Lepchas of Sikkim. But she was deeply shocked after seeing the pathetic socioeconomic condition of the Lepchas under the monarchical rule. Although she was carrying the blood of her Bhutia mother, she was moved by the *Chogyal's* tyrannical rule towards the simple, innocent and aboriginally Lepchas of Sikkim.<sup>49</sup>

She had noticed how Lepchas lost their land and became serfs in their own land thereafter she started advocating her voice against the monarchical rule and work for the betterment of the Lepchas in Sikkim.<sup>50</sup> Ruth carried the blood of all the three major communities of Sikkim,<sup>51</sup> in her vein and thus, in true sense of the term Ruth can be identified as the “Daughter of Sikkim”.<sup>52</sup>

However, the main motive behind to open the party was that the Lepcha were suppressed by the Bhutias in Sikkim. She believed that the Lepcha should become the actual ruler of Sikkim because they are the original inhabitant of the state. In the interview given in the weekly newspaper, *The Current*, in the year 1966 at Calcutta, she said that in the early days, the land was inhabited and ruled absolutely by the Lepchas but they permanently lost their land firstly to the Bhutia rulers through the “Blood Brotherhood Treaty” signed between the ancestor of the present *Chogyal* Khye Bumsa and Lepcha priest, The -Kung Thek, during the thirteenth century.<sup>53</sup>

In the interview with the editor, she narrated the story that “around 300 to 350 years ago, when there was no *Chogyal* in Sikkim, the Karthak clan of the Lepchas ruled

Sikkim".<sup>54</sup> The *Chogyal* came late from the Tibet and later they came into power. Therefore, the present generations of Karthak clan should feel proud and believed to be the descendants of the ruling class of earlier Sikkim.

Ruth had no faith in monarchical rule of Sikkim because she believed that rulers were imported from Tibet, only to rule and suppress the indigenous Lepchas. She strongly recommended that the condition of the Lepcha could be improved only by releasing them out of the clutches of the Tibetan rulers. The grandfather of the Ruth, Baksing Karthak, who used to serve as a General Secretary to the Maharaj of Sikkim, Sir Tashi *Namgyal*, also believed that Ruth was the reincarnated daughter of Goddess Kanchenjunga and was sent by the Goddess to rescue the Lepchas from the bondage and oppression of Tibetan rule.<sup>55</sup>

Thereafter, she continuously started publishing her party's manifesto through the *Pukar*.<sup>56</sup> It was the important media through which she could reach the common people of Sikkim very easily and comfortably. The main manifesto of her party was everyone should be treated equally.<sup>57</sup>

In March 1967, when people of Sikkim and the political parties preparing for the third general election, SIF, appeared in the scene under her leadership. She fielded total six candidates, five from the Lepcha community and one from the Nepali community. Unfortunately, the nomination paper was rejected by the Sikkim Council. Thereafter, on 23 March 1967, she was arrested along with her husband, A. Halim, a Muslim Business man, who was from Calcutta, under the Sikkim Security Act, on a charge of attempt to commit suicide and Mr. Halim was externed from Sikkim on 3 January 1968 and threatened him not to return to Sikkim.<sup>58</sup>

In her personal interview on 29 May 2022, she explained to me that on 23 March 1967, she was arrested at the middle of the night from her home at Singtam (East Sikkim) on the grounds of sedition. She said; some of the people came at her house and asked her to report in a police station, but she was unaware that they are taking her in a jail. Thereafter without mentioning any reason to her, her husband, A. Halim was also arrested and sent him jail along with her. When she was in the jail, every day jailer used to give her one pen and plain paper to surrender herself against the Sikkim *Durbar* and forced her to write an apology letter to the King. But she neither surrender herself nor asked for an apology.<sup>59</sup>

The changes under the Security Act of Sikkim against Ruth were never made public, nor was she tried under this Act. The security Act was, apparently, used as a convenient tool to detain her in the jail, while the administration applied itself to finding sufficient evidence to prosecute her.<sup>60</sup> The statement of the Magistrate identified Ruth was a representative of one community, i.e., the Lepchas of Sikkim and targeted her against the ruler of Sikkim.<sup>61</sup>

In the *History of Democratic Movement*, Gopal Gaunley and others wrote, in 1967, the Chief Magistrate's Court, Gangtok, filed her name in the criminal case under Section 78. In that, she was alleged to have broken the law and thereby invited IPC Section 124. In the complaint filed by the Chief Secretary against the Ruth, she was alleged to have said:

1. I was implicated for having held the view that the then ruler was not the real ruler. The real ruler of Sikkim was the Lepcha not the Bhutia.
2. The Present *Chogyal* Palden Thondup *Namgyal*, the ruler of Sikkim, had no right to rule over Sikkim.



3. I dislike the continuance of the rule of the *Chogyal*.
4. The Lepchas are being suppressed in Sikkim by the Bhutias. The Sikkim *Durbar* or palace is bringing 5000 Tibetans in Sikkim.
5. This move of the Sikkim Government (*Durbar*) is to harm the Lepchas. For a long time, the case continued in the court and after fleecing her in entirety, she was sent on exile from the state.<sup>62</sup>

On 15 November 1968, Ruth was sentenced to undergo two years rigorous imprisonment by the Chief Magistrate of Sikkim, the retired Indian Magistrate serving under the Sikkim Government. When she was in the jail, Sikkim Government issued the proclamation which stated that “a Sikkimese woman marrying a non-Sikkimese shall automatically lose her Sikkim Subject”. This decision by one stroke of the pen devastated Ruth’s life.<sup>63</sup>

D.C. Roy, in his work, *Prominent Personalities Among the Lepchas*; while referring her statement after such proclamation; stated that “such proclamation snatched away my birth right a lawful citizen of Sikkim virtually rendered my status to that of a stateless person. I thought of only way to escape, and made my way for India immediately”.<sup>64</sup> Not a single voice of protect was raised against such proclamation. *Kazi* Lhendup Dorji, being the President of the SNC and the leader of the “Lepcha association”, an organization that enlisted members and raised funds for the protection of the rights of the Lepchas remained silent as like the other party members. Ruth was not only a Lepcha woman but also a subscribing member of the Lepcha association.<sup>65</sup>

But before the completion of the sentence, she was released on 10 March 1969, before expiry of her term and she was externed from Sikkim with injections not to enter Sikkim again. During that period, she stayed some times in Kalimpong and thereafter

she left for Calcutta to join her husband where she stayed almost for ten years.<sup>66</sup> This showed how society suppresses the voice of the women.

After 1973, when things are changed in Sikkim and atmosphere was created for setting up democratic structure, she came back to Sikkim with the expectation of getting back her house, property and her lost political position. But things did not go according to her expectation and she was again expelled by an order issued by B.B. Lal, the Chief Executive, Government of Sikkim; under the provision of Home and Police Department Notification No. 4081/H.P. Jan. 1956.<sup>67</sup>

Thereafter, when Sikkim became the 22nd state of Indian Union since 26 April 1975. Ruth entered in Sikkim during the parliamentary election of 1977, with the expectation of contesting the election as Janata Party Candidate. But again, she was arrested, but she had continued her political career and fought for her right. D.C. Roy suggested that she joined politics as a stepping stone to bring back the lost status and position of the Lepchas in the state.<sup>68</sup>

Later, Ruth along with her husband formed an “All India Forum for the unemployment youth”.<sup>69</sup> Both had believed that there could be no equality as long as the system of inheritance exists. She was the leader of par excellence and will be remembered in the history of Sikkim for rebuilding Sikkim from authoritarianism to its present democratic shape.

Whatever circumstances she had faced in her lifetime during the monarchical rule, however, people of Sikkim remembered her as a lone Lepcha woman in the history of Sikkim, who dedicated her life for the common people, especially to the Lepchas of Sikkim. She was the first woman who had the courage to fight against the male

dominated society. Her move towards the equality was the first step to achieve the democracy in Sikkim.

#### **4.5. Women Representation in the Legislative Assembly**

The Sikkim State Council formed in 1953 and ran until 1973, was composed of all male members. It was predominantly a “male club”. There was not even a single woman representative in the council.<sup>70</sup>

However, political representation of women began only on 1974, when Kumari Hemlata Chettri became the first woman member of Sikkim Legislative Assembly, a rare feat for Sikkimese women at that time, when Sikkim had not entered the national mainstream and democracy was at its infancy in 1974.<sup>71</sup> Kumari Hemlata Chettri was elected to State Assembly from Gyalshing constituency. She was the first and the only woman legislator of Sikkim at that period. She was the youngest member of the Sikkim assembly.<sup>72</sup>

Born to Dhan Bahadur Tewari and Amrita Tewari at Tarku, South Sikkim, Hemlata Chettri was a fine example of women empowerment in Sikkim. Apart from politics, her contribution towards women and child development was unparalleled.<sup>73</sup>

She entered mainstream politics after the revolution of 1973 with the support from her father, Dhan Bahadur Tewari, who was active in politics at that time. It is said that it was his dream of seeing his daughter become the first woman member in the legislative assembly of Sikkim. In Sikkim, the elections of 1974 marked as historic in terms of political representation of women. From this period onwards, women were continuously motivating to take part in the politics of Sikkim.

#### 4.6. Women and Social Association/Organization

Apart from the politics, there are other women who are coming in the forefront by establishing the different Women Welfare Association, which worked for the upliftment and empowerment of women in Sikkim. In early 1961, the “Sikkim Welfare Society, a Member of the Associated Country Women of the World” (ACWW) was established in Sikkim and Princess Pema Tsedeun *Namgyal*, also known as Coocoola, became the Chairman.<sup>74</sup>

The main work of this organization was to represent Sikkim identity in the international forum as well as to work for the many social causes in the society. Therefore, in the summer of 1967, under the leadership of Princess Coocoola, two Sikkimese women, Gayatri Devi Gurung and Chum Dorji Wangmu, travelled to Manila (capital of the Philippines), where they represented the Sikkim Welfare Society, a non-political but official organization, at a conference on women’s leadership organized by the ACWW.

In addition to participating in a seminar, two women displayed a collection of items that represented Sikkim including a mask of Kangchendzonga, the Sikkimese national flag, a “lucky sign” *Thangka* (religious painting), a yak, a mule, *Somba* (boots), a cup and saucer, *Thongba* (wooden mug for the local beer), *Mani* (Buddhist rosary), booklets about Sikkim history and society, postcards of Buddhist Sahes, birds of Sikkim and skin of wild animals. The women also exhibited color slides showing the *Chogyal* and *Gyalmo* (queen) and other members of the royal family, the

diverse flora and fauna and unusual natural environment of Sikkim and folk dances and rituals.<sup>75</sup>

The items as symbols evoke the agrarian rhythms of Sikkimese society. They point to the profound influences of Buddhism and the distinctive role of landscape and nature in Sikkimese life. The exhibit demonstrates a self-conscious effort to single out objects that offered crystallized and idealized versions of what it meant to be Sikkimese identity. This was advised by the Princess Chocoolo to shaping the Sikkimese national identity in the international forum.<sup>76</sup>

Secondly, “Sikkim Women Council” was formed by the Trithi Taliar Khan. This organization was associated with the Social Health Group of India. At the initial period, only twelve members were there and Mrs. Sardha Pradhan remained as the Vice President. This organization known as *Jagriti De-Addition Centre* or *Swadhar Ghar*, mainly focused on those women, who ran away from their home due to domestic violence. This *Swadhar Ghar* still exists in Sikkim, at Burtuk, Helipad Swastik, Gangtok, East Sikkim and now it named as *Gurung Gumpa*.

In early 1972, an NGO called “*Manav Hith Mahila Mandal*” was formed by Mrs. Santosh Nirash. She was the first woman journalist from Sikkim during the *Namgyal* period. This organization mainly works for the humanitarian. Mrs. Santosh Nirash made an immense contribution in the field of journalism and in education. In Sikkim, she was called as a face of the Sikkimese journalism. She began her writing in the newspaper called “*Asian New Features*”. There was an exciting time for Sikkim, following the merger of Sikkim into the Indian Union. She mostly wrote the

developmental stories of the first democratic government. Because at that time, Sikkim had just become the 22nd state of the Indian Union in 1975.

Besides that, she was even interested to write certain women in politics of Sikkim, such as Mrs. Elisa-Maria *Kazini's*, wife of Kazi Lhendup Dorji, the then the first Chief Minister of Sikkim. Mrs. Nirash was the backbone of *Kazi Lhendup Dorji*, she used to cover all the works of *Kazi* and his party. She mostly travelled with *Kazini* during her democratic movement. As Nita Nirash, daughter of the Santosh Nirash remembered her mother was a reporter on the fast-changing developments and changes in the newly formed state. When the former Prime Minister, Morarji Desai visited the Nathu La pass in Sikkim, in 1968,<sup>77</sup> journalists were not allowed to cover the story, because the road to the pass was dangerous. But Mrs. Nirash did not give up until they agreed to take her along, her question was “why cannot women take on risky reporting assignment”.<sup>78</sup>

Mrs. Nirash started an English monthly magazine named “Broader News and Views for Sikkim” and became the editor of it. She also propagated Hindi language in Sikkim by opening up the weekly newspaper named “Jamana Sadabahr”, the only Hindi weekly newspaper that comes out in Sikkim at that period. Apart from her writing powers, she had also contributed in the radio through her regular broadcast in, All India Radio, Gangtok, during the year of 1990s. She even served as the Executive Member of the Press Club of Sikkim and several other organizations. Mrs. Santosh Nirash even worked for the various social causes such as malnutrition, sexual harassment, charity, domestic violence, etc. She worked as a family counsellor in the Family Court and provided free counselling, tuitions and legal advices to the needy.

In recognition of her contribution towards her development in the field of journalism and education, she was facilitated with the *Kanchendzonga Kalam Puraskar* by the Press Club of Sikkim in 2009.<sup>79</sup> She had also received *Nirman Puraskar*. She was felicitated by Sikkim Women Council in 20 September 2009. In the year 2005, she was honoured by Sikkim *Mahila Patrakar Sangh*. On 16 May 2018, the Government of Sikkim awarded “Kashiraj Pradhan Lifetime Journalism Award”, to honour her outstanding contribution in the field of education and journalism for the state of Sikkim.

