

Political Development in Sikkim Since Merger

A.C. Sinha

Sikkim, the tiny Lamaist kingdom in the Himalayas, has about three-decade-old history of participation of the commoners in the process of decision-making. It was an exotic feudal system patterned on the Tibetan theocracy, as three *lamas* were instrumental in installing in 1642 the first Bhotia king, the ancestor of the ruling family. It had a small population of indigenous Lepcha tribe and some Kirati people. Bhotias were traders and pastoralists on the high Himalayan ranges. Its more aggressive neighbours from the east and west, Bhutan and Nepal respectively, nibbled its territory in course of time. Some two hundred years back, the British emerged on the scene as the decisive player and within next seven decades, Sikkim was tagged with the British Indian Empire as a buffer state in the Himalayas along with Nepal and Bhutan. By the middle of the 20th century on the eve of the British withdrawal from the Indian Empire, there were political stirrings in Sikkim leading to anti-feudal agitation and formation of political parties. The Indian Union and Namgyal rulers contrived a system of ethnic policy, in which more than two-third Nepamul (Sinha and Subba 2003) of relatively recent arrival were equated with one-third ancient settlers of Lepcha-Bhotia tribes for political representation and economic support from the State. This policy known as the 'parity system' created a lot of bad blood between the communities and ultimately it was the ills of this policy that led to eclipse of Namgyal rule in 1975.

From this base, we propose to examine the quality of political development in Sikkim. We have found that as long as the old ethnic policy of 'parity system' continued, there was always a tribesman at the top of the administration next to the king. Secondly, the 1980s saw the consolidation of the Nepamul dominance and emergence of Nar Bahadur Bhandari in Sikkimese politics and Sikkim was well integrated in the Indian political system. Thirdly, we found another unique feature of politics in Sikkim with the advent of 'Mandal' politics for reserving the seats for OBCs and coming of P K Chamling as a sophisticated political entrepreneur. However, though Sikkim appears to be completely integrated with the Indian political system, consolidation of OBC solidarity weakened the dominance of Nepamul solidarity. And lastly, Sikkim completely identified itself with North East India as the 'winner' taking away all the goodies in the system either by winning or causing defection from opposition benches.

Sikkim as an Indian Protectorate

Sikkim was a Lamaist principality in the eastern Himalayas during the British colonial rule. The resident British Political Officer at Gangtok was the guardian of the British interests in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet. He had complete control over the affairs of the two kingdoms including the education of the royal children, their marital alliance, and even the cash transactions. While the kings were under the complete control of the Political Officer, the masses were organizing themselves for social reforms, abolition of landlordism and for popular participation in administration. The Himalayan kings were apprehensive that free India would do away with their privileges and thus they were insistent that retreating British colonial power should ensure their political autonomy, financial support and political control within their territory. Egged up by the Political Officer, A J Hopkinson, they sent two delegations to meet the 'Cabinet Mission' in May 1946 to Delhi. Meanwhile, the popular agitation was taking shape and anti-feudal movement was on as a part of the Indian freedom movement. The Sikkim State Congress was organized and it launched a movement in favour of Sikkim's

merger with India, abolition of lodlordism and establishment of popular government (Sinha 1975). While the common people of Sikkim were anticipating Sikkim's closer association with the Indian Union, Delhi was reluctant to take over Sikkim, as it was doing elsewhere in India. The reasons were not far to look for, as the Political & Foreign Department, Government of India had left a 'Note' for the successor government at the instance of the last British Political Officer.

