

POLITICAL PARTIES AND ETHNICITY IN SIKKIM SINCE 1975

Dissertation submitted to Sikkim University in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

Submitted by

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SIKKIM UNIVERSITY

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the research work embodied in the dissertation titled “**POLITICAL PARTIES AND ETHNICITY IN SIKKIM SINCE 1975**” submitted to **Sikkim University** for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is my original work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**POLITICAL PARTIES AND ETHNICITY IN SIKKIM SINCE 1975**” submitted to Sikkim University for partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in the **Department of History**, embodies the result of bona fide research work carried out by **Ms. Samten Doma Bhutia** under my guidance and supervisor. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association-ship and fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by me.

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GLOSSARY

Rong	Lepchas called themselves as Rong.
Chong or Tsong	Another name of Limboos
Denzongpas or Lhor	Bhutia call themselves Denzongpas
Thikadar	Contactors
Kalobhari	The literary meaning of the term <i>Kalobhari</i> in Nepali is Black load.
Jharlangi	The system of labour without wages.
Kuruwa	The literary meaning of Kuruwa in Nepali is long wait.
Theki-Bethi	Gifts taken by the elites of Sikkim from the masses.
Kazis	During the time of king, the elites in Sikkim were called Kazis.
Lhade Mede	Groups of elite who used to render advice to the king.
Chos	Dharma.

INTRODUCTION

The term ethnicity or ethnic group is a socially defined category of people who identify with each other based on a shared social experience, ancestry and history. In the beginning, ethnicity was defined only on the biological and physical, racial and cultural grounds. But in the imperial-colonial period, i.e., during nineteenth and twentieth century, the term ethnicity became wider as radical changes took place in the political and social spheres (Nain; 2000).¹ Recently, the term ethnicity is connected with nation building, nationalism, culture and of course tribal identity (Agarwal; 1996).² In Sikkim ethnic communities have played a vital role in the politics of State, since the time of pre-merger era and after the merger with the Indian Union on 26th April 1975. First hand information regarding arousal of ethnic consciousness and political manipulation of it at the party or organization level can be found (Basnet; 1974). Basnet writes that with the emergence of the Sikkim National Party in 1948 the use of ethnic symbols such as race, culture, and religion, etc. for political purpose also began³. The political system of Sikkim was typically Himalayan theocratic feudalism parallel to the Tibetan Lamaist pattern (Sinha; 2008).⁴ The ruler was not only the secular head of the State, but also an incarnate lama with responsibility to rule the subjects in accordance with the tenets of the 'Chos'-the Dharma (Joshi; 2004).⁵ Her social structure was based on the social status and the economic organization was basically feudal.

The existence of multiple ethnic groups in Sikkim is as old as the Namgyal dynasty of Sikkim but mobilization of these ethnic categories for political purposes began only during the late 1940's. The main ethnic communities of Sikkim which was recognized by the Chogyal (king) of Sikkim;

¹ Nain, Vikram. Singh. (2000). *International Relations and Ethnicity*. RBSA Publishers, S.M.S. Highway. Jaipur. P. 3.

² Agarwal, M.M. (1996). *Ethnicity, Culture and Nationalism in north-east India*. Indus Publishing Company. New Delhi. P. 11.

³ Gurung, Suresh. Kumar. (2011). *Sikkim Ethnicity and Political Dynamics: A Triadic perspective*. Kunal Book. New Delhi. P. 8.

⁴ Sinha, A.C. (2008). *Sikkim Feudal and Democracy*. Indus Publishing Company. New Delhi. P. 39.

⁵ Joshi, H.G. (2004). *Sikkim past and Present*. Mittal Publication. New Delhi. P. 139.

namely- Bhutias-Lepchas and Sikkimese Nepalese, of which the Nepalese constitute the majority. Compared to other ethnic groups, the Lepchas are considered the earliest ethnic community to have settled in Sikkim. Lepchas were only aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim.⁶ The Bhutias were Buddhist and initially Lepchas were nature worshippers but after the advent of Bhutias, the Lepchas were converted to Buddhism, while Nepalese are predominantly Hindus (while certain section of the Nepalese, particularly Tamangs, Gurungs and Shakyas are Buddhists). These Ethnic communities lived in peace and harmony with each other in the State.

The steady growth of cultural-ethnic politics has been seen in Sikkim even before the merger. Ethnic mobilizations were not altogether unknown under the monarchical form of government of Sikkim. Sikkim, like other parts of India, has been subjected to attempts at cultural-territorial mobilization (or popularly known as ethnic mobilization) since the introduction of parliamentary democracy after the merger with India.⁷ From the very beginning of her history, Sikkim had her own representative form of government, which involved all the three ethnic communities of Sikkim: lepchas, Bhutia and Nepalese. Before the merger, the ruling Namgyal dynasty belonging to a minority Bhutia racial community was ruling over subjects belonging to different racial-cultural communities. Attempts at cultural-ethnic mobilization became evident with the emergence of political parties during the second half of 20th century. The emergence of political parties can be traced back to the 1940s. The birth of organized political parties in the form of Sikkim State Congress was directly the impact of the Indian National Congress and linked with the struggle for freedom. The then popular leader in Sikkim were inspired by the democratic struggle waged by the Indian National Congress for the independence of India.⁸ These leaders started striving for democratic rule in Sikkim and also Sikkim's merger with

⁶ Lama, Mahendra. P. (1994). *Sikkim Society, Polity, Economy, Environment*. Indus Publishing Company. New Delhi. P. 1.

⁷ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 15.

⁸ Lama, Op.cit, P. 97.