Her famous line was “people do not have caste” and former Chief Minister, Mr. Pawan Kumar Chamling used to take Santosh Nirash’s famous line in his every speech.<sup>80</sup> However, at the age of 92, after a prolong illness, she passed away on 10 June 2020. Unfortunately, same day Mrs. Hemlata Chettri also left her heavenly abode. Sikkim lost two important female figures on this day.<sup>81</sup>

In 1974–1975, another organization called “Women’s Voluntary Services-Congress Wings” established in Sikkim. Mrs. Durga Lama, became the President.<sup>82</sup> Mrs. Lama fought for the labour class and poor women. She fought for every woman to get their justice, identity and equality in the society. This organization fought for the socioeconomic and political equality for women in Sikkim. She represented Sikkim at International Labour Organization at Geneva. Mrs. Lama became the first women councillor at Gangtok, in 1975.

All these organizations mostly focused on the social causes such as malnutrition, sexual harassment, charity, domestic violence, etc. and worked for the betterment of the society and tried to make women self-reliance.

#### 4.7. Women and Education

As far as education is concerned, there was no any formal education system in Sikkim until early twentieth century. The informal education was imparted through monastic school situated in different parts of the state. These monastic schools imparted religious education for the preparation of monks to priesthood.<sup>83</sup> But with the passage of time, remarkable changes appeared in the education system of Sikkim with the coming of the British and the introduction of the modern western education.<sup>84</sup> British wanted to bring educational reforms in Sikkim. Their intention was to make the future kings or ruler, modern English educated, who would follow their ideology and support British policy and reform. Therefore, when J.C. White appointed as the first British Political Officer in Sikkim, he took the initiative to educate the Royal Prince and children of some influential persons like *Lamas* and *Kazis*.<sup>85</sup>

Thereafter, many elite class boys were sent to distance land to receive education. The *Namgyal* Prince Sidkeong Tulku was one of them, who received modern western education from Sikkim. He first sent to Darjeeling and later to Oxford University in England.<sup>86</sup> After receiving modern western education from England, he returned to Sikkim and shown keen interest in spreading modern English education all over the state and gave new dimension to education in Sikkim.<sup>87</sup>

In 1906, Prince Sidkeong Tulku established Bhutia boarding school. In the very next year in 1907, Nepali boarding school was also established at Gangtok. In 1909, Sidkeong Tulku also established Enchey School in Gangtok, as a monastic school. This school has educated a great number of Tibetan refugee children and at present has been continuing as one of the government higher secondary schools in the state.<sup>88</sup>



Later, the Bhutia Boarding School and Nepali Boarding School, which were established in 1906–1907, continued for nearly twenty years. However, by 1925, the government decided to amalgamate the two principal schools of Gangtok that was the Bhutia and Nepali schools and the school was named “Tashi Namgyal High School”, in 1925 to commemorate the liberal rule of the then Emperor of Sikkim, Sir Tashi Namgyal.<sup>89</sup>

Thereafter several schools were coming up but education provided only to the boys. But education for girls still not encouraged in Sikkim. Later on, 20 November 1912, initiative taken by the Prince Sidkeong Tulku to introduce industrial education for female at Gangtok. He had written a letter to the then Political Officer of Sikkim, Charles Bell, where he stated education for landlords’ daughter living near the palace should be made compulsory education in Sikkim.<sup>90</sup> As a result, a school for *Kazi’s* daughter was opened. The school began with five girls.<sup>91</sup> Tibetan, Hindi and knitting were introduced as the curriculum. In 1915, the number of girls were increased to thirteen. In 1918, the curriculum was revised and subjects such as spinning and lace making were also introduced.<sup>92</sup> However, the school was only meant for the daughter of the *Kazis* and commoners were not allowed to attain in this school.<sup>93</sup>

Women in Sikkim could see the light of modern education only after the coming of the Scottish missionaries. It was Scottish missionaries, especially Rev. Macfarlane who advised a broad scheme for the widespread dissemination of elementary education to cover up not only Darjeeling hills but also in the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim and Bhutan.<sup>94</sup> Christian missionary education in Sikkim began in the late nineteenth century with some support from the *Kazis* and landlords. Some of whose school had been handed over to Scottish missionaries. On the whole, the Christian

missionary was not favoured by the King of Sikkim. The missionaries were not allowed to live in Gangtok earlier.<sup>95</sup>

However, later Marry Scott, born in Scotland in 1877, daughter of the eighth Lord Polwarth, travelled to Kalimpong in 1905 and then to Sikkim in 1918–1919. She was permitted to live in Gangtok, “a great concession by the Sikkim King that was apparently a personal tribute to her character and reputation rather than a result of any initiative by the Political Officer”.<sup>96</sup> Miss Scott remained in Sikkim for sixteen years, where she was responsible for all missionary and Church activities. She was the one who founded the first Girls School in 1923 and presently known as Paljor Namgyal Girls School (PNGS). Marry Scott was the one who showed the first seeds of modern education for the girls in Sikkim. She was keenly interested in the upliftment of girls and deprived women, especially youngsters.<sup>97</sup> It was owing to the Christian missionary efforts that Sikkim was going to have for the first time one school for girls at Gangtok.

The girl’s school, after an informal beginning, was started on a regular basis with two students at first in 1924, and by 1926, had grown to 45 pupils including some boys. The school was originally housed in a residence in what is now “Tashi Namgyal Academy’s compound”, and then for a short while in a rented house above the market. In 1931, it moved to Mazong Kothi, builds with Miss Scott’s assistance and then rented by the school from the owner.<sup>98</sup> The State Government also provided grant in aid for the school. In the beginning, it was a middle-class school up to class VI. But later, after seeing the dedication, determination and excellent work done by Scott, it was upgraded with the assistance rendered by the Government of Sikkim and the Church. The support of the Sikkim Government also reveals the state’s desire to

propagate the women's education.<sup>99</sup> Later, special classes for girls were extended to other places such as Chakung (West Sikkim), Vok, Rhenock and Pakyong (East Sikkim) where industrial classes such as gardening, carpentry and crafts such as basket weaving, etc. were also introduced in all the schools run by the Mission during late 1930s.<sup>100</sup>

In the year 1941, it was decided by the Sikkim *Durbar* to build a new school building with hostel facility in the memory of Maharaja Kumar Paljor *Namgyal*, who was killed while serving in the Royal Indian Force.<sup>101</sup> The foundation stone was laid down on 22 January 1943 and the school was officially named Paljor Namgyal Girls School in memory of the Crown Prince who had lately died in an air accident.<sup>102</sup>

In 1945, the school was recognized a high school by Calcutta university and at present, it has been continuing as Paljor Namgyal Girls Senior Secondary School at Gangtok, but it is not fully government school now. It has autonomous body but State Government provided financial assistance to this school. Gradually, the *Kazis* and common people started understanding the importance of modern education and took initiative to establish more schools in Sikkim.<sup>103</sup>

Thereafter witness the gradual increase of schools in Sikkim and by 1920, state had almost 21 schools of which six were government, thirteen were missionary and two were owned and run by landlords and *Thikadars* and the people.<sup>104</sup>

Miss Marry Scott, who served as an in charge of the school for a longer period of time was retired from her work and left Gangtok in 1939, which brought an end to a strong missionary influence over Sikkim and its education. Later she was succeeded by Mrs. Rachel Fairservice as in charge of the girl's school. Following Mrs. Fairservice's

departure, PNGS was entrusted to Miss Shirras (1945–1947) as Principal who continued till the withdrawal of British Administrator in 1947.<sup>105</sup>

The merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union in 1975, however, led to the steady increase in the number of schools in Sikkim.<sup>106</sup> Many women from Sikkim received education from the Paljor Namgyal Girls School. Among them, Miss Keepu Tsering Lepcha, who was also known as “A True Educationist from Sikkim”.<sup>107</sup> She was the first woman, who received Padma Shri Award, in 2008, by the Government of India. Miss Keepu’s contribution towards Sikkimese society in the field of education has been relentless with absolute dedication and commitment. Miss Keepu is the Honorary Chairperson of Human Development Foundation of Sikkim, an NGO that looks after the needy and the underprivileged children of Sikkim.

#### **4.8. Conclusion**

The political system of Sikkim was typically theocratic patriarchal in nature.<sup>108</sup> It was all about King and aristocratic men who have unlimited power in their hands and controlled the societies. The ruler was only the secular head of the state, and he was all in all.<sup>109</sup> Most of the influential landlords, who hold the important post in the administration were men. However, political involvement of the women began, when India got her independence in 1947, as different political parties started emerging in Sikkim, and their main demand was to abolish the feudalism and to bring subsequent development in Sikkim. Women were not seen in the politics before nineteenth century and recorded history represented only few royal women (discussed in Chapter III) who were involved in the political history of Sikkim before 1975 to keep Sikkim as an independent kingdom.

However, history did not throw light on those women who, being the backbone of their men or coming in the forefront always, had supported their male counterparts in every step in their life. Therefore, there is a phrase like behind every successful man, there is a woman. B.S. Das stated that such lines are suited to *Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa* because in his every successful move, there was his wife *Kazini Elisa-Maria Langford-Rae*.<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, contribution of “SIF” was practically negligible in Sikkim politics, but it deserves a special mention as its leader Ruth Lepchani made the history by forming political party in 1966. Similarly, Kumari Hemlata Chettri, first women legislator of Sikkim, made history by representing women in the politics of Sikkim before 1975. The political participation of women had completely transformed their nature and pattern of life. Modern changes are taking place in a traditional phase in the society of Sikkim from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when women were started involving in the politics of Sikkim. Apart from politics, women were equally involved in the different social organizations for the upliftment and empowering of women in the state. Similarly, education played a vital role in the society as it regarded as an important variable of social transformation. In the history of women education in Sikkim, without mentioning the name of Miss Marry Scott, would be was incomplete. She was the first woman who took the initiate to establish the first girls’ school in Sikkim. Her contribution in lifting the Sikkimese women in the society and making them aware of their capabilities was very much accountable.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Subba, Innam. “Role of Women in the Political History of Sikkim (1642–1977)”. M.Phil. Thesis, Sikkim University, 2020: 50.

<sup>2</sup> A local landowner who came from an old Sikkim Lepcha family, the Khangsarpa clan. The Khangsarpas and the *Namgyals* had not seen eye to eye for many years. The Lepchas were considered the indigenous people of Sikkim, they had been in Sikkim before the *Namgyals* and their Bhutia kinsmen arrived in the country from Tibet. (Duff, Andrew. *Sikkim: Requiem for a Himalayan Kingdom*. Delhi: Penguin Random House Company, 2015: 86.)

<sup>3</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. *Sikkim; A Short Political History*. New Delhi: S. Chand, 1974: 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>5</sup> Mohan, Preet and Singh Malik. *Sikkim: A History of Intrigue and Alliance*. Harper Collins Publishers, Noida. 2021: 200.

<sup>6</sup> Rao, P.R. *India and Sikkim (1814–1970)*. Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1972: 148.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>8</sup> Kotturan, George. *The Himalayan Gateway: History and Culture of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1983: 104.

<sup>9</sup> Sengupta, N. *State Government and Politics: Sikkim*. New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1985: 12.

<sup>10</sup> Rao, P.R. 1972: *Op. Cit.*, 150.

<sup>11</sup> Sidhu, G.B.S. *Sikkim Dawn of Democracy: The Truth Behind the Merger With India*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2018: 117.

<sup>12</sup> Duff, Andrew. *Sikkim: Requiem for a Himalayan Kingdom*. Delhi: Penguin Random House Company, 2015: 87.

<sup>13</sup> A sub-divisional headquarters of Darjeeling district in West Bengal, India. Kalimpong, at that period was notorious for its intelligence-gathering activities, as it was the well-known centre for the Indo-Tibet trade via Sikkim before 1962. In this view, *Kazini* took to the town like a fish to water (Sindu, G.B.S. 2018: *Op. Cit.*, 17–18).

<sup>14</sup> *Kazi's* ancestor home, now in West Sikkim.

<sup>15</sup> Sindu, G.B.S. 2018: *Op. Cit.*, 17.

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- <sup>16</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1984: 115.
- <sup>17</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. *Sikkim: The Story of Integration*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co (Pvt.) Ltd., 1976: 80.
- <sup>18</sup> Ray, Sunanda K. Datta. 1984: *Op. Cit.*, 115–116.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 115–116.
- <sup>20</sup> Rai, Dhanraj. “Monarchy and democracy in Sikkim and the contribution of Kazi Lhendup Dorjee Khangsherpa”. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publication*, Vol. 3, Issue 9, September 2013,: 5.
- <sup>21</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 116.
- <sup>22</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. 1976: *Op. Cit.*, 81.
- <sup>23</sup> A feudal mini-state run by a king from a minority community with strong links to the Tibetan.
- <sup>24</sup> Duff, Andrew. 2015: *Op. Cit.*, 88.
- <sup>25</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 119.
- <sup>26</sup> Duff, Andrew. 2015: *Op. Cit.*, 88.
- <sup>27</sup> Das, B.S. *The Sikkim Saga*. Delhi: Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1983: 93.
- <sup>28</sup> Sindu, G.B.S. 2018: *Op. Cit.*, 118.
- <sup>29</sup> Das, B.S. 1983: *Op. Cit.*, 93–94
- <sup>30</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. 1976: *Op. Cit.*, 81–82.
- <sup>31</sup> Sunanda K. Datta. 1984: *Op. Cit.*, 118–119.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.
- <sup>33</sup> Kotturan, George. 1983: *Op. Cit.*, 106.
- <sup>34</sup> Executive councillors were formed by the members of three political parties: three from the Sikkim National Party (*Chogyal's* party), two from the Sikkim State Congress and one from the Sikkim National Congress. Following the composition of the six Executive Councillors from the three major political parties of Sikkim, *Kazi*, being one of the Executive Councillors of the *Chogyal's* government and holding important department in the Government of Sikkim, according to the rules he should not accused and criticized the government.
- <sup>35</sup> Kazi, Jigme N. *Son of Soil: The Rise and Fall of the Namgyal Dynasty of Sikkim*. Hill Media Publication, 2020: 224.

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- <sup>36</sup> Kotturan, George. 1983: *Op. Cit.*, 108.
- <sup>37</sup> Das, B.S. 1983: *Op. Cit.*, 94.
- <sup>38</sup> Kotturan, George. 1983: *Op. Cit.*, 109.
- <sup>39</sup> Sengupta, N. 1985: *Op. Cit.*, 210.
- <sup>40</sup> Grover, B.S.K. *Sikkim and India 1947-1974*. New Delhi: Jain Brothers, 1974: 204.
- <sup>41</sup> Sunanda K. Datta. 1984: *Op. Cit.*, 110.
- <sup>42</sup> Shukla, Satyendra R. 1976: *Op. Cit.*, 81.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.
- <sup>44</sup> Sindu, G.B.S. 2018: *Op. Cit.*, 118.
- <sup>45</sup> Duff, Andrew. 2015: *Op. Cit.*, 87.
- <sup>46</sup> Sengupta, N. 1985: *Op. Cit.*, 15.
- <sup>47</sup> Roy, D.C. *Prominent Personalities Among the Lepchas*. Kalimpong: Mayal Lyang Lepcha Development Board, 2014: 112.
- <sup>48</sup> Gauley, Gopal and Priyadarsi, Samiran Chettri. *Prajatranthik Aandolan ko Ithihas, (History of Revolution from Democracy)* Sikkim Sarkar (Government of Sikkim): Kala aur Sankiriti Bihak, 26 January 1997: 186.
- <sup>49</sup> Roy, D.C. 2014: *Op. Cit.*, 106.
- <sup>50</sup> Roy, D.C. *Status of Women Among the Lepchas*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2010: 230.
- <sup>51</sup> The Lepcha, Bhutia and the Nepali, as her mother was from the Bhutia community, her grandmother from the Nepali community and her father from the Lepcha community.
- <sup>52</sup> Roy, D.C. 2014: *Op. Cit.*, 105.
- <sup>53</sup> The Current, Weekly Newspaper, Vol. XVII, No. 3, 24 September 1966. 23–24.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–24.
- <sup>55</sup> Roy, D.C. 2014: *Op. Cit.*, 109.
- <sup>56</sup> It was the party newspaper through which she used to announce all the party's program, election's manifesto, name of the candidates and also took part in the election debate.
- <sup>57</sup> See Appendix 34 and 35.
- <sup>58</sup> Himalayan Observer, 15 March 1969 (p. 1) referred by L.B. Basnet in his book *Sikkim: A Short Political History*.
- <sup>59</sup> Stated by Ruth in her Residency at Singtam on 29 May 2022.



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- <sup>60</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 148.
- <sup>61</sup> Roy, D.C. 2014: *Op. Cit.*, 110.
- <sup>62</sup> Gaunley, Gopal. *History of Democratic Movement*, Government of Sikkim: Department of Information and Public Relation, 2002: 186–187.
- <sup>63</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 148.
- <sup>64</sup> Himalayan Observer. Kalimpong: March 15, 1969, found in the book *Prominent Personalities Among the Lepchas* by D.C. Roy.
- <sup>65</sup> Basnet, Lal Bahadur. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 149.
- <sup>66</sup> Roy, D.C. 2014: *Op. Cit.*, 111.
- <sup>67</sup> Roy, D.C. 2010: *Op. Cit.*, 231.
- <sup>68</sup> Roy, D.C. 2014: *Op. Cit.*, 116
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.
- <sup>70</sup> Rai, Susan. “Democracy, Political Participation and Women: A Study of Sikkim”. Ph.D. Thesis, Sikkim University, 2022: 76–77.
- <sup>71</sup> *Pioneers of Democracy in Sikkim, Profiling 32 Stalwarts of the First Sikkim Legislative Assembly 1975–1979*, published by Sikkim Legislative Assembly Secretariat, April 2017: 117.
- <sup>72</sup> Grover, B.S.K. 1974: *Op. Cit.*, 209.
- <sup>73</sup> *Pioneers of Democracy in Sikkim, Profiling 32 Stalwarts of the First Sikkim Legislative Assembly 1975–1979*. April 2017: *Op. Cit.*, 117.
- <sup>74</sup> Zinkin, Taya. *Princess of Sikkim*. (1963) Collected from the Prince Jigme Wangchuk Pheukhang on 8 May 2019: 3.
- <sup>75</sup> Sikkim Herald, Vol. 8, No. 41, July 28, 1967.
- <sup>76</sup> Hiltz, Jackie. Constructing Sikkimese National Identity in the 1960s and 1970s. *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 39, No. 2. Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2003: 72–73.
- <sup>77</sup> Sengupta, N. 1985: *Op. Cit.*, 69.
- <sup>78</sup> Mathew, Saumya. *Remembering Santosh Nirash. Sikkim’s First Women Journalist Who Feared Nothing*. Feminism in India, 16 June 2020: 2.
- <sup>79</sup> Felicitatation Letter. Press Club of Sikkim, Gangtok, Sikkim: 16 July 2009 (original photocopies were not allowed to paste).
- <sup>80</sup> Felicitatation Letter. Sikkim Women’s Council, Gangtok, Sikkim: 20 September 2012.

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- <sup>81</sup> Sikkim Chronicles page on Facebook account accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> June, 2020.
- <sup>82</sup> Nirash, Nita. *Women Power in Sikkim Politics*. Sikkim Insight, Collected from the Druga Lama on 16 December 2022.
- <sup>83</sup> Chettri, Durga P. *Sikkim Chronicle*. Siliguri: Impact, 2010: 39.
- <sup>84</sup> Yasin, Mohammad and Chettri, Durga P. *Politics, Society and Development: Insights From Sikkim*. New Delhi: Kalpaz Publication, 2012: 259.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.
- <sup>86</sup> McKay, Alex. The Education of Maharaj Kumar Sidkeon Namgyal Tulku of Sikkim. *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 39. No. 2. Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2003: 31.
- <sup>87</sup> Lama, Mahendra P. *Sikkim Human Development Report, 2021*. Delhi: Government of Sikkim, Social Science Press, 2001: 28.
- <sup>88</sup> Yasin, Mohammad and Chettri, Durga P. 2012: *Op. Cit.*, 260.
- <sup>89</sup> Kharel, Sunita and Bhutia, Jigme Wangchuk. *Gazetteers of Sikkim*. Gangtok, Home Department, Government of Sikkim, 2013: 436.
- <sup>90</sup> File No: 30/XV/1912. *Female Education*. Durbar Department, Sikkim State Archive.
- <sup>91</sup> Kharel, Sunita and Bhutia, Jigme Wangchuk. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 441.
- <sup>92</sup> Yasin Mohammad and Chettri, Durga P. 2012: *Op. Cit.*, 260.
- <sup>93</sup> Kharel, Sunita and Bhutia, Jigme Wangchuk. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 441.
- <sup>94</sup> Dewan, Dick B. *Education in Sikkim: A Historical Prospective (Pre-Merger and Post-Merger Period)*. Pedong: Tender Buds Society, 2012: 174.
- <sup>95</sup> Lama, Mahendra P. 2021: *Op. Cit.*, 29.
- <sup>96</sup> McKay, Alex. The Indigenization of Western Medicine in Sikkim. *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 40, No. 2. Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2004:32.
- <sup>97</sup> Phipon, Anira. *Women Education and Marry Scott in Sikkim (1923–1939)*, ADROITIC (An International Refereed Research Journal) Vol. 4, 2017: 2.
- <sup>98</sup> Dewan, Dick B. 2012: *Op. Cit.*, 178-179.
- <sup>99</sup> Phipon, Anira. 2017: *Op. Cit.*, 2.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>101</sup> Yasin, Mohammad and Chettri, Durga P. 2012: *Op. Cit.*, 261.
- <sup>102</sup> Dewan, Dick B. 2012: *Op. Cit.*, 179.

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- <sup>103</sup> Yasin Mohammad and Chettri, Durga P. 2012: *Op. Cit.*, 261.
- <sup>104</sup> Kharel, Sunita and Bhutia, Jigme Wangchuk. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 441.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.
- <sup>106</sup> Chettri, Durga P. 2010: *Op. Cit.*, 39.
- <sup>107</sup> Rai, Malati. “Padmashree Miss Keepu ‘A True Educationist’.Reflections”, State Council of Education Research and Training: Empowering Society through Education. Vol. 1. No. 2, *Sikkim Quarterly News Letter*, 2016: 11.
- <sup>108</sup> Sinha, A.C. *Politics of Sikkim: A Sociological Study*. Delhi: Thomas Press Limited, 1975: 10.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>110</sup> Das, B.S. *The Sikkim Saga*. Delhi: Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1983: 92.

## CHAPTER - V

### WOMEN AND RELIGION

#### 5.1. Women in the Primitive Religion

Regarding the religious status of women in the primitive society, women enjoy a comparatively equal status with men. The Lepchas have their own ancient religion called *Boongthingism* and *Munism* (Shamanism).<sup>1</sup> They believe in the existence of a god called *Rum*, whom they offer their prayers and thanksgivings. They also believed in evil spirits that cause illness and misfortune, and to them they offer offerings. Traditionally, the *Boongthing* (Priest) and *Mun* (Priestess) performed all the religious and ritual ceremonies of the Lepchas from birth to death.<sup>2</sup> The first consecrated *Boongthing* was *Thi-koong Azor Boongthing* and the first consecrated *Mun* was *Nyoo-koong Nyoolik Mun*.<sup>3</sup> Both *Mun* and *Boongthing* are very powerful magicians and can expel demons and appease God through sacrifices.<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, both had occupied the central religious role in the Lepcha community. According to J.R. Subba, a writer from Sikkim, stated that the Lepcha shamans have no written texts for prayers or worship of nature. They entirely depend on oral traditions called *Munthem*.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Mun* culture “the chief supernatural of the *Mun* are the two feminine deities *Itpomu* and *Narzong-nyou*. *Itpomu* herself was never directly invoke, it was always her creations who are sacrificed and prayed to. However, *Narzong-nyou* was really the chief Lepcha goddess, she was considered as the local god of Sikkim. <sup>6</sup> *Narzong-nyou* was the most important supernatural and besides Kanchenjunga, she is the presiding deity of Sikkim. *Narzong-Nyou* is responsible for the geography, flora and Fauna of the Lepchas. Her husband *Komsithing* was considered important but was not

worshiped as he was considered a foreigner. The Lepcha believed that They are the children of *Narzung-nyou*.<sup>7</sup>

Geoffrey Gorer in his work, *The Lepchas of Sikkim*, mentioned that *Mun* has no gender bias, both men and women can be a *Mun*, but female *Mun* occupied more respectable position than the male *Mun* in the Lepcha society.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Anita Sharma, in her work, *The Lepchas of Dzongu Region in Sikkim: A Narrative of Cultural Heritage and Folklore*, stated that in the *Rong* (Lepcha) Pantheon, women occupied a more important place than men, and in the *Munism*, the female *Muns* are considered not just equal but superior to their male counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, D.C. Roy, a pioneer historian of the Lepcha community, observed that god *Rum* created the *Mun* first and was given more power than *Boongthing*. Therefore, in the Lepcha society, *Mun* was considered more powerful than the *Boongthing* and *Mun* was required in every ritual function of the Lepchas.<sup>10</sup>

It is believed that the *Mun* preserved the age-old traditions, culture and customs of the Lepchas. *Mun* became rare and as a result, their presence in any village was not only to enrich the position of the village but also the community to know the village by the name of the *Mun*. *Mun* never claims any special status in the society but people with respect regard her as a gifted personality in the society. Most of the *Muns* are females in the Lepcha community.<sup>11</sup>

The *Mun* spirit is a female spirit, “they are attached to the family lines and are roughly hereditary, they often descend from grandfather to grandson or from grandmother to granddaughter. But there was no regularity about this and man may inherit a possessing spirit may not choose from a woman, and *vice versa*”.<sup>12</sup> Once the vehicle

dies, the spirit may not choose another body immediately and the large groups may be without the possessing spirit for a number of years. The manifestation of the spirit (for the spirits themselves live immortal beyond Kanchenjunga) may choose anybody for its vehicle, with one exception, none of the spirits will enter a Lama (monk) or his own children, though they may enter his family.<sup>13</sup>

Scholar like Halfdan Siiger, there are two types of female *Muns*, a *ding Mun* (standing *Mun*) and a *nan Mun* (sitting *Mun*), both names referring to the position of the *Mun* during their ceremonies. The standing *Mun* as well as the sitting *Mun* can perform the same ceremonies as the *Boongthing*, but the sitting *Mun* delivers a dead person's soul (*pil*) at the funeral ceremony.<sup>14</sup>

K.P. Tamsang in his work, *The Unknown and Untold Reality About the Lepchas*, gave a detailed description of the origin of *Mun*. According to him, the Lepcha scripture *Nyoolik Nyoo Sung* said that Lord *Tamsang-theeng* gave the supernatural power to the chaste woman named *Nyoolik* by offering to her three young shoots of *Pashyor Nyaom*, which means the three young shoots of elephant grass. When the chaste woman received the powerful three young shoots of elephant grass, sanctified with the spiritual blessings, she started chanting spiritual hymns without being taught by any teacher. Thus, with the help of the spiritual power, she revealed that the sacred medicine that can restore back the lost morale of the Lepchas was found in the Netherlands with *Matlimoonyoo*, an Ogress (female ogre). Thus, by living in this human world and finding out the secret of the netherworld by the spiritual power that chaste woman was given in the title of *Mun* and hence called her by the name of *Nyoolik Mun*, which means who can bring out to the outer world, even the innermost secrets of the netherworld.<sup>15</sup>

*Mun* can neither be hereditary nor can be learnt by practice but it was purely gifted by god's grace. It is believed that in most cases, the power of the *Mun* comes hereditarily, may be even after the gap of several generations. The soul of the ancestral *Mun* may come either from the maternal or paternal side.<sup>16</sup> *Muns* are the mediators between the Lepchas and the spirit world, both good and bad. The *Mun*, was a healer who exorcises demons, helps to heal illness and guides souls to the life after.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, *Muns* are classified into seven classes and they are *Avor Mun*, *Pildon Mun*, *Angan Mun*, *Tungli Mun*, *Munjyum Mun*, *Mun Mook Mun* and *Lyang-Eet Mun*.

Every *Muns* have their own functions accordingly. But particularly, *Pildon Mun* performs different ceremonies, “from the ordinary ceremonies to the delivering up of the soul of a dead person to heaven”.<sup>18</sup> By her supernatural power, she finds out the wandering souls of the dead person who was believed to be wandering in the atmosphere for forty-nine days and then takes him/her back to heaven. For that reason, this class of *Mun* was called *Pildon Mun* in the Lepcha, which means a *Mun* who finds out the soul. She has the power to call back the spirit of the dead person on her own body and speaks out in the very voice of the dead person and tells the good and bad happenings of the future of the family members.<sup>19</sup>

The rest of the *Muns* perform rituals, ceremonies, forecasts, predictions and act as medicine women for the Lepchas. They cannot deliver the souls of the dead person to heaven. The annual ceremony of these *Muns* was called *Soogi*, in which they offer one hundred and eight flower garlands to god and pray the whole day and night by chanting hymns in praise of god. As the Lepchas are the nature lovers, these *Muns* chant their hymns, invocations and prayers in the tune of birds, in the sound of wind,

falls, river, etc. that are very melodious and very pleasing to the ears, very soothing to the soul and very gladdening to the heart. Therefore, in the Lepcha language, the meaning of the *Mun* is not only a Lepcha priestess but also the liberator of the souls of the dead persons to heaven, and as such, *Munism* is the Lepcha's ancient religion or philosophy of the soul.<sup>20</sup>

The practice of the *Munism* holds a very important tradition in the Lepcha society. According to Geoffrey Gorer in his work, *The Lepchas of Sikkim Again*, stated that “the services of the *Mun* are very important in the life of the Lepchas. They must always be present at birth, at marriages, they are the only essential priestess”.<sup>21</sup> They performed all the rites dealing with the important events of the life of the Lepchas. The presence of the *Mun* was mandatory during birth, death, purification rites, expelling devils and marriage, among other ceremonies and occasions.<sup>22</sup> After the attainment of *Munship*, there is no restriction on *Mun*'s sexual activity, marriage, etc., nor is there any requisite criterion of age for the *Munship*.<sup>23</sup>

## **5.2. Function of the *Mun***

The main function of the *Mun* in the Lepchas community was to help the people cope with suffering and seek relief. C. De Beauvoir Stock's work, *Folk-Lore and Customs of the Lepchas of Sikkim*, mentioned that the role of the *Mun* was as a medicine in the village. When a child became ill, a *Mun* was called off to make sacrifice to the demons. When the child recovered, it was said that *Mun* had cured it.<sup>24</sup> *Mun* was the divinely ordained person and she was gifted the power to perform religious activities of the Lepchas and can even talk with the spirits. It was the duty of the *Mun* to bring back the soul of the departed person to Kanchenjunga from where the Lepchas are originated. It is also believed that Kanchenjunga is the original homeland of the



Lepchas and each clan has its own *Chu*, *Daa*, *Lyep* (mountains and lakes), etc. After death, the souls of the Lepchas need to return to Kanchenjunga, where their ancestors are waiting to receive them. Therefore, it was only the *Mun*, who can catch the soul of the departed person and directs them the way towards Kanchenjunga to meet with their ancestors. It is strongly believed that the *Mun* can catch the souls moving haphazardly in the world and direct them to their ultimate destination for eternal rest.<sup>25</sup>

The ability and power of a *Mun* are hereditary within her own *putso* (clan), and the rules for establishing the vocation and the instruction of a new *Mun* are similar to those which apply to a new *Boongthing*, apart from the fact that a new *Mun* is instructed by an old and experienced *Mun*. A *Mun* was subjected to the same dietary regulations as the *Boongthing*.<sup>26</sup>

A.R. Foning wrote that among the various functions of the *Mun*, the most important and the most impressive one he found that was the transportation of the soul of the departed person into *Rum-Lyang*, the place of the gods, where they meet with the souls of their ancestors.<sup>27</sup> Even Halfdan Siiger, in his work, *The Lepchas: Culture and Religion of a Himalayan People*, detailed about the particular duties of the *Mun*; he said that every morning before cockcrow a *Mun* prays to her tutelary deity asking for protection for the families for which she has officiated. On the occasion, she utters her prayer in a loud voice, but does not fall into a trance. Whenever a *Mun* has officiated at a sacrificial ceremony returns with her share of the meat, she performs a special ceremony in her own house. She cuts the meat into pieces, fries the pieces and put them into three cups, which she placed before three *Po thyut* (bamboo bottles filled with *chi*). She then invokes her tutelary deity.<sup>28</sup>

Lepcha believed that *Muns* have such a power that they know which spirit is responsible for what type of diseases and how they can bring under their control by offering different articles. All *Muns* are proud of their powers. At last, D.C. Roy again mentioned that the *Mun*, who is the mediator between common Lepcha and the spirit world, used to occupy not only a prestigious and respectful position but was inevitable in the Lepcha religion. However, in course of time the position of the *Mun* has been taken over by the Buddhist monks and the church father. He further mentioned the existence of the *Mun*, female mediator between the Lepcha and the spirits is a unique feature among the Lepchas who are the nature worshippers. The society by respecting the *Mun* respects the females. But after the arrival of the Tibetans and the Europeans in Sikkim, the *Mun* started losing her earlier position. Even today in the Lepcha villages, they continue to hold the prestigious position within the Lepcha community.<sup>29</sup>

After the conversion into the Buddhist faith, the religion that was made the state religion by the *Namgyals*, the Lepchas used both *Lamas* (monks) and *Mun*. If the *Mun* was called off to ward off the evil spirit, then they called *Lamas* to prepare horoscope for the newly born child.<sup>30</sup> The *Mun* was not happy, as she has to sacrifice many animals during her practices. This aspect of a *Mun* too accepted as an act of fate and compiled to. When *Mun* dies, no special ceremony take place, as the spirit that had possessed the *Mun* is believed to have no concern with the soul of the dead.<sup>31</sup>

### **5.3. Women in the Buddhist Monasteries in Sikkim**

Buddhism was consolidated as a state religion in Sikkim, when *Namgyal* dynasty was founded by the Phuntsog *Namgyal* in 1642 CE.<sup>32</sup> Thereafter, the majority of the

Bhutias in Sikkim followed the Lamaist Buddhism where Bodhisattva or the Buddha was their chief deity and the monasteries (*Gompa*) are their place of worship.<sup>33</sup>

The historical writing regarding the religious life of the women in Sikkim is limited; however, historical text such as *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim* by Anna Balicki had mentioned about *Annila* or *Lamani* (nuns), the Buddhist female religious leaders, and *Chotimba* was the head among the nuns and their place of worship is called *Mani-lhakhang* (nunneries).<sup>34</sup> It means the presence of nuns in the history of Sikkim only began after the late eighteenth century. Traditionally, *Annila* were only allowed to get admission in a few monasteries and their number was extremely small, and most of them were illiterate, old and decrepit as compared to the monks, who were nearly one thousand and above in number.

According to P.N. Chopra, in his work, *Sikkim*, mentioned during the time of monarchical period, the monasteries are divided in terms of sex and there have been a separate monastery for the women and they are prohibited to stay in the men's monastery during the night.<sup>35</sup> In the monasteries, a monk used to do all the work or to keep a watch at the monastery. Monks were the real teacher in the monastery. Whereas women visit the monasteries for offering and prayers, but they cannot live in the grounds of a monastery. There are separate nunneries for women. Most of the nuns are old women, whose husbands have died, but there are quite a few young women as well. The nuns' constant occupation was involved in charity and the turning of the prayer wheels, still such things were done by the nuns in most of the monasteries. The monasteries are exclusively reserved for males. In addition, the duties of the nuns were to assist the head *Lama* (monk). Women basically acted just as a helper for the monk.<sup>36</sup>

According to Arpana Bhattacharya, women were admitted as nuns in a few monasteries in Sikkim. However, their number was extremely small and most of them are old. Some of the nuns learned Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist philosophy and preside over the young disciples. But, most of them have no real training and cannot read or write properly.<sup>37</sup>

Traditionally, nuns neither perform religious rituals or ceremonies for private individuals like the monks, nor they are given a place inside the main hall at monastic services, their devotions are confined almost entirely to the turning of prayer wheel and counting the beads. They usually spent few hours in the monastery by turning the prayer wheels.<sup>38</sup>

Nuns have no role in religious teaching; women cannot enjoy any role in performing birth, marriage or death rite. However, they can enter in the monastery and can do the *puja*. Nuns have a disadvantage because of the religious life centres on the monk. There is still unevenness in disciplinary rules and rules that govern the monastic order that treated the nuns as second-class citizens. Therefore, W. Bothe and S. Sachdeva, in their work, *Gendered Participation in the Buddhist Himalayas Sikkim and Bhutan: A Comparative Study on Visions of Female Participation*, defined that “because of the menstrual cycle, women cannot reach at the level of the monk. Women held an inferior religious position than men and the reason was that women are viewed as impure because of their menstrual cycle”.<sup>39</sup> Nuns always have to pay respect to the monks who are junior or senior to them. The nun could rank lower in formal position, but she could be more spiritually advanced than the monk. Even though, the nuns have to pay homage to the monks, regardless of how senior or junior he is. They are instructed by a monk and they cannot disobey them but monk always can.<sup>40</sup>

They further suggested, “It was accepted that the eight disciplinary rules which were laid down by Gautama Buddha at the time of admission of first group of nuns are still functioning as becoming a guide in the Buddhist world”.<sup>41</sup> The eight chief rules are known as *Garudhammas*. These were the first rules to be made for the nuns, while ignoring certain aspects of their calling such as any insistence on chastity, and the possession of only eight belongings, they deal with certain necessary obligation expected of women who wished to dedicate their lives to religion and to live in a community with the fellow devotees. The rules were precise and defined and were designed to preserve and promote the integrity of the women’s order as a body independent of its relations with the secular world.<sup>42</sup>

The eight chief rules were as follows:

1. A nun, even if of a hundred years’ standing, shall make salutation to, shall stand up in the presence of, shall bow down before and shall perform all proper duties towards monk, if only just initiated.
2. A nun must not spend the rains in a residence where there is no monk.
3. Every half-month, a nun should desire two things from the order of monks: the asking as to the date of the *Uposatha* ceremony (observance day) and the time when the monk will come to give the exhortation.
4. After keeping the rainy season, a nun must invite before both the orders in respect of three matters: what was seen, what was heard and what was suspected.
5. A nun who has been guilty of a serious offence has to undergo the *Manatta* (discipline) towards both the *Sanghas* (*Bhikkhu Sangha* and *Bhikkuni Sangha*).

6. When, as a probationer, she has been trained in the six rules for two years, she should seek ordination from both the orders (*Bhikkhu Sangha* and *Bhikkuni Sangha*).
7. A monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun.

Henceforth official admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden, whereas the official admonition of nuns by monks is not forbidden.<sup>43</sup> Patriarchal interpretations of Buddhism was strongly felt by the nuns in Sikkim. Therefore, W. Bothe and Swati Sachdeva again mentioned while quoted interview with the Bhutanese nun in Sikkim, “Being a nun, we have to bow down before the monks and they bow down before the deities. We are not allowed to read all the religious texts. All we do is to clean and prepare the lamps and tie knots in the religious threads. I want to be born as a man in the next rebirth”.<sup>44</sup> Even if the nuns attended monastic education in the monasteries, they were not entitled to perform religious ceremonies and their education was purely for spiritual renunciation and penance.

A scholar like Anna Balikci stated that until the late 1920s, *Lamas* never performed community rituals at the village’s prayer hall, which had until then been the meeting place for the older women of the village to pray. Village prayer halls or *Mani-lhakang* was used throughout Sikkim as a place for the women of the village over child-bearing age to meet and pray on the eighth, fifteenth and thirtieth of each lunar month. Their main practices are *Chenresig*, the Buddha of Compassion.<sup>45</sup>

In Sikkim, Buddhism conferred some disadvantages on women in the past. Women could not hold the highest religious offices. But this did not seriously detract them from the secular life. Women can enter in the innermost chapels of the monasteries. Now a days in most of the *Mani-lakang*, the women can be the head of the

monastery known as *Khandula* and they also learned the Bhuddhist philosophy.<sup>46</sup> During any ceremonies in the *Mani-lakhang*, the most senior women act as a chief and chant the mantras.<sup>47</sup> Except the death ceremony, even nuns perform all the religious ceremonies at the private individual house at their invitation. However, nuns are not allowed to spend overnight at the individual's house during the ceremonies. They have to return to the monastery by evening and again they will proceed in the morning, whereas monks used to spend the night at the individual's house during the ceremonies. But still, monasteries for the nuns are very less and few of the monasteries had been constructed during the early nineteenth century and they are as follows:

1. Takshi Ugen Chokerling Monastery established by *Anni Thamchey Dolma* in 1963
2. Ranka Anni *Gompa*
3. Karma Chokor Dechen Nunnery Rumtak, etc.

Many nuns who came to stay in these monasteries to become nuns are mostly widows, drop-out students and few of them came by themselves to find peace and salvation. They had dedicated their life to Lord Buddha leaving all the materialistic world aside.

#### **5.4. Women and Monastic Education**

Earlier there was only monastic education established in Sikkim, which gave more privilege to men as compared to women. Monastic education is one of the oldest forms of learning. It can be traced back to the ancient Indian educational system. The Gurukuls of the Ramayana and Mahabharata periods and then the Nalanda and

Vikramashila Universities were nothing but well-developed monastic schools, where Hindus and Buddhist scholars could acquire higher knowledge in general, as well as in respect of their individual faith.<sup>48</sup> This system of education was very much prevalent in Tibet from where it came to Sikkim, then it became the main centre of learning and source of higher knowledge during the *Namgyal* period. Sikkim is basically a land of monasteries which was established in the middle of the seventeenth century by the great masters who were renowned followers of Guru Padmasambhava.<sup>49</sup>

Before the seventeenth century, there was no historical evidence that shows the existence of any educational system in Sikkim. The first education system was religion-based monastic education that was started after the Bhutia immigration in the state during the early seventeenth century. This type of education was restricted to the *Lamas* only and not for the common people.<sup>50</sup> The *Lamas* formed a social class in Tibet. They neither imparted education to the laymen nor developed centres of learning where commoners could get educated. The monks and the nobles were closely connected and there could not be any absolute separation between spiritual and temporal estates.<sup>51</sup>

The monastic system of education was followed only in a few renowned monasteries in Sikkim, such as Pemayangtse, Tashiding, Phensang, Enchey and Kathok, all from Nyingma schools and the Ralong, Rumtek and Phodong are from Kagyupa schools, were famous for the centre of monastic education in those days.<sup>52</sup> The monastic education system had been sustained by the Sikkimese traditional custom of sending at least one male member from every family to some *Gonpa* (Monastery) to become a monk.<sup>53</sup>



The tradition of Lamaism started in Sikkim during the regime of the third *Chogyal*, Chakdor *Namgyal* who built the famous monastery called Pemayangtse in 1705 C.E and ordered that the second of the three sons of every Bhutia family must be ordained a monk of the monastery. Furthermore, this order was also applicable for the Lepcha and the Tsong (Limbo) communities.<sup>54</sup> However, such compulsion was not applicable to women and neither the unwritten law nor any historical writing mentioned about the female participation in the monasteries as a nun to receive Buddhist education. Only monk was admitted to receive the monastic education but there was no separate monastic education for the women.

The tradition of sending most intelligent sons to the monasteries to be trained as *Lamas* started and with a formal ceremony that includes the shaving of head, a boy of five to ten years of age were admitted in the monastery as a *Lama*. The monastery has a full custody of the boy and they are guided by the senior monks who instruct them with the rules and regulations of the monastery.<sup>55</sup> This tradition is still in practice in the *Sangha* school, where only monks were admitted to receive the monastic education but such rules and regulations were not imparted to the women. To become a monk, the *Lama* used to get training on different skills such as painting, paper making, etc. but for the common people and for the women, such educational facilities were very negligible.<sup>56</sup>

Women admitted in the monasteries by their own will, they have certain formalities before admitted to the monasteries. Marriage was not restricted to the nuns. However, if they are wish to marry, they can, but they have to get the permission from the head *Lama*, then only they can marry. But once they get married, they are not allowed to return to the monastery. Sometimes they never return to the monastery, as

monastery's rules were not permitted the married women to continue as their spiritual life. After married, they can visit monastery but were not allowed to stay or follow the secular life within the monastery. Nuns are mostly unmarried, either widow or who left their family or home behind and devoted their life to the monastery. However, such rules were not imparted to the monk. After married also, monk can stay in the monasteries and they can perform all the religious ceremonies.

To become a nun, they have to leave their family behind. To wear nun's cloths, they get the blessing from the head *Lama* from the particular monastery. Women have to sacrifice their life for the monastery. Because once they became a *Annila*, they were addressed by the name like *Anni Sherab Choden Bhutia*, *Anni Tshering Choden Bhutia*, etc. The *Anni* was tagged along with their name.

In Sikkim, there were also strong links between the monastic bodies and the monarchy, for instance, the head *Lama* of Pemayangtse held the power to consecrate the *Chogyal* (king) of Sikkim. The *Lamas* were also concerned with the affairs of the state, whereas no nuns were involved in the state affairs.<sup>57</sup> Since 1958, the *Lamas* have been elected representative from among themselves for the *Sangha* seat first in the State Council and since 1974 to the State Legislative Assembly.<sup>58</sup>

When the State Council was replaced with the 32-member State Assembly in 1974, the *Sangha* retained it as reserved seat. Similarly, when the *Parity* system was reviewed in 1979 for reserving seats in the State Legislative Assembly, considering the unique role of the *Sangha* in the body politic of Sikkim, the monks were permitted to elect one of them as their representatives in the Assembly. This is a unique legal provision in secular India to permit a religious establishment to be represented in the spheres of politics. The state has a Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs and the monk

members in the State Assembly play an important role to the extent that many a time they hold ministerial position in the state cabinet.<sup>59</sup>

Whereas nuns were not seen in the representative body till now. Many a times they were invited to present in a meeting but due to their shy nature they were not as versatile as compared to the monks. They can cast the vote but till now, none of the nuns represented in the State Assembly.

However, now a days nuns get the religious training in the monastery itself. They have special classes on the Buddhist philosophy. Teacher will come from the outside to teach them. They have to follow certain rules and regulations in the monasteries. Duties were allotted to them by the incharge of the monastery. Nuns used to get 10 days holiday from the monastery annually. During these holidays, they used to visit their family or some religious places as a pilgrimage. When they became old, their disciples or younger nuns take care for them. Nun's family members can also visit them occasionally. Nuns were considered as *Tara*, *Drolma* and *Avalokiteshvara* (Buddhist female deities) by the people and they get love and affection from the people who visited monastery.

Once they die, their funeral will carry out by the *Gonpa* only. However, in Sikkim, the funeral pyre of the women was eight layered as compared to the men that was seven layered, because they need the extra step to attain salvation. The impact of such patriarchal interpretations of Buddhism was strongly felt by the nuns.<sup>60</sup>

However, life in the countryside in Sikkim centres round the monastery of the Buddhist monks (*Lamas*). Birth, death and sickness, all are the occasions for the *Lamas* to be called in for the performance of appropriate ceremonies. Just putting up a

prayer flag even needs the attendance of *Lamas*. *Lamas* are priests as well as astrologists. There is *Lamas* specially trained to read the stars and to make astrological calculations. They find the auspicious time for all functions such as marriage, funeral, naming, in fact for all activities from starting a journey to laying the foundation stone of buildings. *Lama's* authority in these matters is seldom questioned,<sup>61</sup> whereas nuns are still subordinated and people give more importance to *Lamas* as compare to the nuns.

### **5.5. Conclusion**

Life in Sikkim is deeply rooted in religion. From birth to the death rites, all communities in Sikkim are rooted in their own religious and cultural belief system. In the primitive religion, *Muns* (female Shamans) were given more importance than the *Boongthing*. However, in the Buddhist community, the representation of the nun was less than as compared to the monk. In the primitive religion of the Lepchas, the *Mun* was usually called off to deliver the evil spirit and pray during difficult and *Mun* was required in every ritual.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, in the Buddhist community, the female *Lamas* or nuns are known as *Annila*. They have subordinated position than the monks. They are not allowed to conduct ceremonies or perform exorcism on par with female *Muns*. Therefore, in the primitive religion, women occupy a more important place than men. Religion is the amorphous variable, is an important source that shapes the position and status of the women and gave them an identity in the society.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Tamsang, K.P. *The Unknown and Untold Reality About the Lepchas*. Kalimpong: Lyangsong Tamsang, 1983: 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>3</sup> Subba, J.R. *History Culture and Customs of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2008: 379.

<sup>4</sup> Lepcha, Charisma K. “Religion, Culture and Identity: A Comparative Study on the Lepchas of Dzongu, Kalimpong and Ilam”, PhD Thesis, *North-Eastern Hill University*, Shillong, March, 2013: 85–86.

<sup>5</sup> Subba, J.R. 2008: *Op. Cit.*, 380.

<sup>6</sup> Gorer, Geoffrey. *The Lepchas of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1996: 225.

<sup>7</sup> Sharma, Anita. *The Lepchas of Dzongu region in Sikkim: A Narrative of Cultural Heritage and Folklore*. New Delhi: Intach, 2013: 51.

<sup>8</sup> Gorer, Geoffrey. 1996: *Op. Cit.*, 215.

<sup>9</sup> Sharma, Anita. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Roy, D.C. *Status of Women Among the Lepchas*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2010: 88.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 110–111.

<sup>12</sup> Gorer, Geoffrey. 1996: *Op. Cit.*, 215.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>14</sup> Siiger, Halfdan. *The Lepchas: Cultural and Religion of a Himalayan People. Part I, Result of Anthropological Field Work in Sikkim, Kalimpong and Git*. Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, Ethnographical Series, Vol. XI, Part I, 1967: 165

<sup>15</sup> Tamsang, K.P. 1983: *Op. Cit.*, 46–47.

<sup>16</sup> Roy, D.C. 2010: *Op. Cit.*, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Subba, J.R. 2008: *Op. Cit.*, 380.

<sup>18</sup> Tamsang, K.P. 1983: *Op. Cit.*, 47.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–49.

<sup>21</sup> Gorer, Geoffrey. 1996: *Op. Cit.*, 230.

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- <sup>22</sup> Sharma, Anita. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 45.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 51
- <sup>24</sup> Stocks, C. De Beauvoir. *Folk-Lore and Customs of the Lepchas of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2001: 463.
- <sup>25</sup> Roy, D.C. 2010: *Op. Cit.*, 90.
- <sup>26</sup> Siiger, Halfdan. 1967: *Op. cit.*, 165.
- <sup>27</sup> Foning, A.R. *Lepcha My Vanishing Tribe*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1987: 64.
- <sup>28</sup> Siiger, Halfdan. 1967: *Op. Cit.*, 165.
- <sup>29</sup> Roy, D.C. 2010: *Op. Cit.*, 109
- <sup>30</sup> Kharel, Sunita and Bhutia, Jigme Wangchuk. *Gazetteers of Sikkim*. Gangtok, Home Department, Government of Sikkim, 2013: 136.
- <sup>31</sup> Sharma, Anita. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 47.
- <sup>32</sup> Kandell, Alice S. and Salisbury, Charlotte Y. *Mountaintop Kingdom: Sikkim*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1972: 2
- <sup>33</sup> Sing, K.S. *People of India-Sikkim, Volume-XXXIX*. Calcutta: ASI by Naveen Kishore Seagull Books, 1993: 28.
- <sup>34</sup> Balikci, Anna. *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim*. Gangtok: Rachna Publisher, 2008: 58.
- <sup>35</sup> Chopra, P.N. *Sikkim*. New Delhi: S. Chand and Company Ltd., 1979 (Rpt. 1985): 56.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–85
- <sup>37</sup> Bhattacharya, Arpana. “The Bhutia-Lepcha Women of Sikkim: Tradition and Response Change”. Mahendra P. Lama. Ed. *Sikkim Society Polity Economy Environment*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1994: 32.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.
- <sup>39</sup> Bothe, Winnie and Sachdeva, Swati Akshay. “Gendered Participation in the Buddhist Himalayas Sikkim and Bhutan: A Comparative Study on Visions of Female Participation”. *The Eastern Anthropologist Vol. No. 66: 2–3*, 2013: 303.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

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- <sup>42</sup> Phongsai, Arree. The Eight Chief Rules for Bikkhunis. *The Tibetan Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2. Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Summer 1984: 35–36.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>44</sup> Bothe, Winnie and Sachdeva, Swati Akshay. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 303.
- <sup>45</sup> Balikci, Anna. 2008: *Op. Cit.*, 57.
- <sup>46</sup> Awasty, Indira. *Between Sikkim and Bhutan: The Lepchas and Bhutias of Pedong*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 1978: 57.
- <sup>47</sup> Singh, K.S. 1993: *Op. Cit.*, 29.
- <sup>48</sup> Archarya, Chowang. Aspect of Monastic Education in Sikkim. *Bulletin of Tibetology*, New Series, No. 2, Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 1998: 1.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>50</sup> Yasin Mohammad and Chettri, Durga P. *Politics, Society and Development: Insights From Sikkim*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publication, 2012: 258.
- <sup>51</sup> Sinha, A.C. *Sikkim Feudal and Democracy*. Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 2008: 124.
- <sup>52</sup> Archarya Chowang. 1998: *Op. Cit.*, 4.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>54</sup> Chopra, P.N. 1979: *Op. Cit.*, 27.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.
- <sup>56</sup> Yasin Mohammad and Chettri, Durga P. 2012: *Op. Cit.*, 259.
- <sup>57</sup> Bothe, Winnie and Sachdeva, Swati Akshay. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 297.
- <sup>58</sup> Sinha, A.C. 2008: *Op. Cit.*, 124.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.
- <sup>60</sup> Bothe, Winnie and Sachdeva, Swati Akshay. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 303.
- <sup>61</sup> Kotturan, George. *The Himalayan Gateway: History and Culture of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1983: 115.
- <sup>62</sup> Kharel, Sunita and Bhutia, Jigme Wangchuk. 2013: *Op. Cit.*, 136.

## **CHAPTER – VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

The present thesis, “*The Women in Sikkim: A Historical Study (Seventeenth to Twentieth Century)*” focuses on the socio-economic and political status of women in Sikkim during the monarchical period. There are mainly four objectives formulated to understand the historical status of women in Sikkim. The first objective is to understand the life of women within the private sphere and the second objective is to explore the history of royal women and their power relationship in the royal court of Sikkim. It will further explore how *Namgyals* rose to power in Sikkim through the matrimonial alliances and also highlights some of the prominent royal women in the royal court of Sikkim. The third objective is to study the women in the public sphere, and their role in the political history of Sikkim. The fourth objective is to study the details about the status of women within the religion of Sikkim during the *Namgyal* period.

Sikkim is a gender sensitized state but the history of women in Sikkim is not properly recorded though women in Sikkim have equal role to play in every sphere of the society. However, in the gender-based societies, women were treated as inferior to men and their works were never recognized in the past. Women were placed in such a position where their consent was never asked either in a marriage nor in any other fields. Sikkimese society was based on a patriarchal family system where women’s voices were always subdued. Women’s work was always kept behind the curtains when historians wrote Sikkim’s history. There are ample of literatures dealing with the socio-economic and political history of Sikkim, but these literatures failed to represent women’s role in the history of Sikkim.



However, it is to reiterate that the status of women in the Tribal Communities were bit different compared to other communities' women in Sikkim. Earlier, social position of women within the tribal communities of Sikkim were equal to that of men. Women enjoyed equal freedom and respect within the family. No sex preference were seen within the communities, and some family even showed their desire for having daughters. Marriage bounds gave special positions to women within the tribal communities. Tribal women were considered to be an asset in the household because they commanded a bride price during their marriages. Both men and women were considered to be of the same social status thus encouraged to lead a full life consistent with the general wellbeing of all.

However, on the other hand, the position and the status of women within the Nepali community were adverse to the communities of tribal women as they followed the Brahmanical patriarchy. Child marriage, dowry and widowhood were the common practices that exploited the status of women within the community. The desire for a son instead of a daughter were more as they believed that a son would procreate their lineage forward and a daughter would go to their in-laws' house after their marriage.

Despite this, women in Sikkim had no rights of inheritance even if they were no sons in a family. Only when a daughter remained unmarried, parents could customarily transfer some property to her though decision-making power was always in the hands of men. Women seemed to have a secondary position in both private and public affairs as the traditional local-self government also did not encourage women to participate. Traditionally, in Sikkim, many customary laws bound women in many spheres. The customary laws showed gender biasness in Sikkim during the early periods. Customs

and usages, rules and regulations of the *Durbar* were particularly male centric. The orders and the proclamations of the King had been the primary laws in Sikkim.

Women had to forfeit their rights in the family's property. They always preferred male to inherit the family's property, as there was a belief that only men could own land. A family without male offspring occasionally took a son-in-law to reside with his bride and inherit her parent's property. Contrary to it, people preferred to adopt a young child, usually the child of a relative as to pass on their legacy after death. However, property cannot be transferred in the name of the daughter or wife. Under such conditions, land tenure was always registered in the name of the male head of the household and women was devoid of such legal right.

Women have equally participated in economic activities and there was no rigid sexual division of labour. Both men and women equally participated in their work at home and outside. Women also played a prime role in the earning of the family. However, their works did not find importance, and historians did not interpret them in their writings.

During the monarchy, all the socio-economic and political powers were exercised by the King and his Ministers. However, the power of the royal women and their involvement in the royal court were not taken into consideration. All the highest administrative power was held by the King and other male officers, and whatever contributions made by the Queens in the history of Sikkim were all neglected when history was written in the past. In the history of Sikkim, none of the queens challenged the existing traditional patriarchal norms. However, Princess Pende Wangmo challenged the patriarchal society and fought for the throne during the

seventeenth century. But society's norms led her down and the dream to become the queen of Sikkim also buried along with her death.

Princess Pende Wangmo plays a very pivotal role in the history of Sikkim since no other female in the *Namgyal* Dynasty exemplifies the strong character in the light of womanhood during the seventeenth century. Therefore, she is always remembered in the history of Sikkim as the only one who had the courage to fight for the throne. But, instead of looking at her courage, historical narratives blamed her as an evil spirit. She was the most popular figure who let the quires to many scholars to work on the women's question in Sikkim.

Other than her, many queens took up the reign of the administration when their husbands were indisposed and also showed vigour in the upkeep of the dynasty. They were actively involved in the royal court and showed firm decision-making capability. However, their work was never included when history was written in the past. They also played an active role in their husband's court to protect the interest of the dynasty. Among them, Queen Yeshe Dolma was one such woman who seemed to handle the situation in a similar way as men handled it and never let down her husband's dynasty. However, the unequal relationship of the king and the queen and the centrality position of the king in the political and social hierarchy left the queens as subordinate and scholars failed to raise the royal women's voices. The queen's ardent support to his Majesty in each and every situation had been left out leaving little scope for the scholars to study as on date. Historians always showed the masculine values as the epicentre in the history thus, they ignored the royal women's power and their leadership qualities in the royal court of Sikkim.

Even Matrimonial alliances occupied an important place in the politics of Sikkim as well, where royal women often being used, in order to raise in power, extend and defend their territories. Therefore, the old socio-political and traditional life in Sikkim continued unchanged under the patronage of Tibet till the mid-nineteenth century. The marriage alliances not only brought cordial relationship between the two kingdoms but also there was cultural assimilation. Therefore, polyandry, the traditional marriage system of Tibet, coexisted with polygamy. Both the systems were followed by the royal family of Sikkim. It became an important part of the political system, which gave the king personal ties with a larger number of different groups, both within and outside the court, which was one of the many causes for the *Namgyals* to rule the Sikkim for almost 332 years.

Sikkimese society was based on a patriarchal system and the position of women equally deteriorated culturally, socially and politically in the past with the coming up of different institutions. Firstly, the establishment of the patriarchal rule in Sikkim by the *Namgyals* lead to women been mostly confined within the domestic spheres and politically they were not visible before the nineteenth century. However, after the nineteenth century, women started participating in the politics and started challenging the prevailing patriarchal society and put their immense contribution to make Sikkim as it is today. Among them, *Kazini* Elisa Maria was the one who being the backbone of her husband, *Kazi* Lhendup Dorji, entirely changed his political career and made him successful to become the first Chief Minister of Sikkim in 1974. She played a tremendous role to bring democracy in Sikkim.

Secondly, another important woman figure was Ruth Karthak Lepchani, a native woman, who fought against the monarchical government by forming a political party

called Sikkim Independent Front (SIF) in 1966. She was the leader of par excellence and will be remembered in the history of Sikkim for rebuilding Sikkim from authoritarianism to its present democratic shape. However, Kumari Hemlata Chettri made the history by becoming the first woman legislator of Sikkim in 1974 election. From this period onwards, women were continuously seen motivating to take part in the politics of Sikkim. Apart from politics, there were other women in the forefront who established different Women Welfare Associations in Sikkim, which worked for the upliftment of the deprived women. Such organizations mostly focused on the social causes such as malnutrition, sexual harassment, charity and domestic violence.

Henry Brougham quotes “Education makes a people easy to lead but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave” . Therefore, women were always deprived from their right to get the education and earlier there was only monastic education established in Sikkim, which gave more privilege to men compared to women. Patriation of women to receive monastic education was very rare and privileges were given to elite class women therefore only few of the royal women received monastic education. In general women in Sikkim could see the light of modern education only after the arrival of the Scottish missionaries. Miss Marry Scott founded the first girls school named Paljor Namgyal Girls Senior Secondary School (PNGSSS) in 1923. She was the one who showed the first seeds of modern education for girls in Sikkim.

On the other hand, religion is an important institution in the life of any individual. The woman priest (*Mun*) in the Lepcha society had more advantages than the male priest (*Boongthing*). As *Muns* were considered not only powerful than the male priests but they also held the most respectable positions. However, *Mun* started losing their importance after the Lepchas started converting into the Buddhist faith. Similarly,

Buddhism was established as the state religion when *Namgyal* dynasty was established in Sikkim after the consecration of the first *Chogyal* in 1642 C.E. Thereafter more Buddhist monasteries were established in Sikkim. The disadvantages are apparent in their religious life due to their humble and shy nature, and they tend to remain quiet in the background. The orders of the nuns did not particularly influence the Sikkimese society like a monk's (*Lama*) order. In Sikkim, as in Tibet, the priests were made and not born. Because of such rules, every Bhutia family tried to have at least one son as a *Lama* and many boys from early childhood were chosen to be *Lama*. However, such compulsion was not made for women. Even though, the concept of patriarchy was widely prevailed in the Buddhist monasteries and nuns had a subordinate position than the monks.

Traditionally, Women were deprived of their rights over property and right to be citizens or subjects within their own land during the monarchical period. Yet from the limited space available to them, they tried to create a political space, negotiating traditional patriarchy. Recorded history only represented men and their leadership qualities. But history did not throw light on those women who played an important role in the politics of Sikkim as well as in the other fields. Finally, we do have a history of women who had challenged the patriarchal society. However, general principles of patriarchal societies are that men work in public domain and women work in private domain. Why men are in the public sphere and women in the private sphere may be due to their biological and physical differences, because roles assigned to women and men in society or the division of labour based on gender are determined according to their biological differences. Women use to exist in the private sphere because of their ability to give birth and nutrition, which was detrimental in

bringing out the difference between men and women in the society. Such a distinction allowed men to gain more power and authority in the societies.

One is confronted with many challenges while tracing the women's history in Sikkim. There are not just silences around them; they are invisible. Finding out their names seems quite a puzzle, while the men were all named. Women faced double exclusion, one because of gender and the other because of their social status. Therefore, more research is needed on the question of women history in Sikkim. Still there has been certain knowledge gap regarding their work and domestic lives and how they maintained their traditional social structure.

Sikkim history presented men's history universally, and all those who are concerned about Sikkim history only reflect male interest, actions and experiences. Women were ignored because of the assumption that they did not play any part, and women were always behind the scene. They continued to get parcel picture of his story, not her story. Unless we understand the past, it will continue to be partial and biased, we will never get their side of the story. Even their story is important. When we talk about the women history, it may help us to understand the patriarchal nature of the society.

Women are always considered as semi- human being. They are not able to speak for themselves. It is always men who speak on behalf of women. Women are always looked upon with lots of expectations such as women should look tall, beautiful and so on. But we never expect anything from men. It is always men who define women and it is always their view had become important. These are some criteria that are relevant today to study women's history in Sikkim.

Although, in Sikkim, women were deprived of the property rights and succession was believed to be in the male line. Even though women occupied a prominent place in the history and provided great services to the society. References to women in history were almost nil. They were marginalized and always kept in a subordinate position. The history of Sikkim has, like other regions, always been represented in an *androcentric* perspective, where a woman's involvement in different activities and their work have been neglected. Though there are women who played significant and role in the socio-economic and political field for the development of Sikkim. Yet women's work was always kept behind the fences when historians wrote Sikkim's history.

At the last, there is scope for research on the women's history in Sikkim. It is hoped that this present study will contribute, to some extent, in promoting the knowledge about the position of women in the history of Sikkim. It needs more time and research to work on the women history in Sikkim because women have been excluded from many spheres. Women are equally important as men in the society and the main aim of studying women history is not just to tag women from the existing framework but the whole purpose of women history is to have a better understanding of the past.

Nowadays, women in Sikkim are more empowered to make decisions compared to women in other parts of the world. Women are no longer only confined to their role as "perfect wife" but multiple identities can be observed while they come forward to take up the challenges of the larger society.

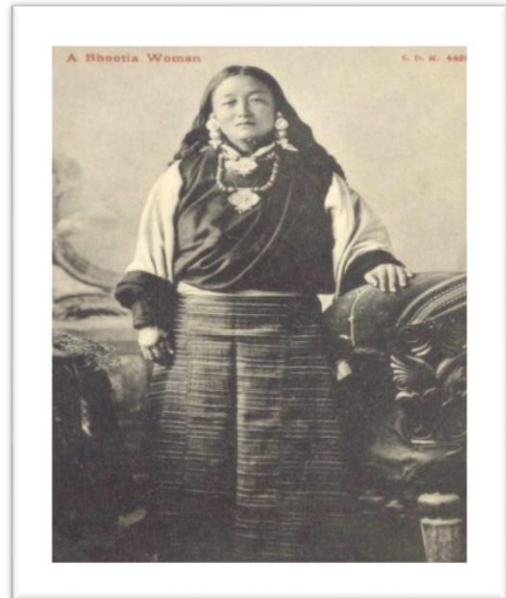
Therefore, there is a famous line quoted by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "To awaken the society, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves".



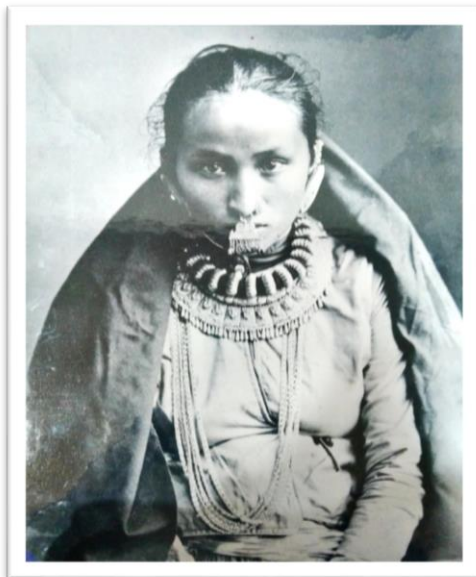
## APPENDICES



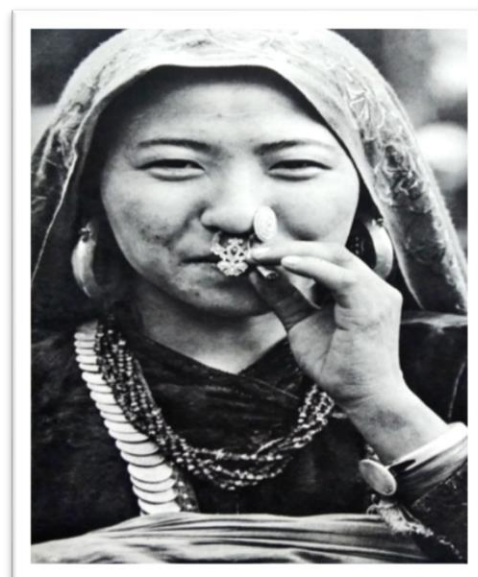
Appendix 1. Picture of the Lepcha Women



Appendix 2. Picture of the Bhutia Women



Appendix 3. Picture of the Nepali Women



Appendix 4. Kirati women smoking cigarette



Appendix 5. Marriage wedding of Bhutia community in 1880

Sources: Sikkim State Archive



Appendix 6. Woman engaged in a household activities like cooking and spinning during the early 1960s.



Appendix 7. Women working in a Agriculture filed during 1960-70s





Appendix 8. Sikkimese women at Sunday market at Gangtok, 1950-70.  
Sources: Hotel Sinclairs Gangtok collected on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2023



Appendix 9. Khye-Bumsa ancestor of the first *Chogyal* of Sikkim and the Lepcha Chief The-Kong-Tek

Signing Blood Brotherhood treaty at Kabi Lungchok, North Sikkim

(Visited: 17/5/1019)



Appendix 10. Wall Painting of Pande Wangmo which was saved from the original Silnon monastery (west Sikkim) before its reconstruction in the 1980s.

Sources: *Royal History of Sikkim; A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal* by John A. Ardussi, Anna Balikci Denjongpo and Pre K. Sorensen



Appendix 11. Pande Wangmo leading the invading Bhutanese army

Sources: *Royal History of Sikkim; A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal* by John A. Ardussi, Anna Balikci Denjongpo and Pre K. Sorensen



Appendix 12. A Life of the third *Chogyal* of Sikkim

Sources: Classified Accession Register (CAR) of *Namgyal* Institute of Tibetology;  
Composed by Pema Kesang, Museum Assistance, NIT, Collected on 14<sup>th</sup> August,  
2021



Appendix 13. Pende Wangmu's Palace in Namchi, build in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Source: personal collection





Appendix 14: Nga-Dag Monastery at Namchi, South Sikkim

Source: personal collection



Appendix 15. Empress Kunzang Dechen Tshomo *Namgyal* at Takse village about 5 miles away from Gangtok

Sources: Personal Collection on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2023



Appendix 16. Queen Yeshe Dolma

Sources: Collection NIT (Namgyal Institute of Tibetology)





Appendix 17. Photograph taken at Hating House, Calcutta, 1906.

Seated L-R: D.E. Holland, Trongsa Penlop, Ugyen Wangchuk (later First King of Bhutan), Political Officer, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, J.C. White, King of Sikkim Sir Thutob Namgyal, Empress of Sikkim, Yeshe Dolma.

Standing L-R: Bhutan Soldier, Captain Hyslop, Ugyen Dorji (later Raja), Lobzang Chhoden, Jerung Dewan, Bermiok Kazi Tenzing Wangyal, Bhutan Soldier, Sikkim Soldier

Sources: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology



Appendix 18. Princess Seymo Jetsun Pema Yeshe Choden or *Mayum Choni*  
Wongmo (1897-1994)



Appendix 19. Queen Sangey Diki



Appendix 20. Queen Sangey Diki, during the inauguration function of the new Lall market at Gangtok in 1956



Appendix 21. Princess Pema Tsedeun Namgyal / Coocoola (1924-2008)

Sources: personal collection of Dr. Tsewang Tenduk Pulger



Appendix 22. Princess Cocoola greeted by Air Marshal and Indian Air Force Officials

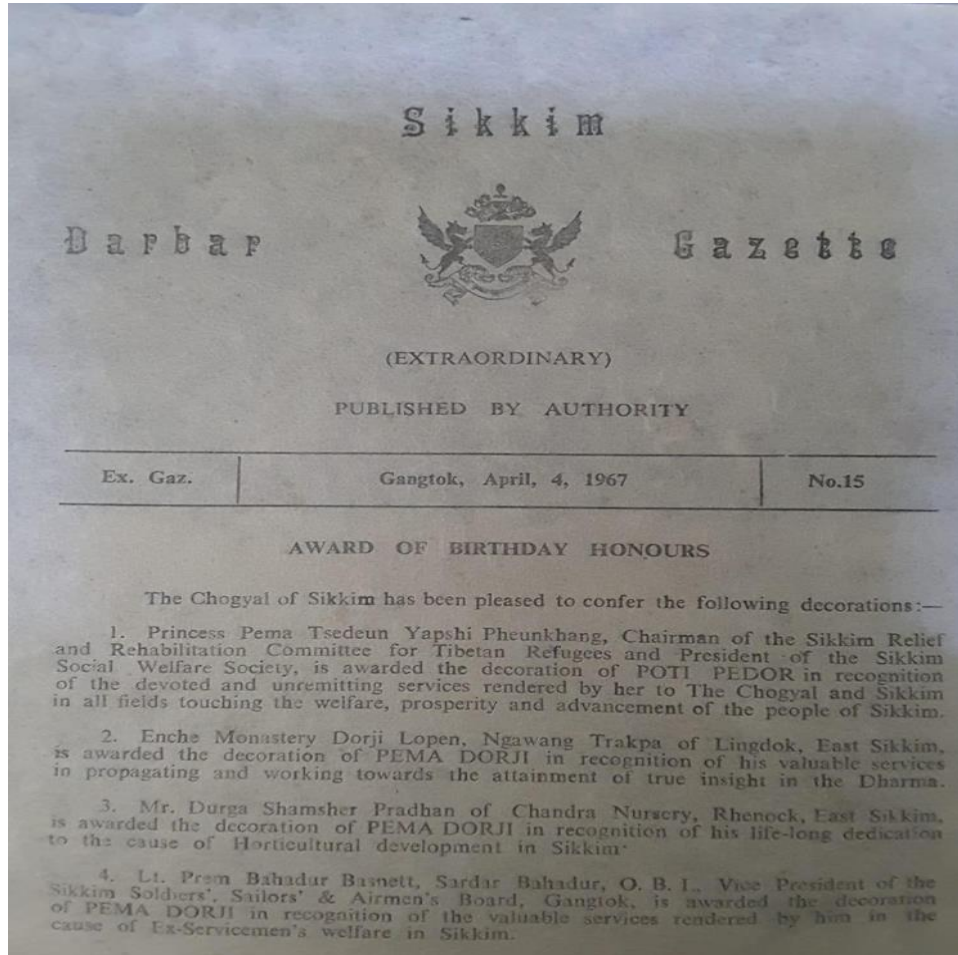
Sources: personal collection of Dr. Tsewang Tenduk Pulger





Appendix 23 Princess Pema Tsedeun with Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister of Sikkim of India and Mr. Krishna Menon, the Defence Minister and the Crown prince Palden Thondup Namgyal in the front row at the state Dinner, New Delhi

Sources: personal collection of Dr. Tsewang Tenduk Pulger.



Appendix: 24. Princess Cocoola was awarded the decoration of *Peti Podar* in recognition of the devoted and unremitting services rendered by her to the *Chogyal* and Sikkim in all fields.



Appendix 25. Queen Hope Cooke



Appendix 26. Queen Hope Cooke and King Palden Thondup Namgyal

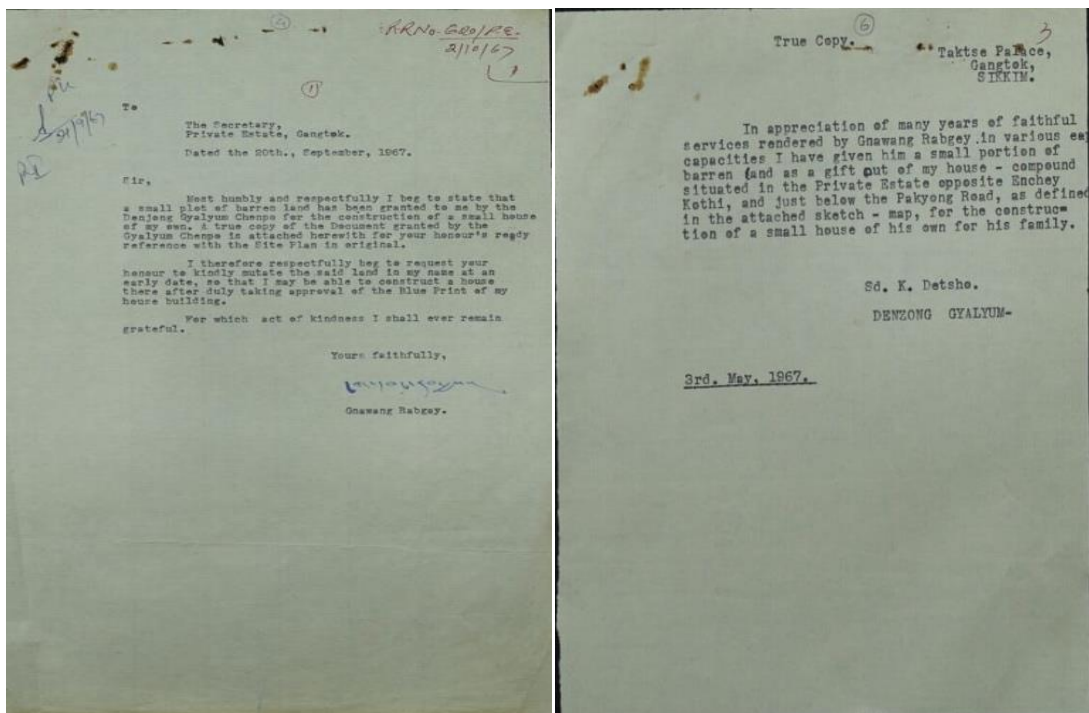
Sources: personal collection of Dr. Tsewang Tenduk Pulger





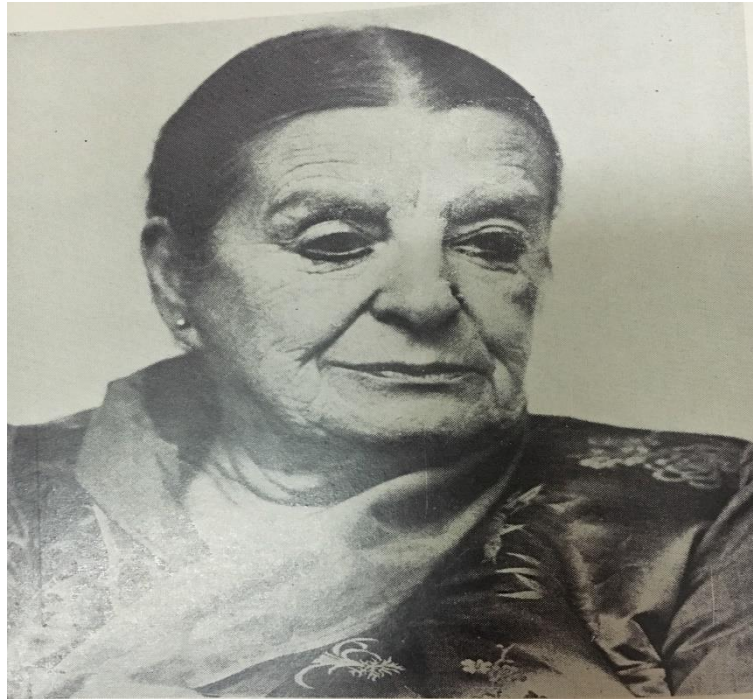
Appendix 27. *Chogyal Palden Thundup Namgyal, Queen Mother Kunzang Dechen Tshomo Namgyal, Queen Hope Cook and*

Family in 1959



Appendix 28: Queen Kunzang Dechan gifted land to Ngawang Rabgey on 20th September 1967.





Appendix 29. *Kazini* Eliza Maria Langford Rae



Appendix 30. The *Kazi* Lendup Dorji and *Kazini* Elisa Mari with the Prime Minister-  
Glad to rule over Sikkim



Appendix 31. *Kazini* Elisa Maria along with Mrs. Durga Lama leading procession of the Sikkim State Congress (1976)



Appendix 32. Ruth karthak Lepchani at her Residence in Singtam (East Sikkim)

personal collection on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2022





Appendix 33. Ruth during her young age



Ruth with her husband Mr. A. Hamil

Sources: Personal Collection of Ruth Karthak Lepchani' home 29/5/2022.

# SIKKIM INDEPENDENT FRONT

## The 22nd Pukaar from the Youths of Sikkim (Part I)

Dear Friends:

Ours at the most, is an imperfect world. Imperfection worse compounded, directly in geometric progression to our progress. And will remain imperfect, inspite of however much we improve our sciences. The total present world concepts of political theories are absolutely off gear, to our political realities. Almost all our present world political leaders are mostly ignorant, incapable and failures in life. Having no recourse to any other avenues of prosperity, they become adept at public speaking and deception. They then mislead our equally ignorant, incapable and greedy poverty stricken masses with defective ideologies. We have now, broadly speaking, two types of failures. The leader type succeed with deception and false promises, and become all powerful masters of the world, bringing us to the edges of chaos, in our already confused world. Whilst the other mass types, serve best-at the beck and call - of these first type masters. Between them, they are destroying our already fragile tottering world of us common people. Because of this situation, the good elements of our society, who matter-are capable, and really can do something good-fight shy of politics.

Our World has changed immensely in these last five decades. Old ideas no longer hold any fascination for our younger generations. Rightly so! For in truth, what values have they, today? Economic theories have all collapsed; their values, too inconsequential. The seven pillars of wisdom, which held up our world for centuries, have now too crumbled down under the strain of scientific progress. All our sciences are galloping towards self- destruction, in guise of human progress. Human feelings have all eroded away and chaos is prevailing all around. Anywhere we turn to, we find confusion and fear. What are we common people coming to? Is there no way out? I know time is not in our favour any longer. We seem to have lost all our WILL to survive in CONTENTMENT; and now we are nearing the threshold of our last point of vanishing. And yet, I do see, one tiny chink of light shining through and if we, common people follow it absolutely with diligence and self- sacrifice, then we will surely emerge from this (present- age) dark tunnel, into a new dawn of freshness and complete fulfilment. For all this, we must begin politics afresh with new faces. If politics can be cleaned up, then confusion is ironed out. From this stage on, will follow: Better understanding of Newer economics, cleaner social values and clearer spritual awakening. Let us all, we common people combine and with one mighty shove, push out all these mighty half-baked party leaders from their chairs of power. Let us all, get together and destroy these party bases and then they will all fall down. Bhandari with his heavy corruption created 5,000-6,000 super-corrupts among his elite followers. Whereas Chamling, with all his honest intentions, without realising, has today created indiscipline and 50,000-60,000 mini corrupts--by his promises of impossible dreams--to legions of disgruntled school drop-outs!! Which is worse??

With Bhandari around, there is no hope...

With Chamling around, there is some hope...

With neither around, there is more hope, in the future.

So do vote Independent in this M. P. elections.

For this, for a beginning, let us begin with good, proven, capable, honest, educated and qualified people free from party interest and elect them as Independents on common free symbols. Only when we succeed in such a way, we can start to proceed with social reconstruction. Our present regional parties



**SIKKIM INDEPENDENT FRONT**  
**The 22nd. Pukaar from the Youths of Sikkim (Part II)**  
Continued from part 1 (... What is the solution ?)

Dear Friends

Get rid of - first step - the Congress of Indira, as quick as possible. Was it not Nehruji ? Who said : " let us industrialise fast and quickly get rich." He did not succeed. But Sri Narshima Raoji might, to our future sorrow. What did Gandhi ji say : " Let us make our farmers prosperous, let us plant more and prosper slowly with the seasons." Was Gandhiji not and still correct, even today ? Our Prime Minister will make the town - rich - even richer. The towns will live off the toils of the farmers. One example : An office - goer, who does nothing year in, year out, just *year in, year out, just about* around, but push pen and carry files hither and thither, for about two to three hours daily, five days a week - he is a parasite - earns easily 100- 200 rupees per day. Whereas a farmer who toils, under sun, rain and hale, four times as much, seven days a week, year in - year out, barely earns even 20 rupees daily. No, the progress of the towns will never reach the villages, as Nehruji claimed. It will consolidate the towns people, making them richer, without doing any real work, harder than us farmers.

In this process of industrialisation for the past five decades from Nehruji - to Induji - to Raoji, India has incurred a total foreign debt BURDEN of more than 5 1/3 lakh crores. We common people now pay this foreign debt burden in INTERESTS alone about 50 crores every morning. This is about 75 N.P for every man, woman and unborn baby of 70 crores, every day. This is breakfast value of a poor man's food. What breakfast will they eat after paying this 75% interest ?

This interest totals up to about 1/3 of our total gross central tax receipts, or 1/2 of all our central revenue receipts. This aggregates to about, a staggering 20, 000 crores annually - vanished away by foreigners in interests alone. What about the original foreign CAPITAL debt repayment of about 5, 34, 000 crores? Where has all this unimaginable wealth vanished to? It did not permeate to us 50 crores poverty stricken people in the villages, or even to the poor of the towns. We are still hungry! I will positively tell you. It has gone to (1) the Himalayan regions from Ladakh to Arunachal; to the terrorists and anti-socials of our land, who are today using this accumulated unearned wealth - in the worst possible way - to slaughter off our poor Kisans, who serve in the defence forces. It has gone to, (2) the CHOSEN FEW elite industrialists in the large cities, who support this corrupt system, to continue, keep on earning in this immoral way, ad nauseam. It has gone to, (3) the crores of parasite office-people with fat salaries - for a few hours of pen pushing and file carrying, to and fro, in the towns and cities. It has gone to, (4) the multi-nationals for building, more & more eco - destroying systems. It has gone to, (5) our corrupt political leaders, gangsters and smugglers who are all rolled up into one, protecting and helping each other.

These five groups of 25% people of our country have each in their own proportion, gobbled up all of the 5,340,000,000,000 rupees (5 1/3 lakh crores ) of foreign money for the past 50 years. And now we poor of the villages and towns, the 75% majority bear the burden of sacrificing away our breakfast of 75 N. P every morning, to pay for interests alone. What about capital repayment? This is about 7, 500 rupees capital foreign debt for every individual, who do not possess even Rs 100. Even a new born baby, will be bound to this debt, by the death of another. What would you describe this as? DEBT TRAP - DEATH TRAP! the Congress party now after exhausting all their foreign sources for begging loans - which eventually only reached the CHOSEN FEW - again took back these lakhs of crores from these same CHOSEN FEW at even higher rates of interests, as internal debt liabilities, amounting to about 3 lakh crores, a little more than half of our previous total foreign debts. These clever politicians have added another 40 N. P to our breakfast bill as interest only. And a grand total capital Death trap of about 12, 000 rupees per person - payable 7,500 to foreigners and 4,500 to the CHOSEN FEW of our own kind; inheritable and transferable to every new born child - but all these wealths, finally again accruing to the super - super criminally rich-rich CHOSEN FEW.

In almost every pukaar, I tell you folks a tale. I have just remembered another. I will for now, just tell you a very small part of it. "... lost, out on a vast ocean, in the middle of nowhere; many people are languishing on a boat.

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Interview with the Editor

Fascinating Girl from Sikkim Who told us about her people, Wins Rs.500

She ran close—and when she walked into CURRENT Office, she was quickly installed a favourite for the contest by CURRENT's secretarial staff.

Ruth Karthak Lepchan's entry certainly contained a few sentences which raised eyebrows. She spoke of her belonging to "the Lepcha race which is almost extinct by now or may be very soon".

Of her people she had said, "Speaking to my people is like speaking to someone from the Kamayana. According to Indian history, the followers of Hanu-man fled from the oncoming superior warlike Aryans, south behind the Vindhyas and Sat-pura mountains; likewise my personal opinion is that my an-cesters too, the Lepcha race re-treated north into the Him-alayas."

Of the origin of her own people, the Karthaks, she had said her ancestors were the priestly ruling class. "Some 300 years ago, they were overthrown by the ancestors of the Chogyals."



Ruth Karthak Lepchan Greeting the Editor in the traditional Sikkimese way

She compared the Lepchas to the pre-Dravidians of South India. "My people still live on monkeys, squirrel flesh, snakes and cardamom fruits." She ad-

ed. "We are a people of out-dated habits. If we are not able to absorb modern ways swiftly, we may well nigh be on the way to extinction with-in a couple of hundred years from now."

When Ruth Lepchani walk-ed in, we certainly didn't think she or anybody who looked as attractive as she did, should ever be extind anywhere in the world.

Ruth was born on the 12th of May 1936, which makes her 30 years old. In the interview she explained that the Lepchas should be considered the ad-i-vasis of Sikkim. There were, according to her estimate, only 19,000 Lepchas in Sikkim, out of a population of 2,00,000. The Karthaks among them were only 500 to 1,000. Sikkim, the land on our north-eastern bor-der, measures 2,700 square miles.

At the time the Karthaks ruled, that is 300 to 325 years ago, there was no Chogyal. The Chogyals came from Tibet. Later the Chogyals came to the throne.

Kabhi-lung-chuk

There is a small high moun-tain in Sikkim, known as the Kabhi-lung-chuk. This is where, it appears to us, the battle was fought 300 years ago, which pushed the Karthak clan out of power and the Chogyal dynasty came in.

Ruth told us about the people of Sikkim, 73 per cent of whom are Nepalese, and the rest are Bhutias from Tibet. The ruling class, the Chogyals, are Bhutias. We asked her what was the full name of the present ruling Chogyal. SHE REPLIED: "Pal-ten Thundup Namgyal. The Government of India gave him the title of Major General."

We asked her what his palace was like.

Ruth: "The Palace is quite picturesque and gay. It has Himalayan masks signifying all the gods and goddesses, and out-side and inside the palace there are carvings — doors, windows, parlours are — beautifully carv-ed. Of course, it has now got modern conveniences — a flush system and all that. These im-provements the Chogyal must have made recently."

"The Chogyal is 43 years of age", she added. "He came to the throne in 1965. His father died in December 1963, I think. He was cremated after 27 days. "Do you keep bodies so long?"

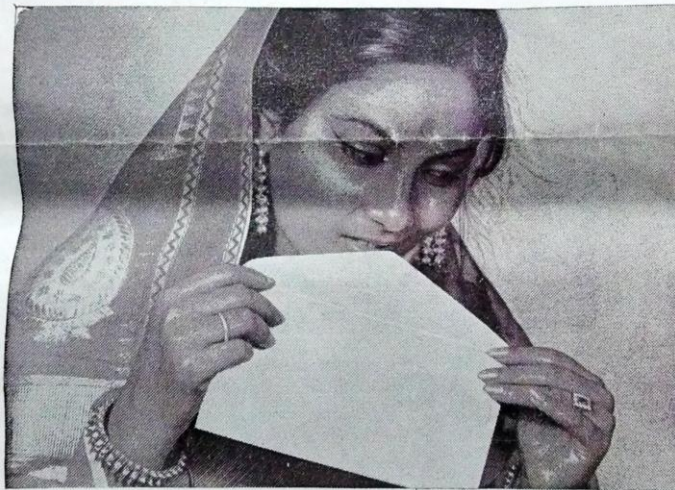
"Yes, we do. The Lamas choose an auspicious day. Then the body is burned. Till then it lies in State."

"Why did he take one year to ascend the throne?"

Ruth explained that they had to wait for an auspicious day. "Who decides these auspicious days?"

"The head Lama of the Pem-a Yonchi Monastery in South Sik-kim. Originally the Lamas came from Tibet, but now there

(Continued on page 23)



"It seems to me that ending a letter to your parents is the easiest part.

As a newly-married bride, I had so much to say that I didn't know where to begin. Now let me look at the letter again. Have I left out something?

Here we are. My new home. The gentle father-in-law always so considerate. And my two little nephews who never stop teasing me. Now listen to this:

"You always said that I'd make a terrible housewife because I finished my pocket money by the middle of the month. But my husband has more confidence in me.

Yours affectionately,



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Appendix 37. Sikkim first women in the legislative Assembly Miss Hemlata Chettri during the 1974 election; Sikkim Legislative Assembly

Sources: Book “Pioneers of Democracy in Sikkim, Profiling 32 Stalwarts of the First Sikkim Legislative Assembly 1975-1979”



Appendix 38. Princess Cocoola along with her women welfare members  
at Kaluk, North Sikkim





Appendix 39. Sources: Nita Naresh's Personal Album



Appendix 40. Member of women Council distributing some aid to women in the Villages

Sources: Collected from Mrs. Durga Lama's Personal Album.



Appendix 41. Mrs. Durga Lama Representing Sikkim at Geneva



Appendix 42. First Women Councillor from Sikkim Mrs. Durga Lama in 1975  
Sources: Personal Collection



Appendix 43. *Mun* (Lepcha Priestess) performing their rituals





Appendix 44. Nun (*Annila*) in her religious costume during the monarchy

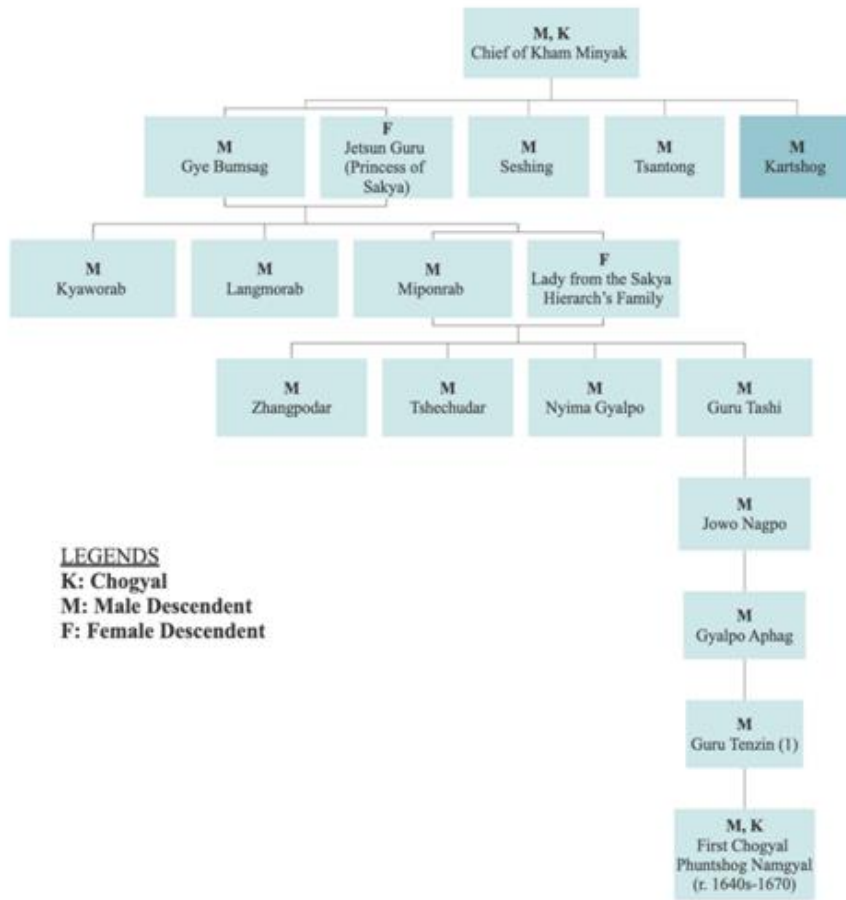
Sources: Sikkim State Archive



Appendix 45: Nuns at Present Takse Monastery, Gangtok, Sikkim (4/3/23)

Sources: Personal Collection

Lineage of the Chogyals of Sikkim (Part I)  
 From the Chief of Kham Minyak to the First of the Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal (according to the Minyak Tradition)



Appendix-46: The number of generation between Gye Bumsang and the 1<sup>st</sup> Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal is uncertain as these names were handed down through oral history.

Sources: *Royal History of Sikkim; A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal* by John A. Ardussi, Anna Balikci Denjongpo and Pre K. Sorensen



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Interviewed with Princess Hope Lezum, daughter of the Queen Hope Cook at her Residence at Gangtok, on

Interviewed with Mrs. Durga Lama, former councillor of Sikkim on 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2022.

Interview with Miss keepu Tshring Lepcha, First women Padma Shree Awardee from Sikkim on 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2022.

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