The note, prepared on August 10, 1946, states: "In practice, it may well prove difficult to secure a tidy solution of the future of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan and even the eastern marches of Kashmir. This will largely depend on the future policy and fate of China and hence of Tibet. The Government of the (Indian) Union must be prepared for complications on the Northeast Frontier and evolve a policy to meet them. This may well have to be that of maintaining all the principalities in virtual independence of India but as buffer, as far as possible, (as) client states. There may be greater advantages in according Sikkim a more independent status than in seeking to absorb Bhutan as well as Sikkim in the Indian Union, adding the communal problem of Buddhism to those of Islam and Hinduism ...The Government would well be advised to avoid entering into fresh commitments with any one of those frontier states or seeking to redefine their status. Their importance is strategic in direct relation to Tibet and China and indirectly to Russia. Such adjustments of relations with the (Indian) Union as can fully be affected by those political and strategic considerations... account of which, it is hoped that the treaty will take, rather than by constitutional niceties, which do not help defence policy"(Sinha 1998). Do these lines not remind one to arguments of 'the great game days'?

Soon after the British withdrawal from India, the Sikkim State Congress was organized on December 7, 1947 as a joint front of all the communities inhabiting the state and it launched its popular agitation on populist demands. With a view to counteracting the popular demands of the common people, the Maharaj Kumar (the Crown Prince, who was looking after affairs of the state on behalf

of his indolent father) got a group of landlords and his courtiers to organize the Sikkim National Party on April 30, 1948 as 'an anti-thesis of Sikkim State Congress'. On May 1, 1949, thousands of demonstrators cordoned off the royal palace, raised slogans in favour of their demands and pressed for formation of a popular government. The Maharaja ran away from the palace to take shelter in the Political Office and State was abandoned in the care of the crown prince, the Maharaj Kumar, and the agitating volunteers of the State Congress had a field day. At the instance of Political Officer a Council of Minister was installed on May 9, 1949 with Tashi Tshering, the President of the State Congress and two of his colleagues, Captain Dimik Singh Lepcha and Chandra Das Rai and two nominees of the Durbar. The powers and functions of the Council of Ministers were not defined; expectations of the people were very high from this ministry; and the palace was determined to sabotage this first limited experiment of democracy in Sikkim. The political leaders themselves did not help the matter very much by arrogating themselves to take actions, where they were not entitled. Once it was realized that the differences between the Durbar and the popular leaders was not patched up, the Political Officer dismissed the Council of Ministers and took over the administration on behalf of the Government of India (Basnet 1973). New Delhi sent a bureaucrat from Indian Civil Service, John S Lall, who was normally to report to the Ministry of Home Affairs as the Dewan (Chief of the administration) and to organize the administration of the state. It may be pertinent here to note that the office of the Political Officer under the Ministry of External Affairs continued to exist at Gangtok to look after Indian interests in Sikkim and Bhutan, as envisaged by the British sixty years back.

Within no time, Palden Thondup Namgyal, then Crown Prince and the last ruler of Sikkim, took advantage of this anomalous situation and did his best to sow seeds of discord between the two highest Indian functionaries in Sikkim. In the words of the last Indian administrator of Sikkim, B S Das : "The first Political Officer carried the day with him as it was too soon for the power equations to develop by then. So did the first Dewan, who was posted at a

time to observe the administration on behalf of Delhi The second Dewan ...happened to be a batch mate of the (last) Chogyal in ICS (training). The then PO was of different origin and he believed in his role as a messiah than a political agent of Delhi. The Dewan joined hand with the (future) Chogyal and soon lost his value. The Chogyal enjoyed the scenario as it served his purpose admirably. The Dewan, of course, became more Sikkimese than the Sikkimese themselves. The Chogyal played the game beautifully. The third Dewan and the PO were not even on talking terms. There was also a third element involved in these goings on. They were the top bureaucrats and army brass visiting Sikkim. Being entertained lavishly at the Palace (some of them) were too amenable to the charms and persuasion of the Chogyal and family and the charms were used in full measures. The fourth Dewan never got his powers as *Sidlon* (Principal Administrative Officer). This gentleman was well known for his weaknesses and the Chogyal was aware of these. The *Sidlon* sold himself completely to the Chogyal...No senior Indian officer brought such a disgrace to his office in Sikkim as he did (Das 1983 : 65-66).

Introduction of the Ethnic 'Parity System' and Elections to the State Council

Keeping the above 'Note' in mind, India became a party to a democratic fraud through its Dewan, when the ruler issued the State Council and Executive Council Proclamation, 1953 with a view 'to associating people more and more closely with the governance of the State'. The proclamation stipulated an intricate arrangement of electoral process with a limited, complex, controversial and purposive political participation. First of all, it created an artificial parity between two bunches of ethnic groups turning the entire politico-administrative structure communal. Secondly, a deliberately complicated voting and counting procedure was introduced, which could be interpreted differently on occasions. Thirdly, it patently denied to about two-third Sikkimese of Nepalese origin (Nepamul) their natural rights by allotting them fifty percent representation in the State Council and elsewhere, while according

reforms. The ruler ignored the political agitation and went ahead making arrangement of a national celebration of his fiftieth birthday on April 4, 1973 as the national day. Within no time, the agitation spread to interior of the State and the agitators established peoples' regime after chasing away the State functionaries from their offices.

Merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union

The ruler's administration fell like a house of cards; emboldened agitators took to the street and two Congress parties got together to form a new political formation, Sikkim Janata Congress (SJC), to press for more and more aggressive demands. It is significant that in these hours of crisis for the ruler, the leaders of his chosen forum, SNP, were nowhere in the picture either in support or in opposition to the cause of the democracy. This should be good enough proof for any body who finds evidence of democracy in Maharaja's regime during 1947 to 1973. The newly formed Sikkim Janata Congress (SJC), a party of the various non-SNP formations, appealed to the Government of India to step in to the scene and play a decisive role in the administration of State in terms of the 1950 Treaty. Furthermore, the Congress articulated the popular aspirations by demanding the following: (i) full-fledged democracy in Sikkim; (ii) a written Constitution; (iii) fundamental rights; (iv) one man, one vote principle based on adult franchise and (v) abolition of the parity system. The ruler was forced by the circumstances to request the Government of India to take over the administration. Next two years were the period of uncertainty, turmoil, and demonstration for and against the old regime, decline of Chogyal's support base and demise of SNP in the body politics of Sikkim. It was also marked by the emergence of Kazi Lhendup Dorji, as the most significant political player in Sikkim with Nar Bahadur Khatiwada and Ram Chandra Poudiyal, two members of the Legislative Assembly along with Krishna Chandra Pradhan as his trouble shooters. In this confused and uncertain environment, there were charges that Indian armed forces were instrumental in support of the agitators, while poor Maharaja was reported to have stored arms and ammunitions for a possible resistance (Dutta-Ray 1983).

What resulted in a very fast change of the events in the next two years were ruler's refusal to compromise with the agitating politicians, invalidation of the 1973 election, fresh election to the State Council (1974), demand for associating Sikkim with India, ruler's visit to Kathmandu against the advice of the Government of India, State Council's resolution to abolish office of the Chogyal, referendum on Sikkim's future and its ultimate merger with India in May 1975. The amendment to the Constitution of India stipulated that Sikkim would become a state with a separate Governor, a High Court, an elected State Assembly, and a cabinet of ministers led by a Chief Minister. All the old treaties between Sikkim and India stood abrogated and one seat in Lower House (Lok Sabha) and another in the upper house (Rajya Sabha) of the Indian Parliament were allocated to Sikkim. Further more newly elected State Council was deemed to be the State Assembly for a full term of five years.

Once Sikkim merged with India, the ugly face of Indian democracy was on display. Petty politicians from New Delhi emerged with dropping of the hat, the bureaucrats took over the destiny of the new state in their grip, and development funds were lavishly allocated without asking. By then, the Emergency was declared in India, a general election was declared, the Indian National Congress lost power in 1977 election, a new government of a new political party, Janata Party, came to power in New Delhi. This new political formation continued for about two years in power in New Delhi, another short lived government was installed, which collapsed, and yet another election was held in 1980, in which Indian National Congress came back to power under the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Kazi Lhendup Dorji, the most active politician in Sikkim for three decades and most effective voice of democracy in Sikkim was after all a state level leader. He felt adrift in hurley-burley of the Indian national political scene. Thus, he kept on changing his political affiliation according to the change of power in New Delhi; ignored the organizational base of his party and gave the impression to the Sikkimese that it was the bureaucrats on deputation sent by New Delhi, who were ruling the State on his behalf.

Kazi, born and brought up in the feudal and theocratic fold, was old enough to change to a functioning democratic mould. Meanwhile, the younger and popular leaders from the dominant Nepalese community, which was his support base in the past, began to part company with him. As soon as he became the Chief Minister, trouble began to simmer in the legislative wing of the party, when his foster son and one of the most dynamic leaders of the pro-democratic movement of 1973, Nar Bahadur Khatiwara, was denied a berth in the state cabinet. He disassociated himself with the Kazi and decided to float his separate political party. Similarly, venerable former secretary of the party and Speaker of State Assembly, Chatur Singh Rai, was forced to join the rank of the opposition against the Kazi. The most serious break in the party occurred when the then Speaker of State Assembly, Bhim Bahadur Gurung, and the former Minister of Revenue, Ram Chandra Poudyal, walked out to form Sikkim Congress Revolutionary Party in August 1979. By then, the feudal elements loyal to the ex-Chogyal were looking for a viable setup to teach the Kazi a lesson or two, discovered Nar Bahadur Bhandari, a former school teacher, who had opposed Sikkim's merger to India and for that he was sent to jail. Bhandari could dare to term the past 32 Members of (Legislative) Assembly as "thirty-two thieves, who had sold Sikkim" publicly and there was no body, who could effectively oppose him. He had formed his own political party, Sikkim Janata Parishad, with a marked anti-merger and proChogyal slogan. By the middle of 1979, the ruling Kazi faction was reduced to minority in State Assembly. And thus, Assembly was dissolved and election was scheduled within a couple of months.

Emergence of Nar Bahadur Bhandari and Consolidation of Nepamul

About a month before the election, the Government of India issued Ordinance 7, 1997 by which the notorious policy of 'parity system' was done away with. The new State Assembly was stipulated to have 12 seats reserved for 'the original inhabitants of Sikkim', one for the monks or the Sangha, another for the Scheduled Castes and

rest of 17 seats were declared as 'General'. These stipulations stirred the Sikkimese of Nepali origin (Nepamul) a great deal. They had not traded for such a development in the wake of democracy. They did charge the former Chogyal for a communal agenda against them through the 'parity system' and thus, agitated for its abrogation. But they convinced themselves that the rest of the seats in State Assembly would be exclusively for the Nepalese (Nepamul). The Nepamul leaders, such as Ram Chandra Poudyal, termed these stipulations as 'black ordinance' and accused the Kazi as hand-in-glove for that purpose. And this was also the time that active, popular and more dynamic Nepamul leaders parted company from the Kazi's fold before the first election to the State Assembly in October 1979.

Kazi Lhendup Dorji, who had thrice won handsomely from all Sikkim General seat in the State Council and managed to get his 31 out of 32 candidates including himself elected to the first State Assembly in 1974, was totally cornered this time. He had to abandon the cosmopolitan Gangtok seat and shifted to a tribal reserved seat in North district. Sikkim Prajatantra Congress led by Nar Bahadur Khatiwara had fielded candidates in 31 constituencies. Ram Chandra Poudyal's Sikkim Congress Revolutionary had their candidates in 26 constituencies. The Pro-Chogyal Sikkim Janata Parishad led by Nar Bahadur Bhandari had as many as 31 candidates, besides nominees of some political parties and 'independents' for the first post-merger election in the State Assembly. The results of the election were startling; most of the candidates put up by national political parties did badly and most of the 'independents' lost their security deposits. The most revealing was the miserable condition of the ruling outfits; all the candidates, including the Chief Minister, lost their seats. With better than 15 percent votes Nar Bahadur Khatiwara's party managed to win three seats, while his arch-rival, R C Poudyal's Sikkim Congress Revolutionary won 11 seats with 20 percent votes. The most surprising was the victory of Nar Bahadur Bhandari's Sikkim Janata Parishad, which polled 31.84 percent votes and got its 17 candidates elected to the Assembly.

Sikkim Janata Parishad came to power and naturally Nar Bahadur Bhandari headed the council of ministers. It was an open secret in Sikkim that Bhandari was supported financially and other wise by the Lamaist feudal elements, Kazi aristocrats and disgruntled bureaucrats closer to the former Chogyal. The Parishad cabinet maintained the same old ethnic parity in distribution of the posts by equal number of Nepamul ministers to that of the Lepcha-Bhotias. Among its many catchy slogans one was 'to promote the over-all interests of the sons of soil and to safeguard the regional interests of the State'. There were a number of reasons for Kazi's ignominious defeat. Firstly, he permitted the ethnic controversy to continue for too long a period. Though himself a Lepcha tribesman, he was a suspect in the eyes of tribals as the leader of the new comer Nepalese, who desired all the privileges at the cost of the indigenous settlers. In the process, he lost support from both the ethnic blocks. Moreover, he permitted the issue of reservation for the Sikkimese Nepalese in the State Assembly to drag on for long, in which younger and more aggressive leaders found scope to occupy the political space. Secondly, his frequent change of political alignment at the national level eroded his political credibility in Sikkim. He came to be identified more with an opaque authority of New Delhi. In this context, Kazi's efforts to seek assistance from the Central government bureaucrats on deputation to Sikkim and his dependence on B.B. Lal, the Governor of the State, for his counsel in the fast changing political equations in Delhi made the senior Sikkimese bureaucrats hostile to him. Thirdly, the most inadvisable step adopted by the Kazi was to align himself with the Janata Party at all India level. Its electoral symbol, ploughman, attracted instant hostility of the hillmen towards migrants from the Indian plains and politically easy and convenient association of the Kazi was seen as sell out of Sikkim's cause to the plainsmen from the rest of India.

Bhandari and Kazi both tried to gate-crash newly victorious Congress Party in New Delhi. While Kazi and his political outfit was a past and spent-over associate of Congress, Bhandari could bring in his government and two members of the Parliament to the

Congress fold. Moreover, Bhandari had changed a lot, once he was on the chair of the Chief Minister. He dropped many aspects of his pro-Chogyal grievances; managed to swell his legislative number by causing defection from the opposition parties and was eager to play ball with the Congress. Within two years of its electoral victory as a regional party, SJP merged itself with the Congress. Very soon, rag-tag Kazi's party, Sikkim Congress Revolutionary (R.C.Poudyal) and N.B.Khatiwara's Prajatantrik Congress got themselves merged with the Congress. The impression Bhandari gave was that he was running his show by himself; his pro-Chogyal postures were strategy; and he needed money to run the show in the State. By then, Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India, who was an impatient, clean and straightforward man. Bhandari was dismissed on the charges of corruption on May 1, 1984 and B.B.Gurung took over as the Chief Minister, who could survive just for a dozen odd days in the office. Within no time, Bhandari revived his old out-fit with a new nomenclature, Sikkim Sangram Parishad. The second general election to the State Assembly was held on May 5, 1985. This time Bhandari got his 30 candidates elected to the Assembly. After that, he did not look behind for a decade. In the next general election in 1989, he repeated the same performance by winning all the seats in the State Assembly.

Bhandari had raised three demands continuously: (i) reservation of the seats in the state assembly for the Sikkimese of Nepalese origin, (ii) granting citizenship to the stateless Nepamul residing for long in Sikkim and (iii) recognition of Nepali as the State language and getting it listed among the languages listed in the VIII schedule of the Indian Constitution. In this way, he adopted a populist posture for the Nepalese and projected himself as the leader of the community at the national level. He could largely succeed in getting his second demand fulfilled. His third demand was also conceded, when the Government of India recognized Nepali, Konkani and Manipuri as the national languages and they were listed in the VIII Schedule to the Constitution as national languages. But his first demand for reserving the seats for the Nepamul Sikkimese could not be conceded and it appears that the Nepamul

Sikkimese were reconciled to the status quo. Now, the demand is made to increase the seats in the State Assembly to partly answer the above grievance. Apart from these formal demands, Bhandari ruled the State ruthlessly and any dissent including from his wife, herself a member of Parliament, was not tolerated. It was he, who began the Sikkimese tradition in which the winner takes every thing away with himself either by getting his candidates elected to the Assembly as in 1985 and 1989 or by causing defection from the opposition as in the case of 1979. His consecutive success in second and third terms in the office of the Chief Minister went to his head so much that he began to treat Sikkim as his pocket bureau in his arrogance (Kazi 1994).

From Nepamul Identity to Consolidation of 'Other Backward Castes' (OBCs)

The caste structure in the Nepalese society, though basically on the same pattern of purity and pollution, is different in the sense that there are communities whose status in the hierarchy is uncertain. It is also a fact that enforcement of caste disabilities is relatively relaxed in the Nepalese social commonwealth. However, a broad distinction between the castes known as 'tagadharis,' 'matwalis', and 'untouchables' is maintained. Then, there were a number of tribes, which were counted among the matwalis, but were very much out side the Hindu caste structure and, in fact, they fell under a more permissive Lamaist socio-religious world. By and large, the deprived Nepalese in Sikkim did not have much time to waste on these niceties as long as they fought against the Namgyal autocracy. But Bhandari's arrogance, style of functioning and his impatience with any form of dissidence led to a silent revival of these broad social divisions.

Bhandari's third term as the Chief Minister of Sikkim from 1989 onward marked the gradual integration of Sikkim to the Indian political system. This was also the year that Congress lost power at the Centre and a rag-tag coalition of political parties came to power in New Delhi under the leadership of former congress man, V.P. Singh. With a view to garnering Hindu support base in its favour,

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) launched a movement to construct a temple of Lord Rama at Ayodhya, a holy site in the province of Uttar Pradesh on a disputed plot of land, where an unused mosque stood for centuries. This emotive move of BJP polarized the Indian society between the Hindus and the Muslims. With a view to encountering such a development, Prime Minister V.P. Singh removed the collected dust from the Report of the 'Backward Commission,' filed by a backward caste activist, B.N. Mandal and decided to implement some of its recommendations. In view of Mandal Commission, a bunch of intermediary castes (below the 'twice born' and above the 'untouchable' castes) were identified as the 'Other Backward Castes' (OBC) and 27 percent reservation on the basis of their population in 1931 was recommended in the jobs and educational institutions for them. The communities listed as the beneficiaries in the Report mounted an aggressive demand for implementation of that recommendation. Naturally, Sikkim could not remain untouched from this development. Bhandari, the Chief Minister, belonging to a Chhetri caste among the 'tagadharis' was not responding to the demand and rather emphasized on the movement for recognition of Nepali as one the national languages of India.

By then Bhandari had reached the plateau in his career as the leader of a 'regional party', Sikkim Sangram Parishad. He was turning impatient and arrogant with his people, as he had all the MLAs from his party in the State Assembly. One of his long associates, Pawan Kumar Chamling, a minister in the cabinet, raised the issue of implementation of the Mandal Commission Report in Sikkim in 1992, and for that he was expelled from the SSP legislature party. At that time, P.K. Chamling was the solitary member in the Sikkim State Assembly. However, a turning point came very soon, when the State Assembly passed a resolution against the implementation of the Mandal Commission report in 1994. Very soon, 19 out of 31 members belonging to SSP legislative wing deserted the Chief Minister N. B. Bhandari and formed a parallel SSP (Sanchaman). On May 19, 1994 Bhandari was voted out in the Assembly and on the same day Sanchaman Limbu was

appointed the next Chief Minister. The first move of the new government was to recommend on May 26, 1994 to the Union Government to include seven communities from among the Nepamul listed from Sikkim as the 'socially and educationally backward classes' (OBC). Consequently, Bhujel, Gurung, Limbu, Mangar, Rai, Sunuwar and Tamang were declared as OBCs in Sikkim on June 2, 1994. Three weeks after that date, Sanchaman Limbu joined the Congress party on June 23, 1994.

The fourth general election for the State Assembly was held on November 16, 1994 and the electoral verdict went in favour of the newly formed Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) led by P.K. Chamling. SDF had fielded 31 candidates and among them 19 were elected and thus, its leader, P.K. Chamling, formed the new government. Bhandari's SSP could get 10 seats in the new assembly and the Congress managed to get only three of its nominees elected to the legislature. While Chamling began to consolidate his social base slowly in the State, Bhandari kept making occasional noises in the press to register his political existence. The fifth general election to Sikkim State Assembly was held in 1999. Chamling's SDF increased its seats from 19 to 24 and in the inverse order, Bhandari's SSP's share was further reduced to 7. The national political parties, which had fielded their candidates in the election, did not appeal to the Sikkimese voters, as not a single of their candidates got elected this time. By the time the sixth general election to the Assembly was held in the middle of 2004, P.K. Chamling's SDF had literally replaced Bhandari's SSP. By then Bhandari was the lone member sitting on the opposition bench before the polls and rest of his six elected MLAs had crossed the floor to Chamling's camp. In such a situation, the result of election was anybody's guess. Though prior to the election, Bhandari once more joined the Congress party, the voters were not impressed by his antiques and not a single candidate put up by anybody other than P.K. Chamling was elected to the Assembly. In a way, Chamling repeated the same feat, which Bhandari had enacted in 1989 fifteen years back by winning all the seats in the State assembly. One of the longest serving Chief Ministers in India,

Bhandari found himself out side the Sikkim legislature for the first time in 25 years since 1979.

There are a number of lessons to be learnt. As long as the policy of ethnic parity between the communities continued, there was always a Bhotia or a Lepcha as the head of the administration. The moment the cap of ethnic parity was removed in 1979 a member of the Nepamul community was elected to the office of the Chief Minister. Since then for the last 25 years, two members of the community, Nar Bahadur Bhandari and Pawan Kumar Chamling, continued to rule the State. Secondly, as long as the Nepamul contested the parity system, they fought for the cause of the community and unlike social situation in Nepal the Indian Nepalese community presented a unified and solid image of the community. This was further extended by various demands made by the political parties in 1980's. In this context, Nar Bahadur Bhandari's contributions were significant. Thirdly, with the introduction of other backward caste commission report, a new social scenario emerged in Sikkim. *Nepamul* are no more unified as a community: there are *tagadharas* and *matwalis*. Then there are scheduled castes such as Kami, Damai, and Sarki. There are *janajatis*. The Newars are now seen as a separate social block. Apparently, today Nepalese in Sikkim have come to largely mean Bahun and Chhetri. And at last, there is an emerging solidarity of OBCs. The Nepamul intelligentsia is not happy with fragmented image of the community in Sikkim, but the political activists have stolen a lead from them. So what appears at the beginning of the 21st century is that instead of two ethnic blocks of Nepamul and Lepcha-Bhutias of Chogyal's era, we have a fragmented Sikkimese social world, in which politicians spin new slogans for political participation, social development, and over-all welfare of Sikkim.

References

- Basnet, L B. 1974. *Sikkim: A Short Political History*. S Chand & Co., New Delhi.
 Das, B S. 1983. *Sikkim Saga*. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.
 Dutta Ray, Sunanda K. 1984. *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim*. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.

- Kazi, Jigme N. 1994. *Inside Sikkim: Against the Tide*. Hill Media Publications, Gangtok.
- Sinha, A C. 1975. *Politics of Sikkim*. Thomson Press (India), Faridabad.
- Sinha, A C. 1991. *Bhutan: Ethnic Identity and National Dilemma*. Reliance Publishing House, New Delhi.
- Sinha, A C and T. B. Subba, eds. 2003. *Nepalis in India: A Community in Search of An Indian Identity*. Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi.