

SIKKIM

Feudal and Democratic

A.C. SINHA



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Glossary

- Bhanu Puraskar – A Nepali literary award given to litterateur to perpetuate the memory of great Nepali poet, Bhanu Bhakta.
- Bastiwalas – *Nepali*: Ruralites, Villagers.
- Chogyal – *Tibetan*: One, who rules as per religious tenets; *Sanskrit*: Dharamraja.
- Dasain – *Nepali*: 20th day of the month of *Ashin* (invariably October), on which *Tika* festival is celebrated to mark the victory of Lord Rama over demon Ravana, a great festival of the Nepalese cultural commonwealth.
- Denjong – *Tibetan*: Valley of Rice, Sikkim.
- Deswalis/Medhesia – *Nepali/Hindi*: Plainsmen from the Gangetic basin settled in Sikkim and Nepal.
- Dewan – *Hindustani*: Chief Administrator, who came to be known variously as Principal Administrative Officer/*Sidlon* (*Tibetan*) Chief Administrative Officer in Sikkim: 1949-1972.
- Dzumsha – *Tibetan*: Traditional village level authority in Lachen and Lachung villages of North district.
- Durbar – *Hindustani*: Royal court.
- Dzong – *Tibetan*: fort
- Ethnic Parity/Parity System – Political arrangement made by Sikkim Durbar to equate Lepcha-Bhutia with that of the Nepalese of Sikkim for political representation in the State Council (1953-1975), which was further extended to

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other aspects of administration.

- Galong – *Bhutia*: Monk in robe, or any monk, a honorific term to the Lamaist holy men.
- Gonpa/Gompha – *Bhutia*: *Lhakhang* (Tibetan), village level Buddhist shrine.
- Gorkha – *Nepali*: An ethnic unit of Indian soldiers, originally from Gorkha principality in Nepal.
- Gorkhalis – *Nepali*: Another term for the Indians of Nepalese Origin (INO) or *Nepamul Bharatiya* or *Nepamul* in brief;
- Gurkhas – *English*: Units of the British army of Nepalese origin.
- Guru Rimpoche – *Tibetan*: The precious teacher, Guru Padamsambhava, the lotus born Buddhist saint, who travelled from Swat, northern Kashmir across the Himalayan ranges in 8th century A.D. to Tibet with a view to spreading Buddhism.
- INC – Indian National Congress: 1885-
- JAC – Joint Action Committee: 1973.
- Illaka – *Hindustani*: (Revenue) block introduced by the British Political Officer in Sikkim.
- Jharlangi – *Nepali*: A practice of obligatory labour provided by the peasants in feudal Sikkim to the officials, state visitors; a form of forced labour.
- Jongpen (Dzongpen): – *Tibetan*: Regional overlord, governor of a fort.
- Kalobhari – *Nepali*: Black Load, a practice of obligatory labour provided by the peasants in carrying a mound (37kg) of load, wrapped in a black tarpulin, across the snow-bound Himalayan ranges on way to Tibet as an article of trade; a form of forced labour.
- Kalongs/Calongs – *Tibetan*: Ministers, Councillors.
- Kargyupa – *Tibetan*: An earlier unreformed Lamaist sect prevalent in Tibet and its adjoining regions.

- Kazi – *Hindustani*: Magistrate, Sikkimese aristocrats.
- Kiratis/Kirats, Kiranti – *Sanskrit*(?): An ancient mythical race residing in the Himalayan region, now a claim made by some ethnic groups such as Limbu and Khambu.
- Kurwa – *Nepali*: A practice, when another set of peasant serfs would be obliged to wait for their turn for the obligatory labour after every two weeks in place of the earlier ones for taking over the load; a form of forced labour.
- Lama – *Tibetan*: Sacred specialists in Tibetan form of Mahayan Buddhism.
- Lamaism – *Tibetan*: Religious knowledge and practices under the charge of the body of the lamas in Tibetan form of Mahayan Buddhism.
- Lhomentshong – *Tibetan*: A claimed ritual blood brotherhood among (lho pas) Bhutia, (Mon pas) Lepcha and (Tshongs) Lamaist Limbus.
- Maharaja – *Hindustani*: The king.
- Maharajkumar – *Hindustani*: The Crown prince.
- Mandal – *Hindustani/Nepali*: Village headman.
- Matwalis – *Nepali*: Those Nepalese communities recognized as drinkers of alcoholic beverages as per *Mulki Ain* (the civil code) of Nepal promulgated in 1854 by Rana Jung Bahadur.
- Muglan – *Nepali*: Originally, Mughal India, of late means India, a contemptuous reference to polluted land of India under the Muslim and subsequently under the British rule by the caste-conscious and tradition-bound Nepalese rulers.
- Mulki Ain – *Nepali*: Orthodox Nepali Civil Code introduced by Rana Jung Bahadur in 1854.
- Nepalese/Nepali/Paharias – Originally, the people of Nepal, also the language of the Nepalese.
- Nepamul: Nepali/Hindi – Indians of Nepalese Origin, INO; *Nepali*:

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Nepali Mul Ko (Nepamul) Bharatiya.

- Nyingmapa – *Tibetan*: An earlier unreformed Lamaist sect of Buddhism, the red hats against the yellow hats (the *Geylugpas*) the reformed ones, represented by the high profile Dalai Lama.
- Padam Vibhushan – *Sanskrit*: Second highest civilian honour of the Indian Union.
- Pema Dorji – *Bhutia*: A civil award given to distinguished individuals during the Chogyal's regime.
- Political Officer – Initially, the British chief administrative officer in Sikkim (1889-1947) and overseer of Anglo-Bhutanese and Anglo-Tibetan relations, which were transformed into an office of overseer of Indo-Sikkimese and Indo-Bhutanese relations from 1947 to 1975.
- Sangha – *Pali*: The Buddhist monastic body.
- SDF – Sikkim Democratic Front: 1993-
- SJC – Sikkim Janata Congress: 1973-1974.
- SJP – Sikkim Janata Parishad: 1977-1984.
- SJP – Sikkim Janata Party: 1970-1973.
- SNC – Sikkim National Congress: 1960-1974.
- SNP – Sikkim National Party: 1948-1973.
- SSC – Sikkim State Congress: 1947-1973.
- SSP – Sikkim Sangram Parishad: 1984-2004.
- Stupa – *Pali*: receptacle of the holy remains of an ascetic, reputed for his/her holy achievements.
- Tagadharis – *Nepali*: Those of the high caste Nepalese, who are entitled to wear sacred thread; *Dwija*, the twice born.
- Tshong – *Tibetan*: The Lamaist Limbus, who are said to have migrated to Sikkim from Tshang region of Tibet.

Preface

Sikkim is a mountainous state, which has an uneven topography. In case one looks up from the below, the vision is not only distorted, but it is also blurred, skewed and partial. If one looks around from the top or at least from some height, the chances are that one may have a clearer, wider, broader and an expansive vision. During the earlier years, studying the social processes from the angle of the masses, and elitist approach to politics was seen as unfashionable, debased, unreal, restrictive, absurd and inappropriate to explain the political nuances. However, I realized way back in 1970s that Sikkim had a long history of theocratic and feudal rule; political struggles and political education to the masses were relatively limited; and economic class-based organizations were almost non-existent. In such a situation, I felt that the elitist approach to social phenomena was the most appropriate approach to study the Sikkimese polity and society at large. I had, therefore, studied the social and political situation of Sikkim in 1970s through this approach.

As things were changing fast in Sikkim, I had kept my antenna closer to the ground reality and, I decided to uncover the extent of socio-political change during the last three decades in Sikkim. This book, thus, is the culmination of my recent study of the complexities of social change and political developments in Sikkim.

I learnt the limitations of the study from fellow researchers and seminarists and got inspired from the authors and experts on the Himalayan study in general and Sikkimese study in particular. I did remain indebted to the living legend of democratic movement in Sikkim, C.D. Rai, for the last four decades for his continuous and unflinching support. This brings back to the memory a battery of names, whose warmth, trust, and numerous favours made my efforts

to understand Sikkim a most rewarding endeavour. Among them mention must be made of Nandu Thapa, Prem D. Rai, Tashi Tobden, Nar Bahadur Khatiwara, N.B. Bhandari, B.B. Gurung, K.C. Pradhan, Raman Shreshtha, Zigmie N. Kazi, D.R. Nepal. Among the members of the academic fraternity, I am fortunate enough to get the counsel of Tanka B. Subba, professor of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, who was kind enough to read the manuscript and gave valuable suggestions to improve the write-up. Among other academics, Imdad Hussain (NEHU, Shillong) Ghanshyam Nepal, S.R. Mandal, R.K. Bhadra, B.P. Mishra, and colleagues in the Centre for Himalayan Studies in North Bengal University (Raja Rammohun Nagar), and S.N. Jha and Mahendra P. Lama (JNU, New Delhi) provided a variety of input to help me out in course of my research. Among the members of the media, Kanak Mani Dixit (HIMAL, Kathmandu) and Sanjay Hazarika from Centre for North East Study, New Delhi had urged me time and again to complete the study at the earliest. Monetary support for the study came from Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, and I value the immense support provided by Dr. C.J. Thomas, the acting Director, North East Regional Center (ICSSR), Shillong. The dynamic Chief Minister of Sikkim, Dr. Pawan Chamling, was kind enough to provide State hospitality on two occasions. Needless to say that I shall remain thankful to my above benefactors and many more, known and unknown patrons and acquaintance, whose support is not possible to enumerate separately.

I shall be failing in my duty if I do not record my thanks to the 'knowledgeable judges' for their efforts to draw the list of elite in Sikkim. I was fortunate to have Dr. M. Amarjeet Singh, Dr. Surajit Sen Gupta and Dr. Kripa Uppadhyay, who helped me in many ways in tabulating and presenting statistical data through electronic media. Ash Bahadur Subba and Ishwar Chhetry, two indomitable field associates, collected the field data through questionnaires travelling across the State from settlements to the villages. I appreciate their involvement and valuable contribution to the study. I record my most sincere thanks to the respondents, without whose co-operation and support, the study could not have been completed. At last, I express my sincere sense of appreciation to all known and unknown patrons, academic associates, public men, journalists, critics, acquaintance

and well-wishers, who stood by me during all these years. And credit for presenting this work in book form goes to Shri M.L. Gidwani, proprietor of Indus Publishing Company, whose expert advise in publication matters I accord high value. I appreciate his support with gratitude.

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A.C. SINHA

Introduction

Sikkim, the smallest among the three erstwhile Himalayan Kingdoms—namely Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, was the most stable and developed among the three. It was also the first to be exposed to the liberal democratic movement against feudal autocracy. Its strategic location between Bhutan and Nepal on the shortest possible route between the Indian plains and Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, made it critical in Sino-British relations. By tradition, its Namgyal rulers were racially and culturally closer to the Tibetan theocracy and bulk of its population migrated till the other day from Nepal. Moreover, its oldest settlers, claimed to be Kirats of Lepcha, Limbu and Magar communities, have greatly been influenced by the Lamaist traditions practiced by their rulers. While its northern Himalayan ranges were the abodes of pastoral Bhutia, Dukpa and other migrant communities from the north, the Nepali (*Nepamul*) peasants, known for their labour, industry and perseverance, inhabited its western and southern districts. In this way, though small in size, Sikkim turned out to be a complex entity from cultural, economic, ethnic, social and political points of view.

Ever since India gained her independence, the Himalayan kingdoms have increasingly been exposed to the winds of change. One such change has been the emergence of a new sense of political identity coupled with strong nationalistic aspirations in the consciousness of the people. Such aspirations generated a new pattern of political dynamics and called for new institutions to cope with the task of nation-building. Such a polity in transition is the most meaningful unit of study for understanding the ramifications of this process of nation-building. Within the polity one may explore the establishment and evolution of political institutions and analyse the forces and forms

of political development. The analysis of the politics of nation-building calls for an understanding of the institutional articulation of a polity and of the changes that occur in the organization and leadership of the political institutions. In this process of political articulation and institutionalization, it is the elite, who play the crucial role of prime movers and models of change for the society at large.

Sikkim was politically a theocracy¹ till the other day. Her social structure is based on social status ascribed by or inherited through tribal/caste associations. Till the other day, her economic organization was basically a feudal one. However, the socio-political scene in Sikkim has witnessed the abolition of the system of landlord leaseholders, feudal privileges and private judicial courts. Furthermore, Sikkimese dispensation was forced to strengthen the bureaucracy on modern pattern and permit competitive political party system right from late 1940s. These changes reflect a new orientation of the Sikkimese power structure. Thus, this study analyses the power structure of Sikkim, social foundation of the political institutions, the characteristics and role of the elite and the bearing of these phenomena on the efforts of nation-building and search for political and of late, ethnic identity.

In 1975 the contemporary Sikkimese polity was passing through a process of integration of tribalism, Lamaist traditionalism and liberal democracy. While the process of tribalism was identified with ethnic institutions, Lamaist traditionalism was a product of the theocratic practices of Tibetan origin. A process of liberal democracy emerged from the intrusion of some aspects of worldwide democratic culture into Sikkimese political structure. For a long period of time, Sikkim was on the horns of dilemma between theocratic monarchy and constitutional democracy. The amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1975, merging Sikkim with India and granting it the status of an Indian State, has once for all resolved the above dilemma.

It appears that tribalism was not strong enough to provide a model for Sikkimese identity as a nation in 1970s. The ex-ruler, the clergy, the *Kazis* (landlords), the monks and the pro-palace bureaucrats favoured the *Lamaist* traditionalism, which, in the final analysis, was identified as the hand-maiden of the extremely small minority with vested interests. The Hindu Nepamul, democrats and commoners

disfavoured the theocratic political structure and opted for democratic participation in the process of decision-making. In this way, the book delineates the sequence of events through which Sikkim acquired the status of an Indian State.

Sikkim in 1970s

I have taken up the issues and tried to understand the nature of changes in polity, personnel and their performance. The elite structure in a relatively traditional and stable society such as Sikkim was found to be cohesive and it was converged around the reputational² and positional³ elite, who were found to be taking significant policy decisions for the Sikkimese.

The present book is divided into three parts: Chapter one in Part One provides an analytical description of the physical and socio-cultural aspects of Sikkimese people. Chapter two provides social analysis of the history of Namgyal rule spread over 333 long years and how it gave a distinct Lamaist flavour to the body politics of Sikkim. Chapter three on immigration of the *Nepamul*⁴ Indians in Sikkim shows the caste and ethnic complexities of the Nepamul Sikkimese and briefly records the on-going ethnic movement seeking Kirat identity by a number of communities otherwise known within the Nepali social commonwealth. Chapter four traces out the advent, contribution and impact of the British presence in Sikkim; and the fifth chapter deals with the events, individuals, policies and historical forces, which created situations leading to the end of the Namgyal rule and Sikkim's merger with India.

Chapter six in Part Two, which explicates the social forces as important and specialized social interests, which are to be identified with religious, social, economic and political institutions. In a society such as Sikkim with complex and heterogeneous organizations of social forces, power is exercised through a variety of institutions. In this way, the multiple social forces provide a pluralistic basis to political power. Chapters seven and eight identify two sets of Sikkimese elite: feudal and modern, at two different times, 1970 and 2005, respectively. The Sikkimese elite may be conceived of as small and organized social groups occupying positions of leadership, power and influence, and claiming the right to exercise, legitimately or otherwise, the authority to enforce and maintain their roles of command.

The distribution of roles of command, wielded by the elite, tends to determine the structure, formation and development of the larger society. The traditional elite of Sikkim is identified with ethnic, religious, feudal and other ascribed social groups, whereas the emergent or modern ones derive their legitimacy from positions in bureaucracy, political parties, professions or voluntary organizations.

Because of the past feudal structure of the socio-political system, there appears to be a limited accountability of the elite, nevertheless they occupy strategic positions in the bodies responsible for shaping the destiny of the community. The strategic elite control the dynamics of political changes and are recognized as prime movers of the society. They are confronted with the task of fostering the development of their society, which had not only inherited a feudal past, but was also ethnically fragmented. Thus, certain questions pertaining to them become extremely relevant: Who are the most important leaders? What are the significant bases of their power? What is the nature of political power: oligarchic or democratic? Chapter nine juxtaposes the two sets of elite: the feudal and the present political entrepreneurs. Chapter ten focuses on the elite par excellence, which uncovers biographical details of about two dozen men at the top of social ladder in two phases of the Sikkimese history: last days of the Namgyal Sikkim and present dispensation. It is interesting to note that while the feudal Sikkim had an unquestioned and universal hierarchy of elite, democratic Sikkim appears to be shy of labelling their strategic players as elite. Thus, there was a very reluctant and extremely small number of elite ranked at the top in 2005.

Part Three summarize the nuances of the three-decade old democratic dispensation. There arise a lot many questions while one tries to analyse the efforts of the Sikkimese at institutional-integration during the last decades. The analysis of this process here has largely been by answering a number of questions: What has been the pattern of elite recruitment during the last three decades in the community? How far have the diverse social entities such as religious, ethnic, and caste combinations been integrated with the core of political structure? With separate entities of various communities, what are the efforts made by the elite of Sikkim to integrate the various social aggregates into a 'Sikkimese' political culture? Are the institutions evolved and integrated into a comprehensive Sikkimese political

entity? How far have the dilemmas of diverse political identities been resolved in Sikkim? What role does Sikkim play in its immediate neighbourhood and in the North Eastern Council (NEC) of which it has become a member of late? Why it is so that there is only one all-powerful leader in Sikkim at a time for the last 60 years?

Field Study

With a view to collecting the data, I first tapped indirect sources. The significant social forces of economic, ethnic, religious, political and social institutions were explicated by going through publications, government and semi-government records and various manuscripts. Informal interviews, field observations and collection of biographical data also helped in uncovering the implications of various social forces. Secondly, a field study was undertaken to collect the first-hand data concerning the social background of Sikkimese elite, their attitudes and perceptions of the Sikkimese system. Besides the informal interviews, collection of biographies, case studies, genealogies, a schedule was administered to the elite. Activities of the elite and their ways of life were observed. Formal and informal meetings, political and ritual processions, social parties, religious rituals, communal festivals, State functions and sessions of the law-making bodies were attended to gain insight into the Sikkimese system.

This study required two sets of data: first, the data on personal and social background of the elite and second, data on the elite's attitudes towards various institutions and their perceptions of the political process in Sikkim. A preliminary field study was undertaken in March-April 1970, which also coincided with the time Sikkim went to polls for her fourth general election to the State Council. I utilized this opportunity to establish contacts with the elite, bureaucrats as well as to observe the process of electioneering on the part of the elite and political parties. This also afforded a unique opportunity for touring almost entire Sikkim and knowing the elite of all walks of life from close quarters.

For the present book at uncovering the dynamics of change since 1970s, I have been in touch with individual elite and keeping an eye on the on-going processes in Sikkim for the last three decades. All these years, I felt that there was a need for a fresh study of the Sikkimese political scenario. For that I made a trip to Sikkim in 2003

and did some preliminary ground work for the present study. In 2004 I made an extended visit coinciding with the sixth General Election for the State Assembly when I renewed my contacts with the elite. Respondents were identified with the help of 'knowledgeable judges'. Having drawn a final list of 145 respondents for a fresh study, as against 128 of the earlier one, I embarked on field study with the help of two full-time research associates. Most of the respondents were more than co-operative. And thus, by the end of 2005, the study was complete.

Political Development and Political Process in Sikkim

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

Like other developing political systems, Sikkim of 1970s was in a state of transition. She had a social structure, which may conveniently be termed as traditional. But internal development and exposure to the wider world brought about some social and political changes. These changes and growing consciousness of an autonomous political identity constitute the matrix of political development in Sikkim. Such development invariably includes the efforts made for the formation of a 'nation' and of institutions such as a national party system, a national economy, a national army, a national legal system, and a national administrative structure as appropriate to a 'national' society. However, there has been another trend to identify the ultimate fate of Sikkim with that of the Indian Union. This acceptance of a common destiny has led to the need of restructuring the entire socio-political complexities in Sikkim. This study, therefore, is expected to make a contribution to understanding of the formation and role of elite in the context of such a social change and political develop-

ment, which resulted in an epoch-making episode for South Asia.

The Sikkimese political system, based on the Lamaist theocracy, had many features of the colonial feudalism. Sikkim was a small and distant Himalayan principality within the British India. It was ruled by the *Maharaja*, though the actual power at the highest level was exercised by the British Resident, i.e., the *Political Officer*. The Buddhist Lamas and the aristocratic *Kazis* dominated the administration. At the end of the British sovereignty over India, there was little evidence in Sikkim of aspirations towards 'national' independence. However, perhaps unknown to the Bhutia ruler, the British had left behind a 'Note'* to guide the future course of relations between Sikkim and the Indian Union, which appears to have guided the Indian actions in Sikkim at the time of popular demand for its merger with India in late 1940s.

Sikkim signed a treaty in 1950 with India to continue to be an Indian protectorate. This new development helped it with liberal financial support from the protecting power trying to become a welfare 'nation' state. This gave birth to a small but assertive group of elite, who aspired for Sikkimese 'nationhood'. For this purpose, they endeavoured to encourage, sustain and nurture the Sikkimese 'national' traditions. This study, therefore, presents a case study of political development in which a small tribal and theocratic feudal community was engaged in transforming itself into a 'nation-state' ignoring the bulk of the people. This exercise was doomed to a failure from the very start. Now, if one looks around its neighbourhood, chaos, conflict, deprivation and disintegration loom large on the horizon. What is it that makes the transition from theocratic feudal dispensation to a basically one party state has been so remarkably smooth? Moreover, compared to other northeastern Indian states, how come Sikkim projects an ordered, efficient and goal-directed state? We have tried to answer these and similar questions through analyzing the given political culture of the state.

The story of Sikkim in the post-merger period veers around the churning going on within the dominant Sikkimese ethnic group, i.e., the Nepamul Sikkimese. First, the community felt cheated when the policy of 'ethnic parity' between the communities was removed in

*See page 63 ahead.

1979 and they were treated as a 'general population' being demographically large and in majority, and not included among the various 'Constitutional schedules' for special treatment. Secondly, as they were still under the mould of the Chogyal era policy of *ethnic parity*, they reacted sharply by filing cases in the courts on the issue and 1980s were spent in confused demands for 'Sikkim for Sikkimese' and reservation of all the general seats in the State Legislative Assembly for the Nepamul. It did not work and then came the opportunity in mid-1990s, which was used by a newly-emerged class of political entrepreneurs. Thirdly, it was the 'Mandal Commission Report' and its recommendations pertaining to Sikkim, which were implemented in 1994 and that made a new beginning in the State. The old slogan of 'Nepali' solidarity was replaced with a new slogan: '*Bhasha Na Bhat*' (it is not the language, which matters, but it is the food with which one shares, that binds us together, and thus, it matters). Thus, a new phase in Sikkim's politics started.

Many of the communities conventionally counted within the Nepalese social commonwealth have staked a distinct ethnic claim to be treated as 'Scheduled Tribes' and they have begun displaying social distance from caste Hindus among the Nepamul social commonwealth. It is interesting to watch the efforts at consolidating Kirat identity distinct from that of the Nepamul Sikkimese. The symptoms for an ethnic movement for the Kirat identity can clearly be identified in Sikkim, but it remains to be seen what shape the ethnic politics in the State will take in the days to come. Furthermore, Sikkim has joined the North Eastern Council recently. It will be interesting to watch what role Sikkim plays in the region and beyond, where a variety of ethnic resurgent movements are being waged. Moreover, as it is the only Nepali-speaking State in the Indian Union, the Nepamul Indians naturally look to it to lead their way to a prosperous and dignified future under the Indian tri-colour.

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that claims to be governed by a god or gods may be called 'theocracy'. History has many different types; the theocratic ideas underlie Brahmanism, Islam, papacy and theory of kingship by divine rights. Yet there is no historical instance of pure 'theocracy'." Smith provides the reason: "Just as the British Constitution today, while predominantly democratic, has monarchic elements, so of old time the Hebrew Commonwealth, for example, while predominantly theocratic, had democratic elements. Different polities are distinguishable historically not because a single principle exhausts them, but because some one principle is dominant within them." *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. XII, T&T Clark, New York, 1958. Similarly, Sikkim was a theocratic state of Lamaist Buddhism, claimed to rule by the tenets of the 'chhos' (righteousness), through a monk-incarnate ruler, the Chogyal.

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PART I
The Background

CHAPTER 1

Sikkim: Natural and Human Resources

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

“There is to the north a king of mountains called ‘Himalayas’, which in reality is a god and which, with its two ends dipped in the eastern and western seas, lies like a yardstick measuring the earth.”

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

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

The Inner Himalayas, with an average width of 50 miles, possess remarkable uniformity of height ranging between 6,000 and 10,000 feet. Though not as inaccessible as the Great Himalayas, forest-clad ranges of the Inner Himalayas have isolated the intervening fertile valleys of the Himalayan region from those of the Gangetic plains. The difficult terrain, numerous gorges and network of river systems make communication a difficult task. In this region lie some of the most populated Himalayan valleys such as Paro, Gangtok, Kathmandu and Pokhra. The Himalayan foothills constituted the dense forest areas between the Inner Himalayan and the Ganga-Brahmaputra plains. Stretching from east to west, these foothills are known as the Duars, the Morang and the Tarai. Pushed from north and south, of late this zone has turned out to be the most turbulent, as a variety of ethnic conflicts have emerged without hope of any resolution within its fold.

NATURAL RESOURCES

On the basis of the general spatial differentiation of associated geographic elements and broad pattern of human occupation, Karan divides the Himalayas into three major realms: (1) Western Himalayas, (2) Central Himalayas, and (3) Eastern Himalayas.¹ These realms possess varying physical and cultural traits, with certain measure of geographical homogeneity.

Sikkim constitutes the western-most part of the Eastern Himalayan realm within the Great and the Inner Himalayan zones. Forty miles wide, it is enclosed between the Singalila ridges and the Donkhya range, which are 80 to 90 miles long. While the former constitute the Sikkimese border with Nepal and include the highest Sikkimese summit, the Kanchenzunga (28,150 ft.), the latter separates northeast Sikkim from Tibet. The southern border of Sikkim is formed by the Darjeeling ridges, through which the Tista has carved a deep and narrow gorge.

Sikkim, with an area of 7,096 sq. km constituting 0.22% of the territorial limit of India, is located between 27° 04' 46" and 28° 07' 48" north latitude, and 88° 00' 58" and 88° 55' 25" east Longitude. It is a land-locked State, which is crisscrossed by green valleys, snow-covered high mountain peaks and exotically colourful forests full of

rare species of birds and beasts. It has an elevation ranging from 300 to 8,500 metres above the mean sea level (MSL) and its drainage system is from north to south, northwest to south and from northeast to south. Northern and north-western parts of Sikkim remain snow-bound for almost the entire year and it receives an average annual rainfall of 500 cm. In such a situation, naturally, the topographical and climatic features have deeply influenced the human settlement pattern and economic activities of the inhabitants.

Sikkim Himalayas harbour more than 26% of the flowering plants reported in the country. Species-wise, it has approximately 5,000 flowering plants, 515 orchids, 36 rhododendrons, 16 conifers, 23 bamboos, 362 fern families, 8 tree ferns, 60 primus, 11 oaks, above 424 medicinal plants, 150 mammals, 552 birds, 48 fishes, 690 butterflies, 20 mountain peaks, 21 glaciers, 227 high altitude lakes & wetlands and over 104 rivers and streams.² With reference to Sikkim orchids, one may consult Mohan Pradhan's recently published most illuminating and authoritative work.³

Physiographically, it has no flat land of good size anywhere and its rock formation is younger, which is prone to erosion and landslides. The rivers Rangeet and Tista (Teesta), forming the main drainage, run from north to south facilitating limited scope for human settlement and agrarian activities. Topographical, vegetational, riverine, and climatic variations impose an immense limitation on human activities in Sikkim, exposing the State to an encapsulated view of life. However, long strides are achieved in hydro-energy, eco-tourism and an overall human developmental sphere in spite of these disabilities.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Ethnicity

The relief and climate have imposed harsh living conditions, restricted population movement and difficulties of communication for the Sikkimese. With their typical population, idiosyncratic settlement patterns and unique economic system, the Sikkimese have been able to preserve their cultural individuality to a great extent, though the autochthonous Lepchas have been sandwiched between the more assertive Bhutias and Nepalese. The Bhutia immigrants, representing the Tibeto-Burman stock, brought Tibetan culture, Tibetan language,

lamaistic Buddhism, and a combination of pastoral and semi-settled agricultural pattern from the north. On the other hand, *the Nepamul* contributed the Indo-Aryan languages, Hinduism, and settled agricultural practices to the Sikkimese complexity. The State recognized till 1979 two broad ethnic groups: the Lepcha-Bhutia and the Nepalese.⁴ The former actually represents two different tribes⁵ with diverse traditions.

The Lepchas (Nepali Lap = *vile* + che = *speakers*), i.e. vile speakers, a contemptuous name because the Lepcha spoke their own dialect and refused to adopt the Nepali, "call themselves Rong and are known to the Tibetans as 'Mon-ba' or 'Mon-rik', referring to the people of the Mon country—a general Tibetan name for the lower Himalayas, from Kashmir to Assam and Burma."⁶ They inhabit the slopes of the hills in the central and western Sikkim. They are divided into a number of patrilineal clans called *ptso*. At present, an important function of these clans is to regularize marriages and prevent incest by practising exogamy. The family relations of Lepchas show traces of matrilineal, according to which the female children trace their descent through their mothers and not through their fathers.

The Lepchas and Bhutias have an old tradition of polyandry.⁷ The Lepcha conversion to Lamaism paved the way for a social intercourse at the highest level with the Bhutia aristocracy. The new Bhutia rulers inveigled them into a ritual bond of blood brotherhood.⁸ That is how a new social class of the Kazis⁹ emerged in Sikkim. The Lepcha commoners, driven to woods, led the life of hunters and collectors of wild roots. Even then, they were well connected to the world outside, through their own custom of '*ingzong*' (literal meaning 'like younger brother'), which is a ritual brotherhood for the purpose of trade relations. Under the patronage of their guardian spirit (*Komsi-thing*) the Lepchas traded with the Nepalese for their pigs, and with the plains Indians for their copper vessels, with the Bhutanese for their fine cloth, with the Tibetans for their rugs and with the Bhutias for their oxen.¹⁰

In contemporary Sikkim, it is difficult to locate an all-exclusive Lepcha settlement outside the ex-ruler's private estate of *Dzongu* and *Dikchu*. The Lepchas' affinities with the Bhutias exist mainly in the identity of their religion, around which their entire cultural life revolves. At the same time, Lepchas do not hide their solidarity with

the *Limbu* Lepchas (from eastern Nepal) and the *Munglan* Lepchas (from Darjeeling in India), even if the later two are animists, Hindus or Christians. Christian churches of various denominations are working among the Lepchas of these three locations. Relatively better educated and more affluent Lepchas have shown an urge for the awareness of Lepcha tradition and a sense of assertion. In spite of their conversion to Lamaism or Christianity, the core of their cultural life has remained animistic, since they retained tribal practices in their Lamaist and Christian ways of life.

The Tibetan traders, farmers and lamas were in search of new areas for colonization long before the 15th century. Sikkim at that time was very sparsely populated by the Lepchas and the Limbus. The Tibetan grazers and the missionary lamas were possibly the earliest immigrants to Sikkim in search of new pastures and potential converts to their religion. Traders in their pursuit of bartering their goods followed them. And lastly, the Tibetan peasants came in search of rich-rice fields, *Denzong*, the valley of rice. All these stocks found in *Derm-Dzong* (Denzong—the valley of rice—a Tibetan term for Sikkim) a wide scope for expansion. During this period (the latter half of the 15th century) an important Bhutia¹¹ patriarch, named Khye Bumsa from Phari (Chumbi Valley, Tibet), came to Sikkim, presented ceremonial offerings to the then Lepcha chief, Tho-Kung-Tek and established a blood-brotherhood. Meanwhile his followers and kinsmen settled in Sikkim as pastorals and traders. The Tibetan lamas of various sects had been trying to convert animist tribes without much success. The Lamaist missionaries strongly felt the need for establishing a central authority to their liking, which might be instrumental in the Tibetization of Sikkim. They could discover such qualities of leadership in one of the Bhutia peasants—Phuntsog Namgyal (Panche Namge also spelt as Phuntso)—in the sixth generation of Khye Bumsa.

A band of the Tibetan lamas installed the first Bhutia ruler of Sikkim in 1642 and thus marked the beginning of effective Bhutia control over the Sikkimese destiny. The appointment of the Lepcha '*Dzongpen*' (district chiefs) and the Bhutia '*Kalons*' (ministers) by the first ruler, in time led to the emergence of two parallel phenomena of feudalism and bureaucracy. Not only was the first ruler declared an incarnate lama and a sanction from the Dalai Lama¹² obtained,

but the Lamaist Church of Tibet also undertook the role of the moral guardian of Sikkim.

The inter-marriage between the Bhutias and Lepchas provided an opportunity for the warriors to bid for, and secure a higher status in the social hierarchy. The social situation remained fluid in the early period of the Bhutia rulers, because of the constant strife. In such a situation, a proletariat Bhutia labour, which might have had some savings, could turn to be a trader, buy some cattle and land, get some people around him, marry a Lepcha chief's daughter and consequently be recognized as a *Kazi*.¹³ The lamas commanded the respect of the commoners, and favour of the ruler and the aristocracy. In this way, the Bhutia immigrants became a stratified society with the lamas (the clergy), the Kazis (aristocracy) and the commoners enjoying a social status in the descending order. Since the British withdrawal in 1947, a new class of commoners of the neo-rich plebeians had emerged to challenge the status and authority of the erstwhile Kazi patricians.

Bhutias are distributed in all the four districts of the State, but their main concentration is in the north. They live in relatively mountainous terrain, high altitude and cold climate. They avoid hot and humid climate. In their body-build, they are on heavy side and live in double-storeyed wooden and mortar-built houses. Their life revolves around the institution of *gompha*, the monastery. They follow a circle of festivals and rituals in which Buddhist monks play significant roles. They had a tradition in which the second son of the family would be offered to the monastery as a novitiate. It is a literate community, conscious of its traditions, history, and present state of affairs and concern for the future.

It is claimed that the term 'Nepal', is derived from Newar, an earlier settlers of Kathmandu valley. Newars are said to be early settlers of the land, who spoke Newari, a Tibeto-Burman language, which had its own script and literature. Though they are non-vegetarian in their food habits, they prefer buffalo meat, pork, mutton, and yak meat is taboo to them. They recognize the Hindu *Varna* system and locate themselves below the Brahmin and Chhetris in the caste hierarchy. However, they too have their six-fold social hierarchy with the Dewa Brahmins at the top and Chauame/Hara Huru (removers of the night soil) at the bottom.¹⁴ It is an educated,

urban and enterprising community, occupying positions in the bureaucracy. They are mainly concentrated in Gangtok, Pakyong, Duga and Nainthang.

The Brahmins are a highly scattered community, found all over Sikkim with the exception of North district. By tradition they are teetotalers, who officiate as community and family priests and ritual experts to the rest of the Hindus. As the British did not recognize them as a martial race, a requisite for recruitment to the armed forces, they tend to raise cattle, normally cows and goats, for a living. 'Uppadhyays' are ranked higher than 'Joshis' among them. As they are at the top of the Hindu caste hierarchy, they are considered to be the custodians of the Hindu traditional values. As their priestly vocation requires expertise of reading and interpreting the sacred books and scriptures, it is one of the most literate communities in the State, which came to occupy positions in the bureaucracy.

Thakuris are Kshatriyas with surnames like Shah, Sahi, Khan, Sen, Chand, Pokharal, Singh, etc. and some of which are shared by other Nepali castes as well. Originally, Chhetris were said to be the descendants of the Kshatriya father and non-Kshatriya mothers. They are divided into a number of patrilineal clans. It is alleged that they came to Nepal in medieval period as royal refugees and fortune-seekers allegedly from Rajasthan in India and decided to stay back in south-western parts of Nepal as petty rulers, who were consolidated into the mighty Gorkha kingdom by Prithvi Narayan Shah (1728-1775) in the eighteenth century. Their Sikkimese counterparts were partly the descendants of the Nepalese invading army, which had occupied south-western Sikkim from 1770s to 1816. They are settled in South and West districts in such a way that on occasions, it is difficult to determine whether a family is Thakuri or Chhetri in Sikkim. Conventionally, they, along with the Brahmins, are counted among the 'Tagadharis' (the *dwij*, or the twice born) in terms of socio-ritual status among the Hindus.

Kirats such as Limbu, Rai, Yakha, and Sunuwar constitute a formidable social combination in the body politics of Sikkim. Now they constitute a legal social block as the 'Most Backward Classes' (MBC) and they advocate that the State should declare them as Scheduled Tribes (STs). In fact, Limbus along with Tamangs have already been notified as Scheduled Tribes in Sikkim and West Bengal. All these

communities claim to possess their distinct languages, which they have almost forgotten in favour of the Nepali. Now the Government of Sikkim has accorded recognition to Limbu, Tamang, Bantawa, Magar, and Gurung along with Bhutia, Nepali and Lepcha as State languages and steps are being initiated to write textbooks and impart primary education through them.

Damai (tailors and drummers), Kami (blacksmiths), Sarki (leather workers and shoemakers) and Gaine (bards) are the traditional 'untouchables' occupying the lowest status in the Nepali caste hierarchy. They provide their respective occupational services to other communities and as such their population is scattered all over Sikkim except the North district. The last Namgyal ruler declared them as *Scheduled Castes* way back in 1967 and a seat in the State Council was reserved for them. They have two seats reserved for them in the 32-member State Legislative Assembly since 1979. Like Brahmin and Chhetris, the members of Scheduled Castes speak Nepali as their mother tongue.

Anthropologists found that the immigrants had outnumbered the autochthons in Sikkim. There is a considerable relaxation in terms of exchange of food and water across the communities, as most of the communities accept food and water from one another. There is an extensive practice of inter-community marriages and incidence of putative kinship across the communities, as members of each community are relatively small in most of the Nepamul villages. It is a vibrant society with colourful festivals, in which men and women of various communities dance together. Nepali castes have no sense of territorial belonging, as elsewhere among the caste societies. The chief function of the caste organizations (*Jat/Jati samaj*) is social control and regulation of the marital alliances. Caste hierarchy and practice of 'untouchability' have become notional.¹⁵

With the emergence of Gurkha power in Nepal, the Nepalese made numerous raids eastwards and clashed with the Bhutias as well as the Kiratis in the middle of the 18th century. Some Nepalese like the Khas (the Basnet), Thakuris, the Chhetris came down to settle in Sikkim during this period. With the changing fortunes of their patrons, they were established and then uprooted many a time. Yet, the Gurkhas remained an important section among the Nepalese in Sikkim. With the liquidation of the Newari power in Kathmandu

valley by the Gurkhas in the middle of the 18th century the Newaris expanded to the east. They settled down in Darjeeling hill station around 1840s and got engaged in trading in commodities across the borders with Nepal. Within no time, they entered Sikkim as monopolists of the copper mines and minting industry. The more enterprising among them, such as Lachmi Das Pradhan and Brothers, obtained land lease from the Sikkimese Kazis. By the close of the 19th century, a section of the Newars emerged as the Nepali counterpart of the Kazis in Sikkim. With them came a large number of service-castes such as the Brahmins, barbers, and artisan castes such as blacksmiths (Kami), tailors (Damai) and shoemakers (Sarki).

On the socio-ritual ground, the Nepalese in Sikkim may be divided into two groups: the '*Tagadhari*'—those who wear the sacred thread—such as the Brahmins, Thakuris and Chhetris and the '*Matwali*'—those who do not wear sacred thread and are traditionally permitted to consume alcoholic drinks. Unlike the Hindu society in India with its rigid caste system, the Nepamul society in Sikkim permits inter-caste marriages. As a whole, the '*Tagadhari*' Nepamul look down upon the Bhutias and the Kiratis, because they are alleged to eat beef not necessarily fresh. Though all the tribes of the Kirati stock have their own languages, they all speak Nepali. Nepali functioning as a lingua franca, identical styles of life and a notionally common religion, a form of permissive Hinduism, firm the thread of uniformity that lies through their cultural corpus and holds the Nepamul Hindus in Sikkim together against the Lamaists.

DEMOGRAPHY

Ever since the opening of Sikkim to the outside forces by the British, one of the main concerns of the administration has been to formulate a feasible policy regarding the settlement pattern of a particular ethnic community. The Bhutia rulers had always seen to it that no other community raised to such formidable a position as to pose a threat to their power. They had been able to subjugate the Lepcha easily because of the latter's conversion to Lamaism. The Magars were forced to migrate to the south and the west. The Limbus had been contained to a great extent. Ever since the inception of Sikkim's effective contacts with the British in 1817, one of the most controversial

issues has been the Nepali immigration and settlement in Sikkim. This led to a number of minor clashes between the Sikkimese forces and the British constabulary. Notwithstanding their repressive and regulative devices, the Bhutia rulers failed to control the flood of the Nepalese immigration to Sikkim. To counteract the growing number of the Nepamul the Bhutias encouraged the Tibetans to settle down in Sikkim.

The first authentic information regarding Sikkim's population was the census of 1891 in which the total population was shown as 30,455, including 5,762 Lepchas, 4,894 Bhutias, 3,356 Limbus and 15,458 Nepalese.¹⁶ Writing some three years ahead of the fourth decennial census of 1911, J.C. White mentions, "by far the greater number of the inhabitants of Sikkim . . . are the *Paharis* (the Nepalese) who number nearly 50,000 of an estimated population of 80,000."¹⁷ White's estimate proved to be under statement, because population was recorded to be 87,920 in 1911 in course of the census operation. The latest census figures for the ethnic affiliation were available for 1931, when out of a total population of 109,808, 13,060 were Lepchas, 11,955 Bhutias and the rest mainly Nepalis. The population figures rose to 121,520 in 1941. In 1951, statistics based on religious affiliations presented an overall increase to 137,725 with 39,397 Buddhists (largely 13,625 Lepchas and 15,626 Bhutias) and 97,863 Hindus (inclusive of 15,991 Limbus). After 10 years these figures increased to 162,189, 49,894 and 108,165¹⁸ respectively. And the density of population rose to 57.52 persons per square mile (see Table 1.1).

The figures for 1971 census were the following: total population 209,843; Bhutias 23,572; Lepchas 22,316 and the Nepalese 134,275. There was a dramatic change in the population of the State after its merger with India. The annual rate of population growth from 1971 to 1981 was 5.07% (rising to a total population of 316,385); between 1981 and 1991 it was 2.85% and between 1991 and 2001 it was recorded to be 3.29% respectively. There was a marked addition to the Bhutia population with the inclusion of Chumbipa, Dophapa, Dukpa, Kagatey, Sherpa, Tibetan, Tromopa and Yolmo, as it rose from 23,572 in 1971 to 36,308 after a decade. And this more than 50% addition was achieved after adding a number of Buddhist communities originating from Tibet to the Bhutia stock. Many of them had migrated to Sikkim from erstwhile Sikkimese enclaves in Tibet. Similarly,

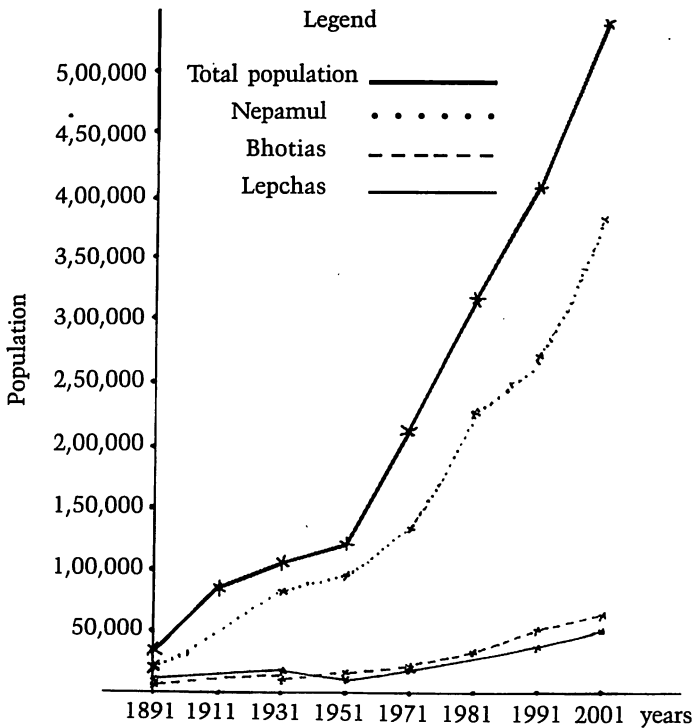


Table 1.1. Growth of population in Sikkim since 1891

Years	Bhotias	Lepchas	Nepalese (including Limbus)	Total
1891	4,894	5,762	18,714	30,458
1911	-	-	-	87,920
1931	11,955	13,060	84,803	109,808
1951	15,626	13,625	97,863	137,725
1961	49,894 ¹	-	108,165	162,189
1971	23,572	22,316	134,275 ²	209,843
1981	36,308	-	225,185 ²	316,385
1991	50,410	37,771	273,790 ²	406,475
2001	63,723	51,391	380,393	540,493

Source: Data extrapolated from various decennial census reports.

¹Figure based on religious (Buddhism) affiliation.

²Figures based on claims of linguistic affiliations.

there was a considerable change in the figures of the Nepalese from 1,34,275 in 1971 to 225,185 in 1981 mainly by legitimizing the Stateless 'Nepalese' as Sikkimese. The next decade saw another more than 90,000 persons in the State added to Sikkimese population, when its figure rose to 406,457 in 1991 with Lepchas rising to 37,771, Bhutias to 50,410 and Nepali speakers to 273,790.¹⁹ This needs some explanation. The figures for 1991 are based on linguistic return recorded during the census operation. It is significant that the number of the Nepali speakers was reduced significantly in 1991, but it does not mean that the Nepamul population decreased in Sikkim. In fact, their number increased, but ethnic resurgence in the State motivated other communities within the Nepamul commonwealth to record their languages in place of Nepali, as they had been doing in the past. The census of 2001 found Bhutias 63,723, Lepchas 51,394, Nepamul, 380,393 and total population of Sikkim 540,493. From the point of political economy, while 70% inclusive of 5.93% Scheduled Castes were of Nepamul origin, 22% were counted as Scheduled Tribes, which belonged to Bhutia and Lepcha tribes. These figures partly expose the hollowness of Herbert H. Risley's about hundred year old notion that Lepchas were a dying community and Bhutias had no future in Sikkim, though growing size of the Nepamul proves his vision partly prophetic.

The issue of 'Stateless citizens' must be mentioned in this context. It was claimed in the aftermath of 1973-75 agitation that there were 30,000 persons of Nepalese origin, who were not covered under Sikkim (Citizenship) Order, 1975. By 1988, this number rose to 54,000 and it was strongly backed by the ruling party of the State, Sikkim Sangram Parishad under the leadership of Nar Bahadur Bhandari. This figure rose to 75,000 after a year in 1989. The Minister of Home Affairs, Government of India informed the Lok Sabha in 1990 that orders for declaring 40,083 'left out' persons (by Sikkim Citizenship Order, 1975) in the State as Indian citizens had been given on August 7, 1990. He also informed the house that the Centre was expected to issue another order in September 1990 for granting citizenship to another 35,000 persons in the State.²⁰ It should be of interest to the observers that all figures of Stateless Sikkimese sent by the State to the Centre were rounded up figures.

The Indian State of Sikkim has an image of being the only

Buddhist State in the Union. By and large, the Buddhist communities have been recognized as Scheduled Tribes for providing certain facilities to the 'economically and socially backward' communities. This is the only State in the Union, where two ethnic groups, Bhutias and Lepchas, have their political representation guaranteed in the State Assembly by name. Similarly, Sikkim is the only State in which in spite of its basic secular character of the Indian Constitution, a seat has been allotted to the *Sangha*, the Buddhist monasteries. Incidentally, this is the only State in the Indian Union where State language is Nepali and Nepamul Bharatiyas democratically run the political show.

POLITICAL CULTURE

The political system of Sikkim was a typically Himalayan theocratic feudalism parallel to the Tibetan Lamaist pattern. The ruler was not only the secular head of the State, but was also an incarnate lama with responsibility to rule the subjects in accordance with the tenets of the '*Chhos*'—the Dharma. The basic tenets of the Lamaists policy in Sikkim ever since 1642 was the *Chhhos* as the established religion of the rulers (rGyalpo) who were instrumental in upholding the doctrine justifying the appellations, 'Chos-Gyal' (Chogyal). In ideological sense, the traditional Tibetan government was a synthesis of clerical and lay elements. "As there were two sets of laws—one for Lha-sde (the domain of the church) and one for the Mi-sde (domain of the state), there were two sets of officials (monk and lay) not necessarily working exclusive of each other. The monks and the nobles were closely connected and there could not be any absolute separation between spiritual and temporal estates. Besides, the lamas held a good number of civil posts. The apex, the Sakya hierarchy, was the meeting point of both ecclesiastical and civil jurisdictions. Here was a government possessed of both *Chhos* (Dharma) and *Srid* (Samsar)."²¹

It is pertinent to note that ideology of state and the Lamaist polity has been ingrained in the psyche of the Sikkimese people: natives and immigrants alike. At the ethnographic level, this heritage may be identified with its traditional lamaist world view in which Buddhist theology and royalty provided a paternalistic subservient relationship

pervading every walk of life. The ideology of the state presupposed an ordained benevolent king in the court in communication with the divine. He could command a type of aristocracy, who were not known as ruthless as the Nepalese Ranas, rather they were closer to the peasants and slaves. All of them could congregate in the local *Gompha* on a variety of festive occasions, where king and commoners could rub shoulders with each other. And continuity of these practices may be identified with smooth transition from the feudal past to the competitive democratic politics of today.

The ethnic complexity coupled with the British subjugation made the Sikkimese ruling class to adopt many non-Tibetan elements into the political system. Among the most manifest results of this assimilation mention may be made of the evolution of Kazis and Newar thikadars as landlords and the appointment of non-Tibetans as lay civil servants. In the recent past, the ruler, though proclaimed and consecrated as the *chogyal*, had incorporated some of the features of democracy, in which secular aspects were predominant. Though Lamaism was given weightage, it was mainly in the name of safeguarding the character of the minority (i.e., the Buddhist Lepchas and Bhutias). In fact, Sikkim was facing a serious problem. The political hegemony rested with the minority, namely the Bhutia-Lepchas, which received the royal support and patronage, while the Nepalmul, the numerically majority community, felt aggrieved over the denial of proportionate representation in the Council of the government. Since 1975, there has been a sea change in the socio-political orientation of the State. Naturally, Indian democratic politics is seen operative in Sikkim. However, the westerly wind does affect otherwise placid politics of the State. If Kathmandu catches cold, Sikkim starts sneezing. Among many illustrations, movement for Kirati identity in Sikkim is patterned on *Janajati* (ethnic) movement in Nepal. We shall see in the next chapters how distinct Sikkimese polity was historically evolved.

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There is an utter confusion about the term 'Nepalese'. Naturally, it denotes people of Nepal. But problem is that the term is used in a very loose way, referring to any body, who speaks Nepali or whose ancestors had ever been 'Nepalese'. This situation is not only for the laymen, even the records of the governments of India, Nepal and Bhutan do not maintain a consistent difference among the 'Nepalese' and residents of the Nepalese origin in countries other than Nepal. Furthermore, the members of the community, i.e. Indians of the Nepalese Origin (INO) themselves add to the problem, as they have not been able to evolve a consensus on their nomenclature. Moreover, there are many 'Nepalese', especially from Sikkim, Darjeeling and Terai areas in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, who reside in the regions for centuries and they have never been migrants.

Thus, wherever the term 'Nepalese' occurs in official documents, we have tried to maintain it as such. However, since 1970s an awareness has emerged among the Indians of Nepalese Origin (INO), *Nepali Mul ko Bharatiya*, in brief, *Nepamul Bharatiya* or *Nepamul* that they must display their distance from the 'Nepalese', i.e. the citizens of Nepal. And efforts were made to coin terms describing the INO. *Bharapali*, *Gorkhali*, *Gorkha*, *Nepali* and some others were suggested, but till date the community stands divided on the issue and consensus has eluded the community. Some five years back, I used the term, *Nepamul*, which has not been accepted either. Many of the *Nepamul* scholars use either 'Nepali' or 'Gorkha'. Unfortunately, these two terms have polarized the *Nepamul* in two ethnically opposing camps, rather hostile to one another. I feel the acceptance of the term, *Nepali*, has problems from the similarity between the *Nepali* language, citizens of Nepal in *Nepali* speech and common Indian and *Nepalese* perception of people of Nepal as *Nepali*. So not only to the scholars, but even to the men and women in the street, 'Nepali' inappropriately describes the history, culture, aspirations and struggles of the INO. It should be instructive that new term must not send confusing signal and it should be, if not universally, largely acceptable to most of the people concerned. The term *Gorkha* is strongly projected by people of Darjeeling and a political party, *Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF)*. It is

- associated with the Gorkha (Gurkha) soldiers, Gorkha kingdom of Shah dynasty, Gorkha watchmen in the Indian metropolis and the subjects of the Gorkha kingdom. Furthermore, it has an inferiority (*hin bhavna*) complex and all types of past ethnic negative stereotypes, which must be discarded by the earliest. So in this confusing situation, whenever occasion demands to refer to the INO, I have used Nepamul, otherwise, what is given in the document is quoted. But the confusion continues and it will continue as long as community does not develop a consensus on the nomenclature.
5. Though it is difficult to come across an agreed definition of the term, for the convenience, by tribe we mean, "a social group, usually comprising a number of sibs, bands, villages, or other sub-groups, which is normally characterized by the possession of a definite territory, a distinct dialect, a homogeneous and distinctive culture and either a unified political organization or at least some sense of common solidarity as against outsiders." P. Fairchild, *Dictionary of Sociology and Related Sciences*, A Little Field, Adams, Quality Paperback, 1967. p. 324.
 6. L.A. Waddell, *Among the Himalayas*, New Master Book Co., New York, 1899, pp. 92-93.
 7. However, a recent ethnographer "did not find any case of polyandry among the Lepchas . . . Both junior and senior sororate and levirate are allowed. The traditional form of marriage is called agnop where . . . younger brother has to marry the widow of the elder brother." S. Ghatak, 1993, p. 91.
 8. *Sikkim Coronation*. The Statesman Press, Calcutta, p. 1. *Sikkim: A Concise Chronicle*, The Royal Wedding Committee, Gangtok, 1963, p. 7.
 9. "The term Kazi seems to be taken from the Muslim rulers in India. It derives from the Arabic 'Qadi', a magistrate and is not generally used in the Tibetan, although the Tibetan spelling 'bKagzigs' is recorded by the Tibetan scholar, Sandberg. The Tibetan equivalent of Kazi is said to be blon-po or ministers, or rdzong-dpon (from commander). But the term rdzong-dpon is also equivalent to a magistrate. The Kazis are called by the Bhutiyas L'umpo (minister), by the Lepchas 'Pano-Sadambo (king's chiefs)." L.A. Waddell, *Among the Himalayas*, 1899, pp. 102-103. "It was from his (King Lo Hang Sen, ordained King in Bijayapur, Eastern Nepal in 1609) time, he began to administer his country by keeping Subbas, Kazis and Dewans in his country. First of all, he appointed only 5 Subbas and gave them power to administer five districts . . . as well as to discharge the duty of ministers in his court. The Subbas used to come in the capital town of Makwanpur in turn to run the court of ministers for six months only . . . The Subbas used to get ¼ of the total income of their districts as their annual

commission. The Kazis were the second grade officers in the state. They used to be in charge of all the judiciaries of the district. Their annual commission was 1/6 of the total income. The Dewans (the third grade) were the revenue officers in the district. Their annual commission was 1/10 of the total annual of their district." I.S. Chenzong, *History and Culture of Kirat People*, Part I, Pushpa Ratna Sagar, Kathmandu, (3rd edition), 1967, pp. 93-94. "Having brought all the Lepchas and Bhotias under his direct power, he (Phuntsog Namgyal) selected twelve Kazis from among the twelve Lepcha Jongpens from among the superior families of Lepchas of Sikkim. Proclamations were made promising due recognition and services, saying that the posts of ministers and Prime Ministers (Chang-mzod) would be conferred on them. On the other hand, those who did not serve well would be classed amongst the common people and require to contribute such services as were required by the Maharaja." T. Namgyal, Maharaja of Sikkim and Jeshay Dolma, 'History of Sikkim', Mss, p. 30.

10. G. Gorer, *Himalayan Village*, Nelson, 1967, (2nd edition), pp. 118-119.
11. "All the Tibetan settlers south of the Himalayas from Ladakh to eastwards, are denominated by Europeans as 'Bhuteas' (derived from the Tibetan word 'Bod', the true name of Tibet). They are called by the Tibetans Lho-pa, southerners or southerners." B.G. Mainwaring, *Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language: As It Exists in Darjiling and Sikkim Hills*, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1876, p. xiii. "The Tibetan settlers and descendants are generally known to Europeans by the Indian term, 'Bhotiya', that is an inhabitant of Bhot or Tibet." L.A. Waddell, *ibid.*, p. 93. "The Tibetan themselves call their country Bod-yul and their language, Bod-skad, pronounced Bhod-ka in central Tibet. A Tibetan is Bhod-pa, and this word has changed to Bhutta, Bhotia etc. by the Hindus. The name Bhutia (Bhotia) is now applied by them to the Tibetans living on borders between India and Tibet." G.A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III, Tibeto-Burman Family, Part I, Superintendent of Government Printing Press, Calcutta, 1901, p. 14. "The term 'Bhotia' is employed to designate several different groups of people in the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions. In the districts of Almora and Garhwal, in the central Himalayas, the non-Tibetan borderland folk are called Bhotias, while outside these districts, the Tibetans are often referred to by this generic name. In the eastern Himalayas, certain groups of people inhabiting Nepalese-Tibetan border regions, the Tibetans living in the vicinity of Darjeeling and the inhabitants of Bhutan State are referred to as 'Bhotias' in their respective regions. To confuse the situation still further, some of the eastern Tibetans also style themselves 'Bhotia'. While all these are

- distinctly unrelated groups, they seem to have one thing in common. They are all connected with some kind of a trade between Tibet and the region in which they live. They usually carry the goods available in their areas to Tibetan markets and exchange these with Tibetan traders for salt and wool. The latter goods, chiefly salt, are used again to buy stock for their next trade trip in the following year. Thus, the cycle goes on. The nature of their occupation requires a seasonal migration between their region and Tibet. Their life, therefore, is geared to a semi-nomadic living." R.P. Srivastava, 'Tribe-Caste Mobility in India and the Case of Kumaon Bhotias' in *Caste and Kin in India, Nepal and Ceylon*, (Ed) C. Von Furer-Haimendorf, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1966, p. 194. However, in the context of the present study, by Bhutia, and not Bhotia, we mean settlers of Tibetan origin in Sikkim.
12. T. Namgyal, and Y. Dolma, *ibid.*, p. 34.
 13. A.C. Sinha, "The Feudal Polity and Political Development in Sikkim," *Indian Anthropologist*, Vol. 5, December 1973.
 14. "(Sikkim) has been derived from two Limbu words 'Su' = new, and 'Khim' = a house or palace; and the name was first given to the country when the Tibetan Panche Namgye, the first raja, built a new palace at Rabdentse (in Western Sikkim) and established a new kingdom. Curiously enough, in an old map of Hamilton, the palace where Rabdentse stands is marked 'Sikkim', and it may be noted that Kirk Patrick writing in 1793 speaks of the town and district of 'Sookhim', and of a place Sikkim in the itinerary from Bizapur to Daling, and this place would fall somewhere near the (river) Runjeet. It is clear, therefore, that the name was originally given to a place and not a country." H.H. Risley, *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, Calcutta, 1894.
 15. K.S. Singh, *Athropological Survey of India*, Calcutta, pp. 32-33.
 16. H.H. Risley, *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, Superintendent of Government Printing Press, Calcutta, 1894, p. 27.
 17. J.C. White, *Sikhim and Bhutan: Twenty-one Years on the North-East Frontiers 1887-1908*, Edwood Arnold, London, 1909, p. 9.
 18. J. Dutta Gupta, *Census of India, 1961*, West Bengal and Sikkim, Part II (I) Social and Cultural Tables, Manager of Publications, Delhi, 1965.
 19. Shiva K. Rai, 2006, 'A Brief History of the Bharatiya Nepalis (Indian Nepalis) with Special Reference to Sikkim' paper presented in the "Conference on Ethnicity and Nationality of the Nepalis", Gangtok, April 20-22, 2006.
 20. Zigme N. Kazi, 1994, *Inside Sikkim: Against Tide*, Hill Media Communications, Gangtok, pp. 277-78.
 21. N.C. Sinha, *Prolegomena to Lamaist Polity*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1969, p. 66.