India. Later on, a number of political parties emerged to support and interact with and counter these moves in Sikkim. However, the real wave for a democratic movement and merger of Sikkim with India has its roots in the 1973 revolution when the popular forces favoured merger with India through a referendum.⁹

The basis of political reorganization in Sikkim to a great extent is community oriented. In fact from the time of Namgyal dynasty, political parties had raised the issue of one particular community or another. Political parties and organizations which raise the issue of community rights actually also deny those same rights to other communities. The Sikkim National Party (SNP), which stood for the preservation of the distinct identity of Sikkim and for the rights of the minority Bhutia- Lepcha community, captured most of the seats reserved for these two communities. On the other hand the Sikkim State Congress (SSC), which stood for accession of Sikkim with India, supported the demands of the majority Nepalese and won the unreserved. The establishment of the Sikkim State Congress, under the presidentship of Tashi Tshering, marked an important phase in the political development of Sikkim.¹⁰

Sikkim is inhabited by different ethno-cultural or linguistic group which often exhibits antagonistic tendency due to the presence of competition between them over various things which they consider valuable. Such antagonistic tendencies act under certain situation in a particular way impairing social cohesion and development itself. The political institutions, which are expected to act as arbitrators in a conflict, also often act as instruments of promoting interest of a particular ethnic community and thus end up as antagonistic to each other. The government also tends to favor a particular ethnic group or groups and deprive others, which in long run, may lead to ethnic

⁹ Ibid. P. 97.

¹⁰ Kazi, Jigme. N. (2009). *Sikkim for Sikkimese (Distinct Identity within Union)* Vol 1, Hill Media Publications. Gangtok-Sikkim India. P. 35

polarization or ethnic division in the society. The history of the quest for ethnic parity in Sikkim is much older than the saga of merger. Nepali communities in Sikkim which consist the majority of the population, feel dominated by the minority Bhutia-Lepcha community, which some of the political parties made it their agenda. Thus, the question of providing equal opportunities to all the three ethnic groups will continue to dominate the political agenda of the State. Political parties began to campaign in favour of particular communities and for their rights, due to this consciousness aroused among different ethnic groups for equal opportunities.

After the merger, parliamentary democracy and notions of equality, individual freedom, and the modern legal system have been introduced. It was hoped that cultural differences and ethnic politics would be gradually marginalized with the slow permeation of notions of individual rights and equality. But, contrary to the general expectations, cultural or ethnic consciousness and the political actions based on cultural or ethnic identity have become more frequent. New political parties and organizations have been formed with community oriented claims and demands, and are competing with each other for the ethnic space. By raising such community oriented issues political parties have facilitated the process of articulation as well as legitimated the demands of various cultural categories.

Evidently, cultural or ethnic mobilization in Sikkim cannot be seen as a positive development. Sikkim, in fact does not have a long history of conflict between the different communities though some communities were discriminated. There is evidence of cultural exchange and inter-community marriages among members of the three major communities even until the past. These communities lived in peace and harmony with each other in the State. Eventually, with the emergence of various political parties and the growing consciousness among the different communities has led to the cultural-ethnic mobilization on exclusivist lines in Sikkim in recent past.

In such ethnically divided society or societies, political parties often rely on social bonds and community sentiments in order to get support. In this way, relationship between political parties and social ethnic organization is built for mutual benefit- as political parties use ethnic community as vote banks while ethnic groups use political parties to legitimate their community interests. Thus, the ethnic communities in Sikkim have played a vital role in the politics of Sikkim.

Review of Literature

Speaking of literary sources, there has been some exciting work done regarding the history of Sikkim. Many works were done on the cultural, traditional, religious aspects and the period of these concerned with the Chogyal (king) rule. However, there are some works published which have focused on the politics and ethnic communities of Sikkim in recent times. There are three main ethnic communities in Sikkim as mentioned earlier: Lepchas, Bhutia and Sikkimese Nepalese since the time of Chogyal (king) rule. It has been evident that these ethnic communities used to live in harmony with each other and there were no conflict or tension between these communities, in fact there was exchange of culture and inter-community marriage. But, gradually there arose consciousness among different ethnic groups for individual right and freedom and along with it emerged the political parties who took these issues of communities in order to gain their support.

The focus of the proposed work is on the ethnic communities and the politics of Sikkim. The following work in this area attempt to show the political life and role of ethnic communities in it. Mahendra P Lama(ed): Sikkim-Society, Polity, Economy, Environment (1994), is divided into four broad sections viz., Society, Polity, Economy and Environment. Each section carries articles written by scholars, professionals and policy-makers most of whom have worked in Sikkim in various capacities. Some of them were instrumental in introducing policy changes in Sikkim based on their

research studies, experiments and findings. This work focuses on the Polity which talks about the situation of Sikkim after the merger and the process of its transition in the political and economic culture. The merger brought in a system of governance and institutions which were alien to the Sikkim traditional past. But this change did not affect the environment to a point of ethnic or political conflict and the credit for this goes to the people of Sikkim who exercised a healthy restraint. The people of Sikkim did not get submerged after the merger. The work talks about the Constitutional status of Sikkim under article 371F of the Constitution of India and gives the detail accounts regarding the special provision and political structure of the State. It also gives the details of electoral politics, as Sikkim immediately after the merger adopted unicameral legislative system in the name of Sikkim Legislative Assembly. This book gives detailed information on the electoral process, administration and the formation of government in Sikkim after the merger.

M.M. Agarwal's *Ethnicity, Culture and Nationalism in North-East India*, (1996) deals with the socio-cultural problems of the north-east, and gives a detailed understanding of ethnicity, culture and nationality. It talks about the ethnic identity of the tribal communities of the north-east states. It helps to understand the different ethnic communities and their role in the State.

A.C. Sinha's *'Sikkim Feudal and Democratic'*, (2008) tells the story of Sikkim from its past to the present and reports as how the Tibetans, Nepalese and the British dealt with Sikkim, leading to the eclipse of its autonomous entity. It provides with the background and social history indicating the emergence of ethnic plurality and indeterminate political status. Sinha delivers in details into the feudal and democratic elite and describes the travails of Sikkim from a feudal set up to a democratic one. At the end book talks about how Sikkim can find a place in the Indian democratic environment.

Jigme N. Kazi's book *Inside Sikkim Against the Tide* (1994), *Sikkim for Sikkimese* (2009) and *the Lone Warrior* (2014) focus mainly on issues after the merger. In these books the author brings the issues of identity crisis, the citizenship issues in Sikkim, seat reservation in the Legislative Assembly, fall and rise of political parties based on ethnic communities and the views regarding the merger. It deals with the democratic movements (1990-1997), and political rights (1998-1999). It holds that even after Sikkim became India's 22nd State in 1975, the question of citizenship had not been fully settled. This, along with the increasing influx into the State, which threatens the survival of the native Sikkimese who feel that they are on the brink of extinction are discussed in these works. It shows that even after the merger, ethnic complexities still continue to determine the discourse in Sikkim; be it political, economic, or social. Overall, this book shows the political and social condition of the people of Sikkim after the merger and the response of Central government to their demands.

Suresh k Gurung's 'Sikkim Ethnicity and Political Dynamics A Triadic perspective' (2011) is an attempt at understanding the cleavages between ethnicity and politics. The author contends that ethnic consciousness in Sikkim is brought through a historical process and that politics played a determine role in the creation of ethnic consciousness rather than ethnic communities creating the consciousness. Apart from that the book contains an exhaustive list of political parties and organizations of Sikkim. This will be useful to understand politics of State

Objective of Study

Objective of this research is to draw attention towards the interdependence of political life and ethnic community within Sikkim since the time of its formation as a State within India. Ethnic communities have played a significant role in the political history of Sikkim and are till date a dominant factor for the existence and survival of a political party within the State. Major national

parties have failed to secure a dominant role here because of the factors associated with the communities and the tribes coexisting in it. Therefore, the objective here is to bring forward those factors which have been important and interrelated to the political history and the ethnic community of Sikkim. The proposed research throws light on the role of ethnic community and how, did this community become important factor in the politics of State. How political parties used these ethnic communities and brought up the issues concerning these communities to achieve their political aims.

Methodology

The methodology for the proposed research will involve gathering relevant data from the various documents and compiling database in order to analyze the material and arrive at a more complete understanding and historical reconstruction of interrelationship between political life and ethnic community within Sikkim. It has both primary and secondary sources and manifestoes of political parties. Data are collected from field surveys and interview with personalities as well as from published articles in newspapers and materials from the Sikkim State archives.

Chapterization:

Chapter One: Origin of Ethnic Communities in Sikkim

- Dealt with the origin of ethnic communities in Sikkim.
- Dealt with the other communities like Sherpas, Tsong (Limboos), Rais, Mangars, Tamangs (Murnis), Gurungs, etc. as they deserved special mention in view of the ethno-political scenario of Sikkim.
- Focused on the three main ethnic groups: Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalese.

Chapter Two: Emergence of Political Parties

- Dealt with the emergence of different political parties in Sikkim.
- Focused on the political parties which emerged after the merger of Sikkim with India till date.
- Political parties used the demands of ethnic communities as their political agenda and how these ethnic communities in Sikkim through political parties tried to fulfill their demands.

Chapter Three: Assembly Seat Issue

- Dealt with the Assembly seat issue from the time of Chogyal and till date.
- Discussed Bill No. 79 of 1979.
- Focused on the tendency of opposition among the political parties regarding the seat issue.
- Response of Central Government towards reservation of Assembly seat.

Chapter Four: Contemporary Scene

- Focused on the role of the emerging political parties and social organization in Sikkim.
- Dealt with the role of social organization of different ethnic communities which work for the rights and welfare of the people.
- And how far these political parties and social organization have achieved their goal.

CHAPTER ONE

ORIGIN OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN SIKKIM

Like many other States of India, Sikkim is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural State. There are Buddhists, Hindus and Christians, sometimes co-existing happily within the same community.

A tiny Himalayan State of the Indian Union, Sikkim is a multi-cultural society cohabited by a multiple cultural-linguistic groups. It is inhabited by different ethnic communities like Nepalese (also called Gorkhas/Paharis), Lepchas (also called Rongs/Monpas), Bhutias (also called Denzongpas/Lhopas), etc., of which the Nepalese constitute the majority. Apart from these, there exist some smaller groups like Sherpas, Tsongs (Limboos), Rais, Mangars, Tamangs (Murnis), Gurungs, etc., who identify themselves as Nepalese in Sikkim. The major ethnic groups of present day Sikkim are the Lepchas, Bhutia and the Nepalese. As these communities have played an important role in the political life of Sikkim, it will be pertinent to know about their origin in Sikkim. Besides, the communities like Sherpas, Yolmos (Kagatey), Limboos (Tsongs), etc., are also important in any analysis of ethnicity and identity formation mainly in view of what the communities think and what others say about them. Certain other Nepalese tribes/castes like Mangars, Tamangs (Murnis), Gurungs, Rais, etc., also deserve special mention in view of the ethno-political scenario of Sikkim.

The existence of multiple ethnic groups in Sikkim is as old as the Namgyal dynasty of Sikkim but mobilization of these ethnic categories for political purposes began only during the late 1940s. The ethnic communities of Sikkim which was

recognized by the Chogyal (King) of Sikkim were the Bhutia, Lepchas and Sikkimese Nepalese, of which the Nepalese constitute the majority. Lepchas are the aboriginals of Sikkim.¹ Compared to other ethnic groups, the Lepchas are considered the earliest ethnic community to have settled in Sikkim followed closely by the Bhutias. The two enjoy privileges as the original inhabitants of Sikkim. As Sikkim opened up in the colonial period and particularly after independence, the Nepalese, Marwaris, Biharis and Tibetans came in to develop agricultural, trade and the services sector. Gradually, these communities began to settle down in Sikkim. The Nepalese have emerged as the dominant community in the economic, political and administration in Sikkim. The Bhutias and Lepchas were Buddhist while Nepalese are predominantly Hindus (certain section of the Nepalese, particularly Tamangs, Gurungs and Sakyas are Buddhists). These ethnic communities lived in peace and harmony with each other during the Namgyal period.

Sikkim, though inherited as early as in the thirteenth century by the Lepchas, who migrated from the Assam hills, came into being as a political entity in 1641. In that year, the lama of Lhasa, with the aid of two other lamas, converted the people of Sikkim to the Buddhist faith and appointed Penchoo Namgyal to be the first King, or Gyalpo.² The term Sikkimese indicates the resident of Sikkim. Citizens of modern day Sikkim trace their ancestry to a variety of Asian people- Lepchas, Bhutias, Nepalese and Indians. As everywhere in India, these populations are organized in administrative categories (Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, etc.). The historical process of

¹ Lama, Mahendra P. (1994). *Sikkim Society, Polity, Economy, Environment*. Indus Publishing Company. New Delhi. P. 1.

² Karan, P. Pradyumna and Jenkins, M. William. (1963). *The Himalayan Kingdoms: Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal*. D. Van Nostrand Company, INC. P. 57.

formation of the present population of Sikkim can be seen from the gradual evolution of local ethnic communities. These are the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese.

The native Lepchas including Bhutias and Tibetan-Dukpa, who overran Sikkim in 16th and 17th centuries from Tibet, comprise only 21 percent of the Sikkim's population. The largest group is the Nepalese settlers. When the British first set foot on the Kalimpong area, which was under Bhutan for well over and half century, along with them came Tibetans and the Nepalese.³ British then encouraged more and more influx of Nepalese community in to Sikkim as more people were needed for the agriculture purpose. Between 1891 and 1931 the increase in the number of Nepalese migrants was five-fold.⁴ This trend shows the encouragement given to Nepalese settlers in the first phase of the British protectorate. The first authentic information regarding Sikkim's ethnic composition is the census of 1891 in which the total population is shown as 30,458 including 5,762 Lepchas, 4,894 Bhutias, 3,356 Limboos and the rest Nepalese.⁵ After 1891 only Lepchas, Bhutias and Limboos are taken as distinct ethnic groups while all the other groups came to be regarded as different castes of the Nepalese society.⁶

Ever since the opening of Sikkim to the outside world 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 Bhutias rulers were

³ Foning, A.R. (2003). *Lepcha My Vanishing Tribe*. Chyu-Pandi Farm Kalimpong- 734301. West Bengal, India. P. 11.

⁴ Mamata, Desai. (1988). *Eco-System and Ethnic Constellation of Sikkim*. Best Books Publication Department. P.27.

⁵ Risley, H.H. Reprinted. (2010). *The gazetteer of Sikkim*. Low Price Publication. New Delhi- 110052. P. 27.

⁶ Singh, K.S. (1993). *People of India, Sikkim (Vol XXXIX)*. Anthropological Survey of India. Sea Gull Books Calcutta. P. 4.

always cautions about the other communities, and saw to it that they could not get a formidable position as to pose a threat to their power. They were able to subjugate the Lepchas easily because of the latter's conversion to Lamaism. On the other hand, when the British encouraged the Nepalese immigrants in to Sikkim, the Bhutia rulers failed to control large scale Nepalese immigration to Sikkim. To counteract the growing number of Nepalese, the Bhutias encouraged the Tibetans to settle down in Sikkim. As a result of this immigration, both the communities outnumber the original inhabitants of Sikkim. Figures for the year 1931 and 1951 show a stagnating trend among the Lepcha population.⁷ Disturbed by this influx, laws have been passed by the palace (King) prohibiting the Nepalese from settling in the lush valleys of the North, but it is not certain to what extent these laws are enforced.

From the time of establishment of Sikkimese Kingdom, the Lepchas became an inferior subject people under the domination of the Sikkimese Tibetans or Bhutias. The situation became worse for the Lepcha community when the British encouraged the influx of Nepalese into the State and also with coming of Indian traders. Lepchas have lost much of their land due to the infiltration of Bhutias and above all, by the rapid spread of Nepalese settlers. The Lepchas have been pushed into the forest and the lower valleys by the Bhutias who have settled at higher elevations. However, despite this discrimination, the religious factors and common feelings of national consciousness have restricted, to a certain degree of historic and cultural unity of Sikkim.

⁷ Desai, Op.cit, P. 21.

Despite such an ethnic diversity, there is no apparent social tension between the various groups. A remarkable feature of Sikkimese society is the tolerance and acceptance of the different cultures and their harmonious co-existence. Over the years, there have been cultural mixture, especially between the Lepchas and Bhutias, and this helped to create a distinctive Sikkimese ethos. One of the strong evidence of this acculturation is the absorption of mount Kanchenjunga into Buddhist ceremonies. This mountain has been worshipped by the Lepchas from very early times. Yet, today, it is equally worshipped by Bhutias and the Nepalese, and there is an elaborate annual Buddhist ritual in its honour. It seems that though there are various ethnic communities in Sikkim, following their own culture and tradition, these communities respect each other's religion. These communities, though different in many respects, have developed a sense of belongingness and togetherness among themselves due to their long association with each other. The intercommunity marriages, which was once considered a taboo, is a common happening and a new Sikkimese culture, a sort of fusion of all the cultures, is a reality. And finally with the passing of Sikkim Subject Regulation of 1961⁸ that gave citizenship to these inhabitants, there is a sense of a new identity that cuts across ethnic groups.

Lepchas or Rongs

There are numerous tribes and castes in our country, which is the land of unity in diversity. The Lepchas are one of them. They are a Scheduled Tribe and have a unique culture of their own. The Lepchas are said to be the earliest and original inhabitants of

⁸ Sikkim State Archives. *Sikkim Subject Regulation*. 1961. Notification No. 156/s-61. Dated- 3rd July 1961. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 2/9/2014.

Sikkim. The Lepchas call themselves “*Rong*” or “*Rongkup*” which means ‘the son of the snowy peak’; they are now in a numerical minority. The Lepcha is the name given to the tribe by the Nepalese. In a Parbatiya dialect of Nepal ‘Lep’ means ‘speech’ and ‘cha’ means ‘unintelligible’ i.e., the “unintelligible speaker”. It is referred to as ‘Lepcha’ or ‘Lepche’ for not adopting the Parbatiya language.⁹ According to one opinion, the Lepchas are supposed to have come to Sikkim from the east of the mountains from Assam and upper Burma. Their own tradition, however, states that their original home was in the neighbourhood of the great mountain, Kanchenjunga.

Opinions differ about the original homeland of the Lepchas. According to some historians, they are said to be of Tibeto-Burman and Chinese origin. We are told that they came from Kailash parbat in Tibet. Some scholars associate them with the Nagas but modern scholars associate them with the Japanese. George Kutturan in his book mentions that the Lepchas came from Assam and belonged to Tibeto-Burman tribal group.¹⁰ Most of the scholars support this view regarding the origin of Lepchas. Various parts of Tibet and Mongolia have been suggested and a certain similarity has apparently been found between the Lepcha language and some dialects spoken in Indo-China.¹¹ Geoffrey Gorer holds that “the Lepchas are a Mongoloid people, slightly more pronounced Mongolian feature, fairer complexions and greater stature than their present neighbours”. However, the Lepchas themselves have no tradition of migration and believe that they came from Mayel, a high snow filled valley beyond the holy

⁹ Nirash, Nita. (1982). *The Lepchas of Sikkim. (Vol. 2)*. Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology and Other Buddhist Studies. Gangtok, India. Bulletin of Tibetology (New series). P. 18.

¹⁰ Kutturan, George. (1983). *The Himalayan Gateway: History and Culture of Sikkim*. Sterling Publishers. New Delhi. P. 16

¹¹ Gorer, Geoffrey. Reprinted (1996). *The Lepchas of Sikkim*. Gyan Publishing House. New Delhi. P. 35.

Kanchenjunga where they say their ancestors still live.¹² Thus it is very difficult to come to a definite conclusion on the origin of the Lepchas.

The Lepchas as a tribe are timid and are shy to strangers. Perhaps, living in the deep solitude of the mountains, they have become so. They are naturally simple and easy-going people. They are very strong and are not easily tired. They can walk long distances along steep climbs and winding paths. This may be due to their living in the mountainous region. Lepchas mix amongst themselves and with other people with equal ease. This very simple and easy-going nature of Lepchas became their weakness too. The Lepchas do not appear ever to have resisted invasion of their land by the outsiders. It is believed that initially the Lepchas led a semi-nomadic economic life depending mainly on forest products- fruits, roots and tubers and hunting and fishing. Besides, they used to grow two varieties of dry-land paddy (*Dunbra and Ongroyzo*), millet (*Mongbru*) for preparation of *Chee* (a Lepcha Beverage) and maize (*Kunchung*) through the practice of shifting cultivation.¹³ Abundant forestland provided ample scope for such a simple economic formation to sustain.

It is said that the early Lepchas, before the coming of the lamas with their Buddhist faith, were *Shamanists* variously described as believers in ‘*Bon*’ faith or ‘*Mun*’ faith. The belief in spirit both evil and good formed the basis of this faith. All sickness and calamities was attributed to evil spirits who were to be exorcised. Whereas plentiful harvest, healthy off-spring, timely seasons were all considered to be the work of good spirits who were to be constantly humoured with prayers and

¹² Ibid. P. 35.

¹³ Gurung, Surush Kumar. (2011). *Sikkim, ethnic Political Dynamics: A triadic Perspective*. Kunal Boks Publication. New Delhi. P. 99.

offerings. The priests of the faith were called *Muns* who were really sorcerers. It was the *Mun* who served as the oracle as well as the doctor. There was however no particular class or caste of priestly *Muns*. It was not even hereditary and there was no organized hierarchy. Apparently anybody can become *Mun* irrespective of sex and status.

The Lepchas have their own language and script. Perhaps it is the oldest language of all the hill dialects. However, its origin is obscured and nobody can say with a sense of certainty with from where it originated and how it became the mother tongue of the Lepchas. The Lepcha language is one of the eleven official languages recognized by the Sikkim government¹⁴ and is taught up to the high school levels. According to philologists the language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages to which the other languages of other tribes of the sub-Himalayan region also belong. According to the Lepcha mythology, the Lepcha language is the language of God, i.e., the language of Fodong Thing and Nazaong Nyo, to whom the Lepchas owe their origin.¹⁵ The Tibetan sources reveal that Lhatsun Chempo, one of the three lamas who anointed and consecrated the first Bhutia king (Chogyal) of Sikkim in 1642, gave the language to the Lepchas. Lama Lhatsun Chempo is considered to be the great patron saint of Sikkim. Believed to have been an incarnation of the great Indian teacher, Bhim Mitra, he is said to have been responsible for the conversion of Sikkim to Buddhism.¹⁶ Whatever may be the contentions on the origin of the Lepcha language, it certainly has undergone modifications under the influence of the various other

¹⁴ Sikkim State Archives. *Sikkim Official Language Bill No. 7*. No. 100. Dated 16th September, 1977. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 2/9/2014.

¹⁵ Gurung, Op.cit, PP. 97-98.

¹⁶ Kutturan, Op.cit, P 22.

languages of the sub-Himalayan tribes. Gorer, contends that the Lepcha community adjusts well with the mixed communities, to a very great extent adopting the habits, culture, and even the language of their neighbours.¹⁷ As a result of this it appears that they have practically completely forgotten their own language.

It seems that there is no reliable way of knowing the early history and tribal organization of the Lepcha people. However, there is a mass of folklore which has come down from generations. From these sources, it is clear that a loose type of tribal organization did exist from the early days of their settlement in Sikkim. Most of the scholars hold that in the Lepcha society there used to be a king called "*Panu*" and Pohartak Panu is considered to be the first Lepcha ruler of Sikkim. There is also mention about Turvey Panu, another Lepcha ruler in succession who lived about 500 years ago. After the death of Turvey, his son ascended the throne. After the death of Turvey's last descendant, two Lepcha chiefs successively ruled over Sikkim. The Panu of Sikkim, who was born in 1686, was a very benevolent and popular ruler. During his short reign of 25 years the country enjoyed prosperity and the Lepchas flourished greatly. He introduced the art of writing among his people.¹⁸ A.R. Fonning, however does not subscribe to this theory of Lepcha Panu. According to Fonning, the Lepcha society is such that ranking and gradation is completely out of place, and it could be said with emphasis that there never has been any acknowledgement of authority except

¹⁷ Gorer, Op.cit, P. 37.

¹⁸ Campbell, A. *Notes on Lepchas of Sikkim*. Journal of Asiatic society of Bengal. Vol IX. Appendix 1. P. 1.

those of the seniors in the Lepcha tribe. Contrary to what is written by the foreigners it could be asserted, with equal emphasis, that the Lepchas never had any king.¹⁹

The Lepchas are divided into a number of clans: The *Renjyong-mu*, *Ilam-mu* and lastly *Tamsang-mu* and *Dalim-mu*. Lepchas of Sikkim belong to the *Renjyong-mu* clan. As the name indicates, the groupings have been done and named according to the old time administrative jurisdictions under the Sikkim kings.²⁰ The Lepcha people from all of these clans believe that originally they all came down from the Chyu-bee, i.e., from a place somewhere among the mountains and peaks around the great Konchen-Konghlo. Here it will be interesting to know that in the days gone by and beyond the pale of history, the two tribes, the *Rong* (Lepchas) and the *Chong* (Limboos) may have been one and the same tribe.²¹ In the course of centuries, this same tribe because of the territorial expansion and difficult terrain of the hills and the valleys, and because of their contact with tribes from outside got swayed into adopting two slightly different ways of life and culture.

The coming of Tibetans during the fifteenth and sixteenth century had a great influence on the economic lifestyle of the Lepchas. They were exposed to political domination, subjugation and cultural transformation with which Lepchas were possibly unfamiliar of. Lepchas were confined in the Dezungu reserve area and lost contact with the outside world. To some extent the Lepchas have adopted themselves to the changed conditions, accepting the way of life and language of their neighbours. Another

¹⁹ Fonning, A.R. (2003). *Lepcha My Vanishing Tribe*. Second edition. Chyu-pandi farm Kalimpong, West Bengal, India. P. 8.

²⁰ Ibid. P. 126.

²¹ Ibid. P. 135.

important phase is characterized by political unrest, with conflict and tension. The contacts with the Nepalese introduced a new variety of crops- cardamom and wet-paddy, along with the system of terrace farming. This has a significant influence on the occupational habit and settlement process of the Lepchas. The British got involved in Sikkim's affairs due to the latter's involvement in wars with the Nepal and Bhutan. Along with the British, there came people from Nepal and the traders from India. These people had a profound effect on the easy-going simple aboriginal inhabitants. The final wave of migrants came when the British took over power from the king of Sikkim, during the first half of the 19th century. They were primarily brought in to work on preparing and working on tea plantations, for building roads and bridges, as also for a political reason- for counteracting the strong Tibetan influence on Sikkim. They were encouraged to migrate. As a result of this, at present, Nepalese form an overwhelming majority in the population of the State.

It can be seen that the Lepchas have been, for a considerable period, a subject race, under the domination of the Bhutias and British. They are agriculturists and hunters, but in Sikkim the best land has been taken by the Bhutias and later by the Nepalese who have migrated in great number. The Lepcha appears to be a dying race. It is only in Dzongu and in one or two small villages outside the reserve area that there is a homogenous Lepcha society practically undisturbed by alien influence.

There was increase in the population of the State. Within 40 years from 1891 to 1931 the increase was five-fold. This trend reflects the encouragement given to Nepali settlers in first phase of the British protectorate. Figures for 1931 to 1951 show a

stagnating trend among the Lepcha population. In 1981 the total population was 30,485 and it went up to 406,457 in 1991.²²

Table No: 1.1

Population Figure of Sikkimese Lepcha at a Glance (1911-2011)

Year	Total Population	Lepcha Population
1911	87,920	11,020
1921	81,721	-
1931	109,808	13,060
1941	121,520	12,532
1951	138,093	13,625
1961	162,863	1,272
1971	210,205	33,360
1981	316,840	27,814
1991	406,000	29,854
2001	541,902	35,728
2011	607,688	78,999

Source: Various books and Census records of India

The Bhutias

The first outsider who came to Sikkim, in an appreciable number, were the Tibetans from the province of Kham, in eastern Tibet. The word Bhutia is derived from the name of the place “Bhot”, i.e., Tibet, to which the Bhutias of Sikkim originally belonged. At present they are one of the important ethnic groups of Sikkim. The migration of the Bhutias into Sikkim probably began during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Migration took place continuously in many ways and through different routes, from the northern and western passes of Sikkim. According to the popular version, the religious strife between the *Ge-lig-pas* (Yellow Hat Sect) and the *Nyngmapas* (Red Hat Sect) in Tibet forced many followers of Red-Hat-Sect to flee Tibet along with their

²² Census of India. Distribution of Population. (1991). Series 22, Sikkim, Part XI. Census Atlas. P. 12.

leader Khye Bhumsa after their defeat in the hand of Yellow-Hat-Sect. They settled in the Chumbi Valley, an alienable part of Sikkim then. Initially the nature loving and friendly Lepcha Athing, Thekong Tek, advised the Panu Hyum to take stock of the situation. It is said the Lepcha Panu was treacherously murdered. According to the folklore/legend Khye Bhumsa later sought kind relationship with the Lepcha spiritual leader (Athing) Thekong Tek which was then solemnized by a 'blood-brotherhood' pact at Kabi and solicited blessing for son.

Having realized their bleak future in Tibet, the *Nynhmapas* made Chumbi Valley their permanent settlement and gradually spread to other parts of Sikkim. These early settlers from Tibet presently are known as *Denzongpa* or *Lhori* while those who migrated to Sikkim during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were called *Khampa* or *pu-pa* considered different from the *Denzongpa* or *Lhori*. Those who migrated in the twentieth century, especially after the Chinese occupation of Tibet, are referred to as Tibetans. The distinction however narrow down due to the use of the all embracing generic term "Bhutia" in the Scheduled Tribes Order of 1978.²³ This order included eight other Bhutias namely Tromopa, Dophapa, Sherpa, Yolmo, Kagatey, Drukpa, Tibetans and Chumbipa within the fold of Bhutia.

Another version of migrations of Bhutias into Sikkim, was that the Bhutia herdsmen must have come down the slopes of the country with their folk in search of pastures in very ancient times. Possibly they avoided summer and rainy months and came down only in winter months. They must have made early contacts with the

²³ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 106.

Lepchas.²⁴ This view is supported by Sinha, who said that the Tibetan traders, framers and lamas were in search of new areas for colonization long before fifteenth century. Sikkim at that time was very sparsely populated by the primitive tribes of Lepchas and Limboos. The Tibetan grazers and missionary lamas were possibly the earliest immigrants to Sikkim in search of new pastures and potential converts to their religion. They were followed by the traders in their pursuit of bartering their goods. And lastly the Tibetan peasants came in search of rich rice fields. All these stocks found in *Der-me-Dzong* (Denzong- the valley of rice- a Tibetan term for Sikkim) a wide scope for expansion.²⁵

The story of the “blood-brotherhood” pact is important because it was from the descendents of Khye Bhumsa that the first Chogyal came to be selected. Phuntsog Namgyal, the first king of Sikkim, was the direct descendent of a prince who had, in the ninth century, founded the kingdom of Minyak in Kham, East Tibet. Many generations later a prince of the Minyak House went on a pilgrimage. One of his sons, named Khye Bhumsa, married Gurumo the daughter of the Sakya hierarch and settled in Chumbi. Khye Bhumsa, being childless, was advised to seek the blessing of the Rong (Lepcha) elder, Thekong Tek. Khye Bhumsa crossed into the Rong domain, where not only did he secure the Rong elder’s blessing for the three sons but also the prophecy that his descendents would become the rulers of Sikkim, while Thekong Tek’s own people, the Rong would become their subjects. A blood-brotherhood pact was sworn between Khye Bhumsa and Thekong Tek at Kabi Lungstok, signifying the

²⁴ Kutturam, Op.cit, P. 24.

²⁵ Sinha, A.C. (1975). *Politics of Sikkim: A Sociological Study*. Thomson Press. (India) Limited Publication Division. P. 6.

unification of the Tibetans and the Rongs. Though Khye Bhumsa remained and died at Chumbi, his three sons crossed into Sikkim and settled there. Khye Bhumsa's youngest son was Mipon Rab. Mipon Rab's fourth son, Guru Tashi, shifted to Gangtok. Guru Tashi's eldest son was named Jowa Apha. Jowa Apha's son was Guru Tenzing, and Guru Tenzing's son was Phuntsog Namgyal.²⁶

Phuntsog Namgyal or Penchoo Namgye was born in 1604 A.D., and passed his earlier years near Gangtok.²⁷ Some accounts show him as having entered Sikkim via the Jelep-la pass in 1641. Phuntsog Namgyal was a man of substance and commanded respect among not only his neighbour but also the people of the surrounding localities. Traditions tells how the three monks of the Dukpa or Red Hat Sect, namely Lhatsum Namkha Jigmed, Sempah Chhenbo and Rigdzin Kunzangpo met at Yaksun (Yoksum), under Kanchenjunga and consecrated Phuntsog Namgyal as the first king of Sikkim in 1642 and along with it the conversion of Lepchas to Buddhism. The easy going Lepchas readily accepted the externals of Buddhism, monasteries and churches rose to preserve the memory of the missionary monks, and the descendents of the Tibetan settlers recognized to this day as the rightful rulers of Sikkim. Most of the scholars hold that Phuntsog Namgyal was consecrated in 1642; Mullard, however, believes that the consecration of Phuntsog Namgyal took place in 1646.²⁸

Following the classification given by Risley, the Bhutias of Sikkim may be grouped under three categories. Firstly, the six families that descended directly from

²⁶ Basnet, L.B. (1974). *Sikkim: A Short Political History*. Publishers, S. Chand and CO. (Pvt) LTD. New Delhi. P. 13.

²⁷ Risley, H.H. Reprinted (2010). *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*. Low Price Publications. New Delhi- 110052. P. 10.

²⁸ Mullard, Saul. *A History From the Hidden Land: Some Preliminary Remarks on a Seventeenth Century Chronicles*. Bulletin of Tibetology. Vol. 41, No. 1, May 2005. P. 76

Khye Bhumsa. They are *Yul-tenpa*, *Lingcerpa*, *Zhan-tar-pa*, *Tshe-gyu-tarpa*, *Hyim-gye-pa* and *Guru-tashe-pa*. The last four families (clans) are also called *Tong-du-ru-zi* or “the four families of a 1000 collections”. The second category includes those who migrated after the exodus of Khye Bhumsa. They are called *Khampas* or *hBeps-mTshan-bGyad*, or the tribe of the “eight families (clans) namely *Gensapa*, *Namnakpa*, *Chungiopa*, *Ethnpa*, *Phenchunpa*, *Phempunadik*, *Namnakpa* and *Nachingpa*. The third category is comprised of those who migrated, at various times, since the establishment of the Bhutia rule in Sikkim. They are called *Rui-Chhung* or the little families with eight important branches, the Chumbipa (immigrants from Kham in Tibet and Hah in Bhutan and settled in Lachen and Lachung valleys). Each of these families or clans is further subdivided into several sub-families.²⁹

The majority of Sikkimese Bhutias are the followers of Lamaist Buddhism. Bodhisattva is their chief deity followed by guardian deity, including local deity, family deity, village deity and also mount Kanchenjunga. The monastery or Gumpa is their place of worship and the Bhutia lama (spiritual leader) performs all customary rituals. Their main concentration is in the north district, especially Lachen and Lachung villages but, of late, they are numerically the largest among the tribes of Sikkim in the east district, especially in Gangtok. They wear Tibetan style cloth. The Bhutias never took to the tongue of the Rongpas. Their language is essentially a variant of Tibetan. These Tibetans, besides colonizing, started preaching and converting the Lepchas to their faith. Thus, learning their ways, the Lepchas also started cremating dead. Before this, the Lepcha method of disposing of the dead was by burial, which

²⁹ Risley, Op.cit, PP. 28-29.

some of the Lepchas even do today. By this it does not mean the Christian way of doing it, but, in their own traditional methods.

With the consolidation of political power and establishment of religious hegemony after 1642, not only the settlement pattern was changed but the social stratification too began to take shape in the form of Royal family, Lamas, Kazis and the commoners. The State administration consisted of twelve Tibeto-Sikkimese ministers and twelve Lepcha rdzong dpon, giving rise to two-tier but bi-ethnic political class.³⁰ The inter-marriage between the Lepchas provided an opportunity for the warriors to bid for, and secure, a higher status in the social hierarchy. The Lepchas became an inferior subject race, under the domination of the Sikkimese Tibetans or Bhutias, to which race the maharaja and the big landowners belonged. The Lepchas have been pushed into the forests and lower valleys by Bhutias who settled at higher elevations. For a considerable period, the Lepchas were debarred on account of their race, from entering the lamaist monasteries and though this rule is now relaxed, it is questioned whether a Lepcha could today obtain an important position in the big monasteries outside the Lepcha reserves.³¹

The Sikkimese Bhutia people speak their own language and a majority of them can speak in Nepali and the educated people speak in English also. Sikkimese Bhutia language was a spoken dialect and for all literary, cultural and educational pursuits, Tibetan was used in the past. It was also the official language of Sikkim before the merger. All government gazette notifications were brought out in Tibetan language,

³⁰ Mullard, Saul. (2011). *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and Construction of Sikkimese History*. Vol. 26. Brill's Tibetan Study Library. Leiden, Boston. P. 46.

³¹ Gorer, Op.cit, P. 36.

including the official newspaper 'Sikkim Herald'. After 1975, efforts have been made to develop Sikkimese Bhutia as a distinct language in Sikkim and in 1977 Sikkimese Bhutia has been accorded the status of official language.³² There are many socio-cultural organizations of the Bhutias dedicated to conserving and developing the culture, tradition, religion and literature of Bhutias in Sikkim. At present, almost all the Bhutias of Sikkim are bilingual/trilingual and speak Bhutia language as well as Nepali and Lepcha languages fluently. The language is taught up to graduate level.

Eventually the coming of the British, led to a decline in the political and economic powers of the Kazis and Lamas, on the one hand, and settlement of certain Nepali businessmen and peasants and economic prosperity of the protected State of Sikkim on the other hand. The economic prosperity led to competition over growth and resources and growth of resentment against the policies of the British Political Officer in general and Nepalese in particular. The resentment however, led to introduction of certain legislative measures in favour of the Bhutias and Lepchas in the form of prohibition of transaction of the Bhutia-Lepcha land to the Nepalese and other communities.³³

Being the ruling community, the Bhutias did not have a political organization of their own before 1947 as their interests were adequately protected and represented through various proclamations issued by the Chogyal from time to time. However, there used to be the traditional landlords (Kazis) and lamas of monasteries. These

³² Sikkim State Archives. *Sikkim Official Language Bill No. 7*. No. 100. Dated 16th September, 1977. sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 2/9/2014

³³ Sikkim State Archives. *Order Prohibiting Bhutia's and Lepcha's for selling their fields*. File No. 3/8(1)/1921. Serial No. 115. General Department. www.sikkim-culture.gov.in. Accessed on 2/9/2014.

groups were very powerful and enjoyed both administrative and judicial powers within their territorial jurisdiction. The officials of the Darbar were mostly chosen from among the Kazis and they also used to influence decisions in their favour. It is said that the Kazis were instrumental in denying the status of 'hereditary subjects' of Sikkim to the Limboos even when one seat was reserved for them in the State Council in 1967.³⁴ Similarly, the Bhutia spiritual leaders, called lamas, also used to form a powerful group in Sikkim. They used to advise the ruler in political affairs of the country. The custom was that the Chogyal could not avoid the advice rendered by the Lhade Mede, the Council of incarnate Lamas. Their influence in the political affairs of the State under monarchy was such that the one seat was reserved for the monasteries in the State Council as Sangha seat and is still reserved in the present State Legislative Assembly. The first ever political organization of the Bhutias, called Sikkim National Party, was formed in 1948 and with this the political organization in Sikkim started.

The Census report from the year 1891 to 1911 shows the growth in the Bhutia population from 1,995 to 10,411. But in 1921 there was stagnating in the growth of Bhutia population; this must have been due to the influx of Nepalese and Indian settlers. After 1931 it can be seen that there was a gradual growth in the Bhutia population.

³⁴ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 111.

Table No. 1.2

Population Figure of Sikkimese Bhutia at a Glance (1911-2011)

Year	Population	Bhutia Population
1911	87,920	-
1921	81,721	-
1931	109,808	11,955
1941	121,520	-
1951	138,093	15,626
1961	162,863	36,577
1971	210,205	23,562
1981	316,840	36,426
1991	406,000	38,322
2001	541,902	41,825
2011	607,688	97,230

Source: Various books and Census records of India.

The Nepalese

Nepalese constitute ethno-linguistically the majority group in Sikkim. But before going into the details of the subject there are certain confusion associated with the word 'Nepali' which require clarification in the first place. Firstly, who is the Nepali? Is he a citizen of Nepal or a member of an ethnic group or a caste or one who speaks Nepali language? To a Sikkimese or for Indians as such, Nepali means those who have migrated from Nepal and speak the language which is identified as Nepali or Gorkha and belonging to Aryan language groups as distinct from Tibeto-Burman languages or dialects like Bhutia, Tibetan, Lepcha, Limboo, etc. Over the past many years there have been attempts to understand the history of the existence of various groups who are now known to outsiders as Nepalese. The Sikkimese Nepalese belong to Sikkim in the same way as the Bhutias and the Lepchas do.

Secondly, Nepalese is not a completely homogenous group like that of the Lepchas. It is a conglomeration of different and distinct tribes and communities which can broadly be classified under two groups: Mongoloids and Aryans.

Thirdly, there is a lack of cohesion between ‘those who are considered as Nepalese’ and ‘those who consider themselves as Nepalese’.³⁵ For example, the Limboos of Sikkim are called Nepalese but they themselves do not consider so. Similarly, the Sherpas or Yolmos are subsumed constitutionally as a Bhutia group but they acknowledge themselves as Nepalese.

Fourthly, an identity of a Nepali cannot be established only because he speaks Nepali language. A Bhutia or Lepcha or Marwari may not know any language other than Nepali yet he is never considered as Nepali but a Limboo or Rai or Gurung may speak no Nepali but his own language or dialect, yet he is a Nepali to the outside world. So, Nepali identity is not just linguistic, but also racial above all historical.

Under the Nepali term come various tribes and communities. The following groups are generally included as Nepali such as Bahun (Brahmin), Thakuri, Chettri, Newar, Rai, Gurung, Tamang, Limboo, Mangar, Jogi, Bhujel, Thami, Yolmo, Sherpa, Dewan, Mukhai, Sunar, Sarki, Kami and Dami. Out of these groups, the Rais, Limboos, Gurungs, Mangars, Tamangs, Yolmos and Sherpas are all Mongoloid stock and have their own languages or dialect, traditions, cultures, heroes and habits and religion. While the others like Bahun, Chettri, Thakuri, Kami, Sarki and Damai belonged to the Aryan stock and basically Hindus by religion. If taken together, they

³⁵ Subba, T.B. (1989). *Dynamics of Hill Society: the Nepalis in Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas*. Mittal Publication. New Delhi. P. 8.

consist of roughly about 50 percent of total population of Sikkim. The Bahun, