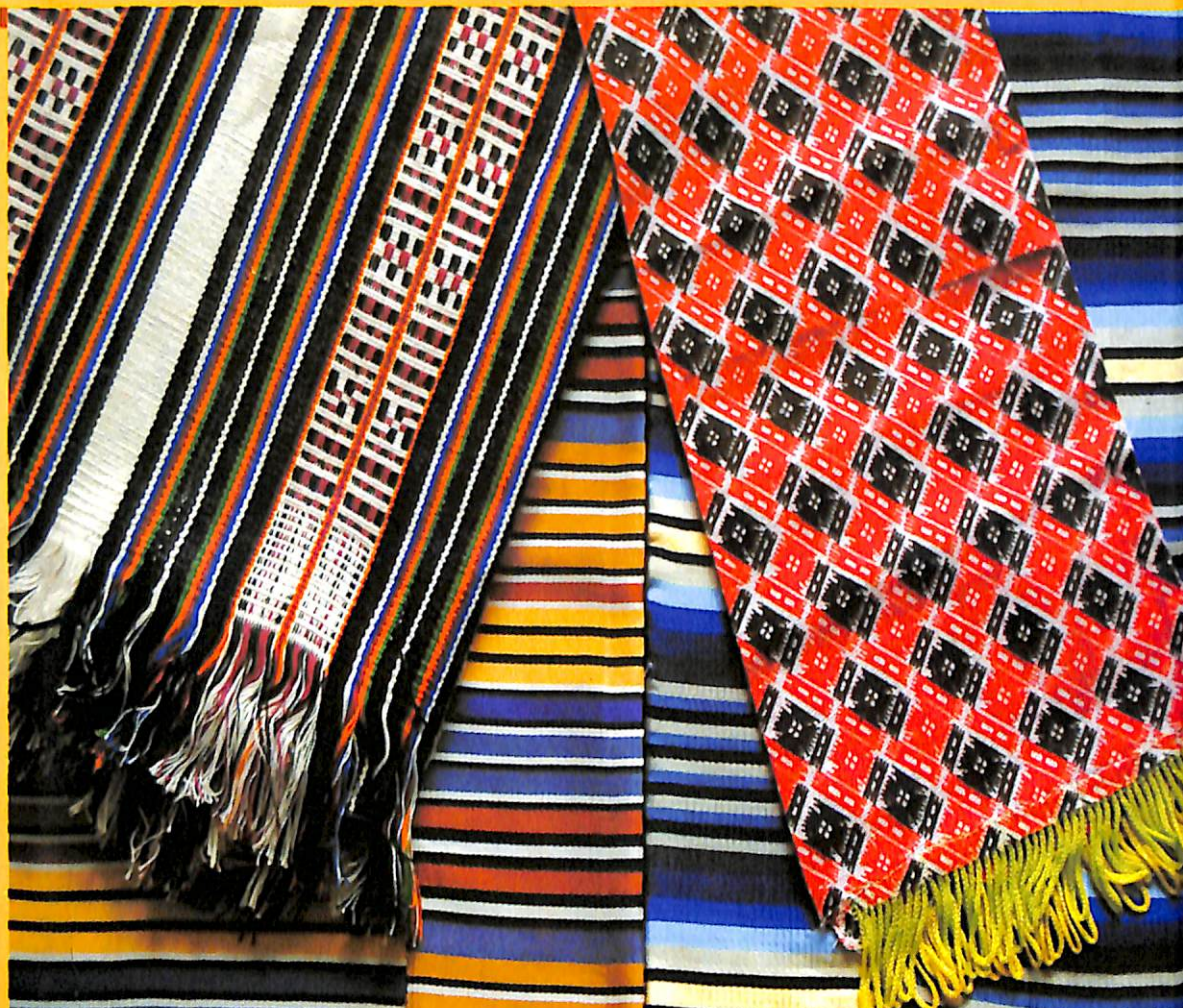


# SIKKIM

## ETHNICITY AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS

A TRIADIC PERSPECTIVE



Suresh Kumar Gurung

**Sikkim**  
**Ethnicity and Political Dynamics**  
**A Triadic Perspective**

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## PREFACE

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Way back in early 1970s as a student of Jorthang Primary School (now a Senior Secondary) I remember the way we used to line up on both sides of the main road to greet the last Chogyal of Sikkim, P.T. Namgyal. Then I hardly had any idea that Sikkim was undergoing political turmoil which would change the face of Sikkim forever. The reminiscence of my school days proved to be so strong that some thirty five years down the line Sikkim became a passion for me and a subject of further academic enquiry.

Sikkim had been a monarchical state before its merger with India in 1975. During the 333 years of monarchical rule Sikkim had been exposed to number of invasions and influences at the hands of neighbouring countries which are distinctly reflected in the composition and way of life of the people, including the nature of politico-administrative structure and governance so designed to suit the convenience of the kingdom.

After the merger, a new political arrangement hitherto unknown in Sikkim was established. The principles of democracy, rule of law and the rights of the people, etc. were introduced as a basis of governance in a society which was predominantly traditional. Apparently contradiction began owing to presence of primordial belief system and emerging modernity. Politics never happens in vacuum. The contradiction became politically viable when political and non-political organizations emerged and used the issue for their respective political and socio-cultural advantages giving space for ethnic politics. Two important arguments run through out the book. The first argument is that any study of ethnic politics in Sikkim must involve historical perspective. The second argument emphasizes on the involvement of the entire political process, including state policies, for such a perspective facilitates inclusion of non-state political actors in the analysis.

In course of writing this book I met many people from different walks of life and without their support and cooperation this book certainly could not have seen the light of the day. I have the pleasure of particularly

expressing my heartfelt gratitude to my teacher, Sir Dyutis Chakrabarti, Reader in the Department of Political Science, University of North Bengal, with whom I spent years discussing the subject. I am also deeply indebted to Dr. H.P.Chhetri, for his unflinching support and providing relevant information.

I should also put on record the names of various personalities, including political leaders, office bearers of various socio-welfare organizations, government officials and private individual for their much needed support and cooperation in the process of collection of primary information and for valuable suggestions. A few of them deserve special mention: Late Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa (Ex. Chief Minister), Shri N.B.Bhandari (Ex. Chief Minister), Shri C.D.Rai, Late K.C.Pradhan, Shri B.B.Gurung, Shri R.C.Poudyal, Shri Rasaily, Shri Bharat Basnet, Shri Birbal Limboo (Tamling), T. T. Bhutia, Shri Narboo Pintso Bhutia, Shri Meghraj Gurung, Shri N.T. Lepcha, Shri P.K.Pradhan, Mrs. D.K.Bhandari, and many others. Shri Bhaskar Basnet, Shri R.K.Shrestha and Mrs. Anna Balikci Denzongpa deserve special thanks for providing me file-full of rare documents, magazines and materials of pre-merger era and old issues of Bulletin of Tibetology respectively.

I must not also forget to mention here the cooperation extended by the staff and authorities of the Sikkim Archives, the Community Library, the Institute of Tibetology, the Record Section of the Home Department, Department of Law, Directorate of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation (earlier Bureau of Economics and Statistics), the Information and Public Relations office, Department of Industry, Department of Tourism, Assembly Secretariat, Land Revenue Department in Sikkim. Special thanks is also due for the staff and officials of the Central Library, NBU, Centre for Himalayan Studies, NBU, Deshbandhu District Library of Darjeeling and National Library, Calcutta. I am also deeply indebted to Shri Premji of Kunal Books, New Delhi, for wishing to publish this book in the first instance itself.

Finally, I owe a lot to my parents, my wife Subhadra and our loving daughter Stuttee for supporting me ungrudgingly right from the beginning of the work and making this endeavour a successful one.

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## INTRODUCTION

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### BACKGROUND

Ever since the appearance of the term 'Ethnicity' in English language in 1950, the concept of ethnicity has not been only the subject of diverse interpretations but also lacked universally acknowledged definition. An early meaning of the term refers to either a racial or cultural group or even a minority in an 'exotic' cultural form. There is also a reference of inclusion of 'others' i.e. different from one's own group, and 'migrant people' within the ambit of the term.

Glazer and Moynihan (1975) consider any group of distinct culture and origin, including the majority, as an ethnic group. While studying the question of cultural-racial identity and mobilization process in the USA, they view ethnicity as a distinct category of social process, social differentiation, articulation and social mobilization. From this viewpoint cultural-racial identity or ethnic identity may be looked upon as a universal social phenomenon like the 'class'. G.De.Vos and L.R. Ross (1975) also subscribe to this viewpoint. Similarly, Clifford Geertz (1971) observes that the primordial ties continue to influence public action notwithstanding the establishment of a modern secular state. This is so because competing loyalties within a modern state i.e., class, party, business, union, professional loyalties etc., are considered feeble as compared to primordial loyalties. Today, ethnicity is conceived as a social phenomenon embracing anything and

everything of individual belonging to a particular cultural community, whether minority or majority, host or immigrant. Therefore, all cultural-linguistic movements which emphasize common history, territory and aspirations may be considered as ethnic movements.

One of the most comprehensive accounts of ethnicity and ethnic political mobilization is represented by the effort of J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith (1996). Hutchinson and Smith offer a workable definition, analytical framework and different manifestations of ethnic politics along with valuable excerpts from the books of various authors. They, in their work, have attempted to classify researches on ethnic movements into two categories: instrumentalist argument and primordialist viewpoint or simply primordialism. Hutchinson and Smith's classification helps one to deal with the vast literature on the theme of ethnic political mobilization.

Primordialism, as various researchers suggest, however, is not something which is fixed; it is rather changing, revising, negotiating as per the circumstances, demands and interests. Jack Eller and Reed Coughlan (1993) argue that primordialism is a bankrupt concept so far as analysis and description of ethnicity is concerned. They continue, if primordialism is widened, as most writers do, to refer emotion, it would only mean unnecessary and unfortunate burden in ethnic analysis because 'emotion' cannot be primordial but, at best, it is sociogenesis. The counterpoint is that Eller and Coughlan have failed to understand that 'attachments' or 'ties' to objects necessarily postulates belief (here emotion or affect) about those objects followed by cognizance in order to become objects of attachments (Grosby: 1994). Another recent but radical primordial argument is found in P. Van Dan Berghe (1995) who believes that social groups are bonded together due to mechanisms of 'Nepotism' (of favour) and 'Inclusive fitness' (fit for inclusion in a biological social group).

The Instrumentalist version, which is comparatively richer in terms of publications, on the other, consider ethnicity as social, political and cultural resource used by various groups and ethnic

mobilization process as a means for gaining political and economic goal. The arguments of D.L Harowitz (1985) and L.A.Despres (1975) belong to such variety. While, Despres views ethnic mobilization as a convenient tool for asserting or reasserting monopoly over resources; Harowitz links it with keeping of group's ethnic honor compared to others (i.e. of backward & forward). Similarly, for Brass (1991) conflict among elites for resources is a major cause behind ethnic mobilization. According to Barth (1969) it is the existence of 'set of prescriptions' (do's) and 'proscriptions' (don'ts) imposed by rulers to maintain control over a given society which fuels ethnic mobilization. Apart from these, Michael Hechter (1975) and B.Anderson (1991) consider ethnic differences, mobilization and national movements as inevitable corollaries of a particular type of economic development and domination in the age of capitalism. Hechter's analysis of the Celtic fringe of Great Britain indicates that modern capitalist market system has historically evolved a social-division of labour. As a result of this social spatial division of labour, different types of cultures have gradually emerged in different regions including the Celtic Welsh. Cultural identities and cultural conflicts are thus related to a particular type of division of labour and economic domination.

An interesting argument is found in Walker Connor (1994) who equates ethnic-cultural mobilization with growth of nationalism. For him, ethnic development is almost like national development. Hence, Connor prefers to use the term ethno-nationalism instead of just ethnicity to address cultural-territorial issues. He emphasizes that the source of ethno-national loyalty cannot be explained in terms of either rationality or tangible interest. It is essentially affective and this sentiment is inherent in present societies. He, along with A.D.Smith (1971), shares the view that nationalism is a special type of consciousness, different from patriotism.

The cultural-territorial mobilizations and efforts to conceptualize them are not new in India. However, owing to the nature of mobilizations and factors influencing variation, scholars



have taken refuge to different terminological creations among which the terms like 'Nation' or 'Ethnicity' or 'Regionalism' are most commonly used. For instance, M.R. Barnett (1976) prefers to use 'Cultural Nationalism' to explain the Dravidic Movement in Tamilnadu. For her, cultural markers are the sole objective factor which determines the existence and non-existence of a nationality. Amalendu Guha (1980) in the context of Assam describes such cultural-territorial movements as 'Little-Nationalism. The term little-nationalism owes its origin to the sociological innovations like little community and great community. Little nationalism is like sub-nationalism which operates within the framework of great-nationalism. This is an attempt at demonstrating a dual identity or divided loyalty; one for linguistic cultural community and another for the nation-state. From this sense little nationalism may be viewed as a component or a reflection of the greater nationalism i.e. loyalty to the nation-state. The two, however, may come into conflict under certain circumstances.

Few other scholars have tried to understand the problem from the point of view of ethnicity. Urmila Phadnis (1989) and R.A. Schermenhon (1978) belong to this variety. A combined argument of both the instrumentalism and primordiality is presented by M. Weiner (1978). To him cultural nationalism is the result of conflict between the migrants and the natives over the resources. Weiner argues that cultural-nationalism or nativism in Assam, which attempts to legitimize the claim of the 'Bhumiputras' and exclusion of the migrants, essentially is an ethnic movement which demands resource distribution on the basis of cultural identity. P.R. Brass (1991) relates such cultural-mobilization with the elite conflict in a plural society.

Another way of describing such cultural-territorial mobilization in India is 'regionalism'. Regional movement indicates search for an intermediate control system for the purposes of resource sharing and control over local or intermediate level of administration. Iqbal Narain and A. Majeed (1984) and Sajal Basu (1992) identify such movements as regionalism alongside the presence of certain socio-economic reasons. This viewpoint

emphasizes territorial identity rather than the cultural one. S.K. Chaube (1973) treats ethnic problem in the north-eastern states of India as a manifestation of clashes between the modern values (nation-state) and primordial loyalties (i.e. loyalties towards clan, tribes, caste, race, language, tradition etc.) and emphasizes that any attempt to understanding the problem and finding reconciliation thereof must be based on the historical perspective. Authors like Susana B.C. Devalle (1992) and Dipankar Gupta (1997) are examples of consideration of such movements as a consequence of a historical context. Gupta argues that ascriptive collective identities (cultural markers) in themselves are not always sufficient for ethnic mobilization but it undergoes context dependent transformation and mutation. Gupta points out that the Sikhs identity has developed in relation to its opposition, i.e., Hindu identity. But the former has also developed in relation to its perception of a government which discriminated the Sikhs. Such perception about the governmental context legitimizes mobilization on the basis of Sikh cultural identity. Gupta advocates for inclusion of the state or state policies as a variable, but actually the entire political process should be considered as a significant factor, for such a perspective facilitates the inclusion of non-state political actors in the analysis. While emphasizing the historical context in which a particular identity i.e., the Jharkhandi identity, has gradually evolved, Devalle equates development of ethnic identity with development of a discourse.

Paul R. Brass (1991), in his later work, argues that conditions for identity formation among various groups or emergence of self-conscious communities in a particular situation and place can be linked with the alliance strategy and policies that the groups dominating the state structure follow in relation to ethnic or cultural groups. In other words, he portrays the State in three different forms: a) State as a resource over which groups engage in struggle for greater share of it; b) State as a distributor of resources which is nearly always done differentially or unequally; c) State, particularly in developing societies, acts as a promoter of new values and threat to locally dominant landed and religious elites. Thus,

gaining control over the State becomes elite's first priority and one who is successful must either suppress the rival elites or establish collaborative alliances with other elites to maintain dominance. When elites in conflict lack bureaucratic apparatus to compete effectively, they resort to use symbolic resources in the struggle. And when elites in conflict belong to different cultural, linguistic, or religious groups, they use these ascriptive differences as a means for mobilization. Thus, for Brass, ethnic conflict or mobilization arises when elites in conflict manipulate ethnic symbols for exercising control over state power or when the state dominated by particular elite pursues policies or affirmative actions favouring its own group or groups as against the other, it may precipitate a sense of discrimination or deprivation among those who are denied benefits. Thus, nature of elites controlling the state apparatus and the policy strategies it chooses to pursue becomes a potential source of ethnic politics.

An important analysis of ethnic mobilization for political purpose is found in the writings of Kanchan Chandra (2004). According to her, the success of ethnic parties is a natural by-product of the process by which ethnic identities become politically salient. The political entrepreneurs who float ethnic parties in ethnically divided societies find a ready-made clientele..... waiting to be laid. In the context of Sikkim, it may be safely said that ethnic political parties have seldom succeeded in capturing political power in the post merger period but since public sector is the major provider of resources (jobs and services) under which patronage democracy generally prosper, the analysis may be especially helpful in understanding reasons for ineffectiveness of the opposition parties in the state.

A researcher may encounter several problems when it comes to publication on Sikkim. The historical accounts of the pre-Bhutia regime are almost non-existent and have been reduced to mere oral or folk stories. Some materials of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Sikkim still present difficulty in determining what is empirically viable and what is mythical. In other words, there is a dearth of secular publications on the 17<sup>th</sup> century political history of Sikkim, in

general, and on ethnic politics and/or race relations and the way such ethnic relations influence politics, in particular, though the actual political process represent frequent attempts at mobilizing people around the issues like Sikkimese – non-Sikkimese relations, rights of the minority Lepcha-Bhutia communities etc. Though such issues are present in the process of mass mobilization yet such ethnicised political issues are seldom properly attended. However, insightful discussions are available in historical and sociological accounts.

Risley's "Gazetteer of Sikkim" (1928/1993) is one of the earliest publications on the history and population of Sikkim. Apart from the discussion on the nature of governance under various rulers of Namgyal dynasty, it provides interesting reading on the purpose of the British involvement in Sikkim and adoption of ways and means, particularly racial and religious, to maintain its political control over the affairs of Sikkim and maximize economic benefits. Talking about the modus operandi of the British officials, Risley writes, "here (Sikkim) also religion will play a leading part. In Sikkim, as in India, Hinduism will assuredly cast out Buddhism, and the praying-wheel of the Lama will give place to the sacrificial implement of the Brahman.....Thus, race and religion, the prime movers of the Asiatic world, will settle the Sikkim difficulty for us, in their own way. We have only to look on and see that the operation of these causes is not artificially hindered by the interference of Tibet and Nepal." Similar accounts on the history and population of Sikkim can also be found in the writings and travelogues of many British officers among which J.D.Hooker (1854/1969), J.W.Edgar (1874/2005), Richard Temple (1875), Colman Macaulay (1885/1977/2005), J.C.White (1909/1999) are interesting for reading.

Apart from C.J. Morris's "Living with the Lepchas: A book about the Sikkim Himalayas" (1938), Geoffrey Gorer's "The Lepchas of Sikkim" (1938/1996) represent some of the pioneering works on the Lepcha community of Sikkim. Gorer believes that the confinement of the Lepchas in the Dzongu reserve area had far reaching consequences on the religious, educational and

economic backwardness of the community. A.R. Fonning's 'Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe' (1987) is an inside view about the Lepchas. Tracing the cultural history of the Lepchas, the author provides valuable information about the Christian and Buddhist influence that were brought to bear on the tribe, and how the Lepcha habitat, "Mayal Lyang", fell into the hands of immigrants from other areas. K.P. Tamsang's 'The Unknown and Untold Reality about the Lepchas' (1983) highlights the perversion appearing in the cultural history of the Lepchas at the hands of both foreign and Indian writers. R.K. Sprigg, also called 'Lepcha Saheb' is perhaps the only living Englishman today who possesses an excellent knowledge on the Lepcha language, literature and history. His recent publication "Shedding Some Light on the History, Language and Literature of the Lepchas" (2005) provides some of the rarest information with documentary evidences about the history and life of the Lepcha community during the early nineteenth century.

The existence of multiple ethnic groups in Sikkim is as old as the Namgyal dynasty of Sikkim but mobilization of these ethnic categories for political purposes began only during the late 1940's. First hand information regarding arousal of ethnic consciousness and political manipulation of it at the party or organizational level can be found in Basnet's work, "Sikkim-A Short Political History" (1974). Basnet writes that with the emergence of the Sikkim National Party in 1948 the use of ethnic symbols such as race, culture, religion etc. for political purposes also began.

Another oft-quoted article on Sikkim is "A Plural Society in Sikkim: A Study of the Interrelations of Lepchas, Bhotias and Nepalis" by Chie Nakane (1966). On the basis of her field work carried out during February and March, 1955, in the vicinity of three monastarial hamlets of Gangtok namely Pabyuk, Phodong and Phensung, she provides an interesting views on the belief, way of life and inter-community relationship among the three communities of Sikkim, though the observation derived from a particular area, i.e. Pabyuk village, still poses difficulty in accepting the same as that of the whole of Sikkim. Her observation

on the Nepalis gives an impression that either she was blatantly oblivious to the then prevailing socio-political structure of Sikkim or she was trying to avoid them intentionally. At the outset it must be emphasized that not all of the castes and communities which now constitute Nepalis were immigrants or coolies or farm labourers. Furthermore, Nakane also seems to be unaware of the fact that the Limboos or Tsongs, Mangers etc. were living in Sikkim long before the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim.

B.S. Das (1983), who served as the Chief Executive Officer in Sikkim from 1973-74, argues that the ethnic melting pot situation was due to Sikkim's territorial contiguity with three international borders (Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan) and as well as competition prevailing among the major groups over economic and political resources of the State. He also explains that the changing political scenario in Tibet and Chogyal's invariable demand for independent status for Sikkim hastened the process for merger. Rao's (1978) observation is also of the same kind. On the other hand N. Sen Gupta (1985) and host of other writers consider ethnic divide in Sikkim as a consequence of the differential treatment meted out to the subjects at the hands of the ruling elite. Apart from this, the book also explains as to how disillusion prevail among the elites after the merger and in a parliamentary democratic set up.

Datta Ray's 'Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim' (1984) and Rustomji's 'Sikkim – A Himalayan Tragedy (1987) are somewhat written as a biographical account of the last Chogyal, P.T.Namgyal. Both were personal friends of the Chogyal and, thus, both of them spoke against the merger though, owing to their profession, Datta Ray advances the concept of class conflict between the Lepcha Kazis and the Royal family/Bhutia Kazis, while Rustomji rely on bureaucratic maneuver of the Indian civil servants in order to explain the issue of merger.

An aspect of culture and history of Sikkim can be found in the writings of George Kotturan (1983), S.K.Jha & Mishra (1984), and P.K.Bhattacharya (1984). While Kotturan highlights on the political, administrative and economic set-up of the people of

Sikkim, Jha & Mishra focuses on the evolution of various organs of the government in the light of the changing institutional framework from a protectorate to a full-fledged State of India. Bhattacharya's book, though is a study of coinage of Sikkim, highlights the contribution of the Newars' in the economic development of Sikkim in earlier days.

'Politics of Sikkim- A Sociological Study' by A.C.Sinha (1975) is a sociological investigation into the world of political elite in Sikkim. The book has three segments – the first segment deals with the political evolutions, presence of various social forces with specialized interests and pursuits, The Second segment analyses perception of the elites in Sikkim in the context of socio-economic and political parameters. His findings suggest that religious elite (i.e. the Lamas) was not only politically salient but also in many ways responsible for propagation of communal feeling in the society. The third segment deals with the dilemma regarding adaptation and re-structuring of the power hierarchy in a new democratic atmosphere in post-1947 era and institutional accomplishment.

T.B.Subba's 'Dynamics Of A Hill Society' (1989) is another sociological study on the Nepalīs of Sikkim and Darjeeling hills. It attempts to understand caste-class relationships in view of the growing occupational mobility and effects of modernization among the Nepalīs. In his 'Politics of Culture' (1999) Subba attempts to unravel the genesis of Kirata politics in Sikkim and Nepal, particularly the identity consciousness emerging among the three Kirata tribes namely Limboos (Tsong), Khambus (Rais) and Yakhas (Dewans). He shares his view with Michael Foucault (1980) and considers Kirata consciousness for identity as "insurrection of subjugated knowledge". He believes that political transformation in both Sikkim and Nepal has been crucial behind the surge of Kirata identity though due to prevalence of overlapping identities and regional variations within the larger Kirata groups, he is uncertain about the future of the Kirata politics. Another ethnographic detail on various castes and communities of Sikkim is found in K.S. Singh's (Ed.) work 'Sikkim' (1993). It

is the first ever-ethnographic survey by the Anthropological Survey of India under the project entitled, "People of India". This comprehensive work offers detail information on the biological, religio-linguistic and cultural profile of all the three ethnic communities of Sikkim, including other sub-cultural groups within the larger Nepali community. Sikkim Study Series, volume III & V, also provides interesting discussions on the linguistic and cultural profile of various communities of Sikkim and government's interest in the protection and promotion of the languages and cultures of these communities.

The role of ethnicity in determining political outcome in Sikkim cannot be denied. An analytical presentation of interplay between ethnic forces and political alignment during the 1979 election is found in Urmila Phadnis's 'Ethnic dimension of Sikkimese Politics-The 1979 election' (1980). The author has highlighted on the significant implication of emerging elite and their ethnic backgrounds in the process of readjusting power relations. In similar vein, S.K.Chaube (1987) provides valuable discussion on the effect of various ethnic and social forces in the post-1947 political development in Sikkim and concludes that factional politics has overshadowed ethnic alignment in new democratic setup. He suggests that though politics has gained stability, political parties have not.

Since the beginning of institutionalized politics of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to till present time, maintenance of ethnic equilibrium has been the primary political goal upon which rested the success and failure of the rulers/leaders/political elite in Sikkim. The question of power and privilege has given way to the issues of equal rights (economic, social and political) and of opportunity which, to a large extent, depended upon the ingenuity of political leaders to maintain ethnic balance without harming or causing to harm the interests of other ethnic communities and endangering prospect for development of the State. A discussion of this variation is found in Dhamala's article "Ethnicity and Development in Sikkim". On the basis of various social indices she contends that the leadership pattern has changed in Sikkim with the emergence of young,



secular and educated politicians, though ethnic representation continue to be a thorny problem. In yet another article, 'Struggle for Identity Maintenance: The Bhutias of Sikkim' (1999) she maintains that the transformation in the status of the Bhutias from a socially and politically dominant group before 1975 to that of a subordinate in the post-merger period has created an identity crisis among the Bhutias which is manifested in the formation of various socio-political organization.

J.N.Kazi's 'Inside Sikkim – Against the Tide' (1993) is a journalistic view on the political development of Sikkim, particularly during the 14yrs rules of the Chief Minister Mr. N.B.Bhandari. The book is an attempt to highlight the political conditions of Sikkim during the period and exposes the hollowness of the democratic system. This book is resourceful in terms of perception of the ethnic Bhutias on various issues of socio-political importance. Pahalman Subba's "Who Ruined Sikkim" (1998) also belongs to the same category.

Although the demand for merger of Sikkim and Darjeeling is not new, the re-emergence of the demand in recent past has acquired lot of attention among the authors. Fred Pinn's 'The Road of Destiny-Darjeeling Letters - 1839' (1986) is one such historical account on the transfer of Darjeeling by the Chogyal of Sikkim. Taking clue from Pinn's work, S.B.Wangyal, (2002) explains the extent of insincerity on the part of Major Lloyd. He argues that the Deed of Darjeeling Grant was neither binding nor was it signed on 25 February, 1835.

Though the issue of merger of Sikkim and Darjeeling is not the subject of the book, he, however, believes that the social peculiarities together with elements of proximity of the people of Darjeeling and Sikkim are such that a good number of people believe, and even fear, that the two areas will one day amalgamate to form a bigger and a more viable state. Relevant documents regarding Darjeeling and Sikkim can be found in R.Moktan's, 'Sikkim: Darjeeling - Compendium of Documents' (2004).

Among the edited books containing articles on Sikkim, mentioned must be made of 'The Himalaya: Aspects of Change (1981) edited by F.S.Hall, 'The Himalayas: Profiles of Modernization and Adaptation' (1985) edited by S.K.Chaube, 'Eastern Himalayas: Environment and Economy (1986) edited by R.L.Sarkar and M.P.Lama, 'The Himalayan Heritage' (1987) edited by M.K.Raha, 'Religion and Society in the Himalayas' (1991) edited by T.B.Subba & Karubaki Datta, 'Sikkim – Society, Polity, Economy & Environment' (1994) edited by M.P.Lama, provide introspective views and valuable information about Sikkim and its people.

All these publications on society and politics of the State of Sikkim constitute a valuable information-store on which the present work relies heavily to understand the process of evolution of emergence of cultural-territorial or ethnic politics in Sikkim. However, the present work is different from previous publications in the sense that the present study addresses the issue of interrelations between political process and emergence of cultural-ethnic politics directly.

### ***The Problem:***

A steady growth in cultural-territorial identity and mobilization based on it has been seen in different parts of the world since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such cultural-territorial movements have been described or conceptualized with reference to different terms such as ethnicity, tribalism, cultural-nationalism, internal colonialism, regionalism etc. The lack of unanimity among scholars may be due to the nature of mobilization itself as well as divergent disciplinary background of scholars. However, among various factors, a great deal of primacy is assigned to economic reasons and the issue of cultural identity. Sometimes, the theme of elite manipulation of economic and cultural issues is emphasized and sometimes discussions on such cultural-territorial movements expose multiple dimensions of such mobilizations which are generally conceptualized as ethnic mobilizations. The above dimensions of cultural-territorial identity and mobilization included changing

nature of cultural identity, structure of identity, political-economic foundations ranging from relative deprivation to internal colonialism of such movements, symbols and pattern of mobilization etc. Very often researchers also focus on integrative / disintegrative role of such movements.

India, being a multi-racial and multi-linguistic country, is also not altogether untouched by the problem of cultural-territorial identity and movements. In fact such identity related issues and mobilizations have been a part and parcel of Indian politics since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The demand for linguistic states after the independence also constituted a significant part of Indian politics. However, after the 1980s there has been a phenomenal growth in the number of occurrences of such movements and very often demands for political autonomy and secession have been advanced as an integral part of the movement. Attempts have been made to conceptualize this cultural-territorial mobilization of a culturally self-defined community in India in various ways among which ethnicity, cultural-nationalism, regionalism, elite manipulation, incompatibility between modernity and primordial loyalties are considered significant. Sometimes the historical context and development of a typical cultural discourse have been also highlighted as factors contributing towards the emergence of such cultural-territorial movements.

The cultural assertion as well as redistribution of resources, conflicts over cultural identity as well as over resources, is not free of power distribution. Assertion as well as promotion of a particular cultural identity needs the support of authority without which cultural protection is not conceivable. Similarly, redistribution of resources in modern times requires changes in the legal system, policies and decisions by the political authority. Hence it is impossible to separate culture and resource distribution from the concept of power and domination.

Another basic paradox underlying ethnic-cultural mobilization is that it intends to accommodate the old notion of community space and community rights with modern democratic values like equality

and individual rights. Political parties and organizations which raise the issue of community rights actually also deny those same rights to other communities. Often such denials are legitimized in the name of territorial claim of indigenous people. Indigeneness is not substantiated with reference to history but is done with the aid of interpretations / reinterpretation of history by the majority or those who are in power. It is also to be noted that the whole idea of individual rights guaranteed by the constitution or legal system is paid scant attention in the face of assertion of community rights. Such denials (rights) cannot be completed through the process of social or economic reconstruction but they evolve through political mobilization, bargaining and finally decisions.

The substitution of individual rights by community rights is done through a particular type of political articulation and political mobilization. Therefore, political organizations play a critical role in moderating as well as aggravating ethnic-cultural consciousness and demands.

Sikkim, which was a tiny Himalayan kingdom tucked between China and India till its merger with the latter in 1975, is at present one of the smallest states of North East India. Sikkimese society consists of multiple cultural-racial groups like Nepalis, Lepchas, Bhutias etc. of which Nepalis constitute the majority. Together with them, there exist some smaller groups like Sherpas, Tsongs (Limboos) etc. who are identified as Nepalis in Sikkim.

Sikkim, like other parts of India, has been invaded by attempts at cultural-territorial mobilization or popularly known as ethnic mobilization since the introduction of parliamentary democracy after the merger with India. Before the merger, the ruling Namgyal dynasty belonging to a minority Bhutia racial community was ruling over subjects belonging to different racial-cultural communities; and this helped the Bhutia community to acquire a predominant position though members of other communities also occupied important positions in the monarchical administration. Cultural-territorial mobilizations or ethnic mobilizations were not altogether unknown under the monarchical form of government

in Sikkim. Incidents of Lepcha or Nepali, including the Tsongs (Limboos), protests against the Bhutia dominations did occur, but such mobilizations though had community orientation were not cultural or ethnic mobilizations in the modern sense; they were primarily directed against the state or its agents. Attempts at cultural-ethnic mobilization became discernible with the emergence of political parties during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were political parties like Sikkim National Party, formed in April, 1948, which articulated interests of a particular community. Such community interests, however, were never presented as the interest of any particular community. Rather such community interests were aggregated and presented as the general interests of Sikkim. Even when the general subjects of whom Nepalis constituted the majority, protested against the discriminatory and oppressive rule of the Bhutia king and elites, the protest movement was not known as the movement by the Nepalis. Rather it was the grievances surfaced in the form of movement for introduction of democracy in Sikkim.

After the merger Parliamentary democracy and notions of equality, individual freedom, and modern legal system have been introduced. It was hoped that the cultural differences and ethnic politics would be gradually marginalized with slow permeation of notions of individual rights and equality. But, contrary to the general expectations, cultural or ethnic consciousness and the political actions based on cultural or ethnic identity have become more frequent. New political parties and organizations have been formed with community oriented claims and demands, and are competing with each other for the ethnic space. A cursory look at the manifestoes of various political parties since 1977 generally reflect attempts at mobilization of ethnic categories by raising community oriented issues either in isolation (i.e. emphasizing a particular community interests) or in conglomerate form (i.e. common issues concerning more than one group). By raising community oriented issues political parties have facilitated the process of articulation or aggregation as well as legitimization of demands of various cultural categories.

Apparently, cultural and /or ethnic mobilizations process in Sikkim cannot be regarded as an expected development. As mentioned earlier that Sikkim does not have a long history of conflict among different communities though some communities were discriminated against. There are evidences showing cultural exchanges and inter-community marriages among the members of the three major communities in the past though it was not as common as in the present day.

The Bhutias and Lepchas are Buddhists while Nepalis are predominantly Hindus (certain sections of the Nepalis, particularly Tamangs, Gurungs and Shakyas are Buddhists). But there is no history of perpetual religious conflict or a history of ethnic violence and social conflict among the groups apart from the resentment expressed sporadically against the rulers and their agents. In other words, history does not appear to be a strong basis for emergence of ethnic or cultural politics in Sikkim. Yet cultural-ethnic politics did not only emerge, it is sustained and proliferated further in Sikkim in recent past.

The growth in caste/community consciousness among different groups and sub-groups has led to mushrooming of several caste/community organizations with claims and demands of their own. The Lepcha organizations like Rangjyong Mutanchi Rong-Ong Shejum (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association) demands for fifty percent reservation in the State Assembly, education and public employment, legal protection of their land, separate delimitation etc. The Bhutia dominated organizations like Survival Sikkimese and Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee emphasize for restoration of rights and privileges of the community which they had been enjoying before the merger. On the other hand, the Nepali organization like Gorkha Apex Committee has demanded for equal treatment at par with the Lepchas and Bhutias, and extension of 'creamy layer' concept to exclude members of royal family and Kazis from the tribal list. Thus, when political mobilization takes place, appeals to these caste/community organizations naturally take place and the community centered demands and grievances are also represented in the political arena.

An interesting 'spill-over effect' of such proliferation of cultural-racial-ethnic mobilization by major communities like Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas, is that certain smaller communities which were considered as sub-groups of larger communities have also started to assert their distinct language, culture and identity. For instance, the Tsongs (Limboos) are acknowledged as a Nepali tribe in adjacent district of Darjeeling, but in Sikkim the Tsongs now claim to be a separate community with their own language and culture, distinct from the Nepali community. Contrarily, the Bhutias in recent times have demanded for exclusion of Sherpas from the Bhutia fold though the Sherpas for generations are acknowledged as Bhutias. All these developments are indicative of a sharp increase in community consciousness and community identity in which redefinition of ethnic boundary of the community and community's name is also underway.

Thus, the matter of determination of ethnic boundary is still flexible and in a dyadic stage in Sikkim. The prevalence of different layers of identities and their political uses poses difficulty in carrying out an enquiry into identity categorization because what is a sub-category from one perspective is regarded as an ethnic category from another. This attempt at creating political-civil identity on the basis of ethnic-cultural affiliation has been a major issue in Sikkimese politics, though the trend towards politicization of ethnicity is universal.

Another aspect of ethnic cultural politics in Sikkim is that community oriented demands or attempts at community oriented political mobilization is common but ethnic parties, however, are not electorally successful. Besides, ethnic organizations with very aggressive community oriented approach also have so far failed to capture popular imagination. For example, the Nepalis have so far not raised any serious demand for abolition of Bhutia-Lepcha reserved seats in the State Assembly except for reorganization on the basis of population. Similarly, aggressive Bhutia organizations like Survival Sikkimese or Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee also could not become electorally or politically very effective. Thus, ethnic politics is there because demands and issues are raised

and even manipulated by non-ethnic parties, but aggressive ethnic mobilization is not effective.

The process of political development in Sikkim, therefore, presents a problem of understanding. Sikkimese society, conspicuous by the absence of a long history of ethnic or religious conflict, has increasingly become subject to assertive cultural or ethnic mobilization despite the introduction of parliamentary democracy and individual oriented legal system after its merger with India. Community and ethnic assertiveness of recent years is demonstrated by rediscovery of hitherto neglected ethnic names and boundaries. Political parties and organizations also are actively participating in this process, though these organizations defend individual rights and modern political institutions as well. Such attempts at combining traditional community identity and modern legal-political institutions themselves demand special attention.

Political parties in a democratic setup are expected to represent public interest rather than segmented or exclusive interest though due to ideological differences polarization of opinion is possible. From the structural-functional viewpoint, various social organizations or interest groups are expected to articulate interests and issues whereas political parties are involved in interest aggregation. But in case of India, or Sikkim, such clear divisions of spheres of activities are non-existence.

Thus, by articulating and aggregating demands and aspirations of a group of people, political parties and organizations mobilize people in support of the issue or demand, and generate consciousness regarding the demands. Thus, through political parties and organizations, aspirations and demands of cultural-linguistic groups are expressed and legitimized.

Similarly, it is generally acknowledged that norms of politics are not fixed. In an ethnically divided society or societies, political parties often rely on social bonds, community sentiments, and symbols in order to garner popular support. In this way the relationship between the political parties and social/ethnic organizations is established for mutual benefit - political parties



use community or ethnic category as vote bank while ethnic groups use political parties to legitimize group interest and influence the decision making process.

The political institution like State may also precipitate formation of identities among various categories through equalizing policies like “affirmative actions” or “protective discriminations”. In fact, in a country like India certain equalizing policies seem inevitable and the State may do so, according to Brass (1991), for variety of reasons such as: (a) the State may be controlled by a class or ethnic group or some combination of classes and / or ethnic groups, whose members the State chooses to favour; or (b) the dominant group may seek support among certain categories in the population and may adopt an ‘equalitarian’ policy for that purpose; or (c) the State may choose a particular equalitarian strategy for its own administrative convenience. Both post-industrial and contemporary developing societies represent these features but mere formulation of equalizing policies may not precipitate organization or mobilization among all relevant categories. On the contrary, it is the selection of particular leadership, elites and organizations within the ethnic group by the government or state as instruments or channels of distribution of government patronage. The leadership or the elites often initiate policies, slogans, or particular patterns of mobilization which aggravate ethnic cleavages. The selection criteria itself is based on the criteria of reliability and high level of political loyalty (Rothschild: 1981). In such a case, not only the government / state tends to work or shape policies on the advice of such selected leaders or elites, but, sometimes a particular leadership within a group may even gain control over an entire area of government policy and the institutions associated with it and use them as means for consolidating the leadership of their own community. The domination of a particular group / groups in state affairs may result in disproportionate distribution or sharing of state resources causing resentment among others who have been denied benefits. Thus, due to its own political compulsions and composite elements, the state is unlikely to be a harbinger of distributive justice. Its

policies may benefit some groups and communities but it may as well be a potential threat to others. It is this perceived threat or denial which strengthens community consciousness in both categories (the favoured group consider it a right and resist any policy diversifying benefits to others while the group which is denied mobilizes its own forces to win concession from the government) and ultimately manifest in the form of organizations articulating community interests.

Thus ethnic-politics in general and growth of ethnicity-oriented political mobilization in Sikkim in particular, throw up a number of interrelated theoretical problems which create uncertainties in the process of understanding. In this connection, the basic problem that a student of political science confronts is related to the behaviour of the state and other democratic political organizations which are expected to promote democratic structure and values in lieu of traditional community orientation. But, in Sikkim, the state machinery and political organizations have been seen doing the contrary, though cultural-territorial mobilization intends to limit the scope of democratic, legal-constitutional rights of individual. Then there is the paradox of growth of cultural-territorial mobilization though electorally aggressive cultural mobilization has not been very beneficial in Sikkim. Besides, the question of assertion of identity by smaller communities also needs to be addressed.

### ***Methodology:***

Political mobilization based on social and cultural and territorial identity has been primarily conceptualized with reference to the idea of ethnicity, which is the derivative of the original Greek word "Ethnikos" meaning 'living together'. It is identified formerly with the elements of culture and race and even refers to minority groups or 'groups in an exotic primitive culture'. During the 1970s Glazer and Moynihan (1970) further elaborated the concept to include any group of distinct culture or origin, including the majority, as an ethnic group. And a recent analysis of the concept includes both objective and subjective ingredients

## STATE OF SIKKIM: A PROFILE

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On the basis of geographical elements and pattern of human habitation, the Great Himalaya may be divided into three major realms: a) Western Himalayas, b) Central Himalayas, and c) Eastern Himalayas. These realms possess certain measures of geographical homogeneity, including certain common physical and cultural traits. Sikkim is located in the western-most part of the Eastern Himalayan realms within the great and the inner Himalayan regions. From above, Sikkim looks like a gigantic amphitheatre hewn by perpetually snow-clad mountains. The tangled series of snowcapped interlacing ridges, rising range above range even to the foot of the wall of high peaks and passes, Sikkim is aptly called an 'abode of the snows'.

Sikkim lies between 27°5' and 28°10' North latitudes, and between 88° 4' and 88°58' East longitudes. It has a total area of 2,818 square miles or 7,096 square kilometers. The physical shape is somewhat rectangular about 113 kilometers long and 64 kilometers wide. It is squeezed between Nepal on the West and Bhutan in the East. On its South lies the famous hill station of Darjeeling district and People's Republic of China on its North.

The present truncated shape of Sikkim is due to the pressures and conquests by its powerful neighbours in the past. Once the territory of Sikkim was extended as far as Limbuan (presently the eastern part of Nepal) in the West, Chumbi Valley (now in China) in the North, parts of Western Bhutan in the East and whole of

Darjeeling district, including Siliguri in the plains, as far as Titaliya on the Bihar-Bengal border in the South.

Sikkim is a land of mountain ridges and passes. In the eastern border of Sikkim and Tibet, the Chola range contains two most important passes of Nathu-la 'the pass of the listening ear' (15,512 ft) and Jelap-la 'the lovely plain pass' (13,354 ft) which had served as trade routes between Sikkim and Tibet in the past. The Singalila range on the Western frontier forms a line of separation between Sikkim and Nepal. The important pass of Chiabhanjang 'the hollow where one peep over' (10,320 ft) and Kangchenjunga 'the auspicious forehead peak' (28,156ft.), the third highest peak in the world, lie in this range. The Teesta along with its tributaries is an important river of the State. It rises from Cholamo Lake and flows through the heart of the State embracing numerous mountain streams in its fold. The Great Rangeet, a tributary of the Teesta, is another important river which rises from Kabru glaciers and meets Teesta near Melli in Darjeeling district.

Apart from rivers natural springs provide alternative source of water. Some of these springs are hot like the one at Ralong at an elevation of about 3,100 ft on the west bank of river Rangeet. Other hot spring sites are Phut Sachu on the east side of Rangeet near the Rinchingpong monastery, Yumthang on the east bank of river Lachung, and Momay below the glacier of Kinchinjho. In terms of geology, Sikkim lies in the mild tremor zone but, unlike Assam and Bihar, Sikkim has not experienced anything like disastrous earthquakes. However, landslides and mudslides are the recurring features owing to the composition of the soil (micacious), steep slopes, unplanned construction and poor drainage facilities.

Sikkim experiences, even for its small size, a climate suitable for both pineapple and apple. Her northern frontiers remain perennially snowcapped discouraging human habitation. The settlement is found between 5000 ft. to 14000 ft. She lies directly on the path of the South –West monsoon and receives abundant rainfall varying between 150 inches in the lower Teesta valley to 40 to 50 inches in Lachung Valley. In short, almost all parts of

Sikkim receive rainwater during the monsoon. About 43 per cent area is covered with lush green forest of various types. Several varieties of bamboos, ferns, cherry, laurel, oak, chestnut, firs, pines, maples, magnolia, champs, katoos are found at an altitude between 3000 ft. to 7000 ft. Rhododendrons of about 36 varieties are found between 6000 ft. to 8000 ft. Among 5000 floral plants, about 500 species of orchids, 30 species of Primulas and 424 species of medicinal plants are found in Sikkim. Similarly, a wide variety of wild animals such as Panda, Otter, Clouded Leopard, Snow Leopard, Thar, Ghoral, Musk Deer, Black Bear, Hyena, Jackal, Civet Cat, and Himalayan Weasel roam about freely among the thicket of the jungle. Apart from this about 500 varieties of birds and 600 species of butterflies are also found in Sikkim.

#### ***A brief political history of Sikkim:***

It has been rather a common practice among the scholars to begin political history of Sikkim with the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty though a rudimentary political system existed much earlier in Sikkim. Despite lack of documentary evidences, which are believed to have been destroyed by the Tibetan lamas when they migrated to Sikkim, the information available from various Lepcha and Tsong (Limboo) oral traditions indicate existence of tribal chiefs and a unique institution resembling rudimentary monarchy. The king was selected through an open competition held from time to time. According to the Lepcha legend the successor to the throne was required to possess expertise in the fields of religion, administration, military tactics etc. The king was expected to be polite, humble and a sociable person who would remain bachelor and would possess no property. Such a platonic king was known as 'Panu' by the Lepchas. The spiritual leader, called Athing or Bongthing, was another important person in the Lepcha society. After the death of a Panu, the Athing used to look after the affairs of administration till a new Panu was selected. The matter of selection would often take several years.

A detail documentary and chronological history of the Lepcha and Tsong (Limboo) rulers is not available. However, Lepcha

legends describe Pohartak Panu as the first important Lepcha ruler of the Mayel country, now called Sikkim<sup>1</sup>. He is believed to be the contemporary of Chandragupta of the Gupta dynasty. There is no record of his immediate successor but sometime during 1230-1316 A.D. Turvey Panu, another Lepcha king, ruled Sikkim with his capital near Kurseong, now a town in Darjeeling district. According to Dahal, he had Tsongs (Limboos) and Mangars among his courtiers<sup>2</sup>. It is believed that he was killed in a military expedition possibly by the Kirats of the eastern Nepal. He was succeeded by Tubh Athak but very little is known about him too. The last among the Lepcha rulers was perhaps Gaeboo Achok Panu of Damsang in Kalimpong region. According to Dahal, he was the son of the slain Lepcha Prime Minister, Tshongzod Bolek, of Sikkim. Gaeboo too was assassinated treacherously at Daling fort at the age of 36 in 1856 A.D. Contrarily, Tamsang believes that Lepchas of Damsang belonged to the independent principality of Kalimpong whose ruler Gaeboo Achok was murdered by the Bhutanese in 1780 in connivance with the Sikkim Raja, and then Kalimpong was annexed to Bhutan<sup>3</sup>. In another version, he was described as the son of Kya-bo-Rab, a Bhutia ruler of Damsang and Daling, and was killed by the Bhutanese General Ari Sethi near Ambiokh<sup>4</sup>. Fonning also expressed doubt about the identity of Gaeboo Achok. He contests that he “could never have been a Lepcha. At the most, he was a half-breed, cultured, moulded and fashioned in the style of rulers themselves”<sup>5</sup>. Despite claims and counter-claims, one thing comes out quite clearly that this part of the territory was ruled by the Lepchas and Limboos, now a constituent of the Nepalis. These rulers were more like democratic chiefs than territorial sovereigns.

Much before the 16th century the Tibetans began migrating towards the northern tracts of Sikkim in search of land and pasture<sup>6</sup>. Generally it is believed that the Tibetan migration began as a result of the defeat of the Red Hat Sect (followers of Nyingma-pa) at the hands of the Yellow Hat Sect (followers of Geluk-pa) in Tibet in a religious strife. According to the legend a Tibetan prince, Guru Tashe, was foretold to proceed to Demozong,

the Bhutia name for Sikkim. His eldest son Jo-Khye-Bumsa (the superior of the ten thousand horses) married Gurumo, the daughter of the Sakya hierarch and settled in Chumbi, then a part of Sikkim. As legends have it, being childless the couple was advised to propitiate blessing from the Lepcha spiritual head Thekong Tek. Khye-Bumsa met the Lepcha spiritual head and solicited blessing for sons<sup>7</sup>. Khye Bumsa was also said to have concluded a 'Blood-brotherhood' pact with the Lepchas. It is also said that Thekong Tek, the Lepcha Athing, prophesized that the descendents of Khye-Bumsa would become lords of Sikkim while his own people would become their raiyats<sup>8</sup>. The statement perhaps is a modern innovation seeking legitimation of Tibetan occupation of Sikkim. The second son of Khye-Bumsa, Mi-tpon Rab, had four sons, the youngest of whom was Guru Tashe. His eldest son was Jawa Apha. Jawa Apha's son was Guru Tenzing who fathered Phuntsog Namgyal, the first Tibetan Gyalpo (king in Tibetan language) of Sikkim. Phuntsog Namgyal was consecrated in 1642 at Yoksum by the three Tibetan lamas of Red Hat Sect namely Lhatsum Namkha Jigmed, Sempah Chhembo and Rigdzin Kunzangpo<sup>9</sup>. Mullard, however, believes that the consecration of Phuntsog Namgyal took place in 1646<sup>10</sup>.

The transition of political power, however, did not seem to be at all peaceful. According to Dahal, Geyzing (the place of victory) got its name as a result of the armed struggle between the combined forces of the Limboos and Lepchas on the one hand and the Bhutias on the other<sup>11</sup>. Mullard also writes that despite establishing himself as the dominant power in Sikkim, Phuntsog Namgyal suffered a rebel, possibly in 1649, instigated by the Lepchas of Yug-bsam (Yuksum) and Limboos (referred to as local traders)<sup>12</sup>. The rebellion was subdued followed by an agreement of some form which, however, was not favourable to the Lepchas. The agreement seemed to have introduced the Tibetan system of land economy marked by social difference between the land owners (Dpon) and Lepcha tenants/servants (G.yog)<sup>13</sup> though it is still premature to say anything conclusively.

The consecration of Phuntsog Namgyal could be perceived as extension of the Tibetan authority in the affairs of Sikkim. After having established the political domination, it did not take much time to have monastic influence to penetrate and mark its presence among the pagan Lepchas and Tsongs (Limboos). Centuries old Lepcha polity based on non-hereditary kingship was replaced with a theocratic and hereditary monarchical system. The Dalai Lama was looked upon as the ultimate source of authority both in temporal and spiritual matters concerning Sikkim. The Tibetan interest was served as far as possible while the indigenous Lepchas remained in utter negligence “mostly confined to the northern belt of Sikkim in an area called Dzongu” and forced to live “a life in indolence and negligence contributing little against the aggressive exploitation by the Bhutias of the riches in land and forest.”<sup>14</sup>

Phuntsog Namgyal extended the boundary of Sikkim as far as Chumbi valley in the North, Tagongla (Bhutan) in the east, Titlia (Bihar) in the south and Devagaon (Bangladesh) and Singalila range in the west. By considering Bhutias (father), Lepchas (mother) and Tsongs (sons) as members of the same family, he improved ethnic relation with other communities. Mangars were allowed to keep their fiefdom at a payment of annual taxes while the Tsongs could use their title of ‘Subba’. For administrative efficiency, he divided the territory into twelve Dzongs or districts such as Lassu, Dallom, Yangthang, Sang, Libing, Malling, Simik, Pandom etc.<sup>15</sup> and Dzongpons (governors or administrator of forts) were appointed from among the Lepchas. There is no recorded evidence suggesting appointment of Tsongs (Limboos) and Mangars as Dzongpons. His royal council was composed of twelve ministers mostly drawn from the Bhutias. He died in 1670.

His son Tensung Namgyal shifted the capital from Yoksum to Rabdantse and reduced the number of councilors from 12 to 8. According to the legend Sikkim inherited its present name from his third wife who was the daughter of a Tsong chief Yo-Yo Hang of Rabdentse. Basnet, however, claims that it was the Lepcha chief with whom the marriage of the daughter of the Tsong chief Yo



Yo Hang of Rabdentse was solemnized. When the bride entered her husband's house, she exclaimed in her own tongue "Su Him" (the new house) which was later corrupted into Sukhim and then to Sikkim.<sup>16</sup> But, according to Dr. Waddell 'Sikkim' was a parbatiya (Nepali) name given by the conquering Gorkhas.<sup>17</sup>

Sikkim suffered first territorial loss during the reign of Chador Namgyal at the hands of the Bhutanese in 1700. The Sixth Dalai Lama, however, persuaded Dev Raja of Bhutan to withdraw from Rabdentse. By this time the practice of finding Tibetan brides for the Gyalpos (Kings) of Sikkim had been established. But the circumstances under which Gyurmed Namgyal married a Tibetan refugee girl created unhappiness among the Lepchas and Tsongs which took the form of a revolt. The Gyalpo fled to Tibet. In 'Sikkim-A concise Chronicle' published by the Sikkim Durbar in 1962, the event has been explained in terms of invasion of Prithivi Narayan Shah over Sikkim which, however, does not seem to be correct. The Gyalpo (king) was issueless but a nun was found pregnant and the lamas concocted a story that in his death bed the Chogyal had acknowledged the child of his own. The boy born from this nun succeeded the throne after the intervention of the Tibetan authority. The boy being minor, the authority in Tibet also appointed a Tibetan regent by the name of Rabden Sarpa to take care of the administration until the heir apparent, Phuntsog Namgyal II, attained adulthood.

In the political history of Sikkim Rabden Sarpa is notable for two specific reasons. Firstly, he introduced a crude system of taxation on land and trade, called Zulong, and, secondly, he earned enmity with the Mangars. The offended Mangar chief is believed to have entered into a secret conspiracy with Dev Raja of Bhutan against the Gyalpo. Bhutan invaded Sikkim in 1770 and occupied certain areas on the east of river Teesta, i.e. Kalimpong subdivision of present day Darjeeling district, and remained so till 1864 when the British finally took over this portion of land from Bhutan.

During the reign of the Sixth Gyalpo, Tenzing Namgyal, Prithivi Narayan Shah, the ruler of a small principality of Gorkha

in western Nepal, was consolidating Nepal into a strong and unified nation and had already extended his territory as far as river Sutlej. Since 1775 the Gorkha soldiers invaded Sikkim with varying success. In 1788-89 the Gorkha General, Jahar Singh, invaded Sikkim from the western border and occupied Rabdentse. In 1791 war broke out between Nepal and Tibet, in the course of which the Gorkhas established themselves firmly in Sikkim, especially in the southern and western parts of the river Teesta.<sup>18</sup> In 1792 Sino-Nepal treaty was signed. The Sikkimese Gyalpo, Tsugphud Namgyal, being a minor and a fugitive, failed to protect the interest of the Kingdom. The land mass which lied on the south of river Teesta and Pemiongchi area went in favour of Nepal which remained occupied till 1815, while Tibet got the Chumbi valley.<sup>19</sup> The Chola-Jelap range became the northern and eastern boundaries of Sikkim.

### ***The British Connection:***

With the ascendancy of British in Bengal in the wake of the battle of Plassey in 1757, a new political power with a modern administrative, economic and military organization appeared in the southern frontiers of Sikkim in the 18th century. Sikkim which had close political and religious connections with its northern neighbour now was forced to face its southern neighbour with which it had little contacts. This new development completely changed the history of Sikkim during the 18th and 19th centuries. The British from the very beginning viewed Sikkim as a passage for establishing trade connection with Tibet. Apart from the lucrative Tibetan gold trade which had already begun in low magnitude between the Newars of Nepal and Tibetan traders with their trade terminus at Patna, the British government was as much interested in commercial transaction of English manufactured consumer goods to Tibet via Sikkim. In 1767 an opportunity to come into contact with the Newars and thereby with the Tibetans had gone unutilized due to Kinlock's half-hearted expedition. The second opportunity came to British when Cooch Bihar involved in a battle with Bhutan and the former requested Warren Hastings

for help. Sikkim, on the other hand, came in support of Bhutan. Unwilling to lose this opportunity Warren Hastings wrote to Tashi Lama of Sikkim about the lenient treatment towards Bhutan in exchange of a friendly mission to Tibet.<sup>20</sup> Two years later in May, 1774 the mission was sent "to open a mutual and equal communication of trade" under George Bhogle but it too did not prove fruitful.<sup>21</sup> A similar mission in 1783 also remained unsuccessful because of sudden departure of Warren Hastings to London and non-involvement policy in the Himalayan kingdoms adopted by his successors.

In view of the deteriorating relationship with Nepal, it became imperative for the British government in India to establish amicable relationship with Sikkim. In 1815, Lord Moira, the then Governor General, persuaded the Sikkim Gyalpo (king) through Captain Barre Latter to fight alongside the British against the common enemy Nepal and on compliance to the British offer the Sikkim Gyalpo was promised restoration of the territory occupied previously by Nepal.<sup>22</sup> The defeat of Gorkha force under Amarsingh Thapa was followed by signing of the Segauli Treaty in December 1815. The interest of Sikkim was incorporated under article VI of the Treaty. In accordance with the promise the British signed the Treaty of Titaliya with Sikkim in 1817 and the territory lying between eastward of Mechi and westward of river Teesta, around 4000 sq. miles, which was occupied formerly by Nepal and transferred to the British by virtue of the Treaty of Segauli, was restored to Sikkim. However, some parts of the Tarai, revenue-rich Dabgong, and surrounding areas were not restored. Within two months from the date of signing of the Treaty of Titaliya, Morung was gifted to Sikkim by Lord Moira. The Treaty put a check on the expansionist ambition of the Gorkhas and, at the same time, Gyalpo's freedom was to a large extent constricted. Article VIII of the Treaty says, "Sikkim authorities would afford protection to merchants and traders from the Company's provinces and would levy no transit duties on their merchandise".<sup>23</sup> In 1827 tension brewed once again between Sikkim and Nepal regarding the possession of Ontoo<sup>24</sup>, a small area on the east of river Mechi.

Besides, the dispute also involved the question of about 800 Lepcha refugees, actually the relatives and supporters of the slain Prime Minister Tsongzod Bolek, of Sikkim who had taken refuge in Ontoo, then under Nepal's occupation<sup>25</sup> and had been harassing Sikkim continuously.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the joint efforts displayed by Sikkim, Tibet and China these Lepcha refugees from Sikkim could not be brought back to Sikkim.<sup>27</sup> As required by article III of the Treaty of Titaliya, the Sikkim Gyalpo was obliged to seek British mediation on the border dispute with Nepal regarding Ontoo. The Governor General Lord William Bentinck authorized two British deputies, Captain G.A.Lloyd and J.W. Grant, the commercial resident at Malda, to investigate into the matter, who eventually negotiated for the grant of "the old Gorkha station called Darjeeling" for the purpose of a 'Sanitarium'.<sup>28</sup>

Though the grant was effected sometime in February 1835<sup>29</sup> the detail analysis of the correspondences that had taken place between the concerned parties such as the Gyalpo, Captain Lloyd and the British government at Calcutta, were suggestive of the fact that the grant of Darjeeling was neither a free gift to the British nor was it comprised of a "spot" situated "on the northern spur or ridge of the Gurdum Kutta or Sinchel mountain"<sup>30</sup> as Major Lloyd and Captain Herbert had deceptively put it. When Major Lloyd met the Gyalpo for the first time at a place called Ponk Samp on the eastern bank of the river Teesta on 19 February 1835 to propose for the cession of Darjeeling by "offering such equivalent either in land or in money as deem reasonable",<sup>31</sup> the Gyalpo handed over a written list containing grievances.<sup>32</sup> Though no discussion took place on that day, it was quite obvious that the cession of Darjeeling depended upon compliance of three simple requests namely:

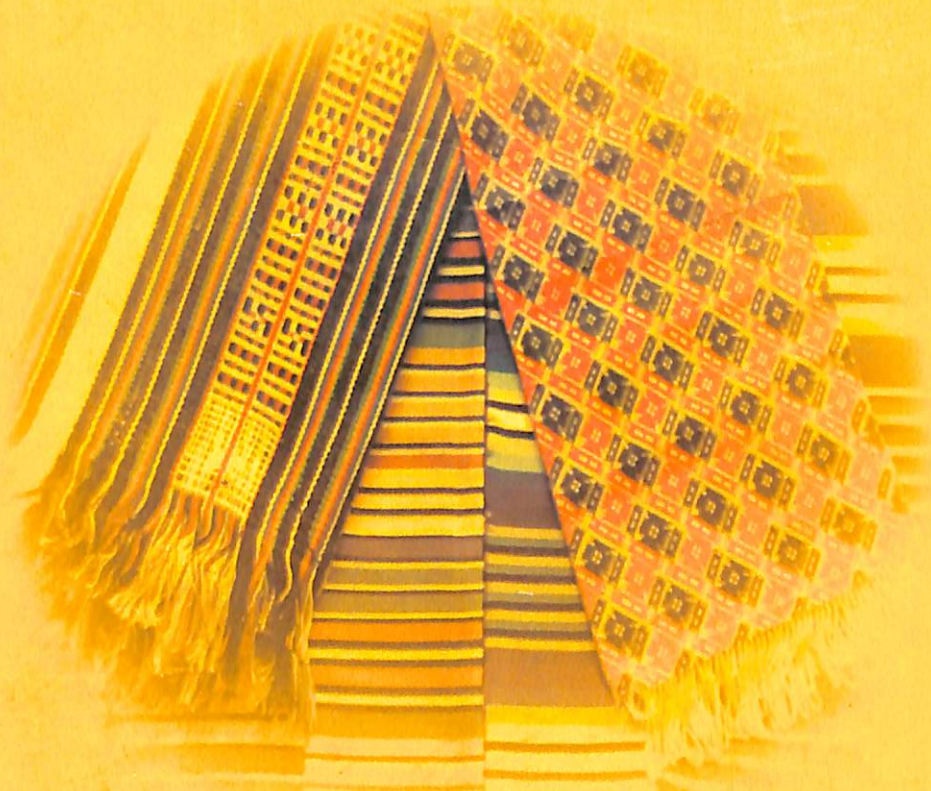
- a. The western boundary of Sikkim to be extended to (? Kankai river);
- b. That a certain Kummoo Pradhan (? Kumbhey Pradhan or Runno Pradhan) and some Kazis be seized and delivered to Sikkim;
- c. That Dabgong (Dev Gaon, Debgong, Dabgong, Deb-gram) in the Tarai, might be ceded to the Gyalpo's territory.<sup>33</sup>

Major Lloyd, however, was in constraint to comply with the request as he was not authorized to negotiate anything other than 'offering such equivalent either in land or in cash'. The Gyalpo after having waited for two days since February 22, summoned Major Lloyd on February 25 and told him that "if his requests were complied with he from friendship would give Darjeeling to the British government, but that his country was a very small".<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the Gyalpo had dropped two of his earlier requests this time but the extradition of Kummoo Pradhan and exchange of Dabgong were, however, kept as they were. The Gyalpo's request concluded with "also if from friendship Dabgong from Amedeggee north be given to me, then my Dewan will deliver to Major Lloyd the grant and agreement under my red seal of Darjeeling that he may erect houses there, which I have given in charge of the said Dewan to be delivered, dated 19 Maugh, 1891, i.e. 25 February, 1835".<sup>35</sup> It seems that by that time the Gyalpo had already prepared a deed and had it left with his Dewan to be given over to Major Lloyd on compliance to a territorial exchange (i.e. Debong for Darjeeling). But the shrewd Major somehow managed to see the deed (written in Lepcha) from the Dewan who accompanied him in his return journey and had it copied and translated. The deed so translated read:

"That health may be obtained by residing there I from friendship make an offering of Darjeeling to the Governor General Sahib, 1891, 19 Maug (25 February, 1835)" (True Translation), G.W.A.Lloyd, Major.<sup>36</sup>

The deed being vague in terms of demarcation of the boundaries, Major Lloyd drafted a deed of his own specifying boundaries in particular and sent it to the Gyalpo with a request either to substitute the original short deed with the new draft or to make a fresh one based upon the draft sent by him. The draft read;

"The Governor General having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his government, suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I, Sikkimputtee Raja, out of friendship for the said Governor General



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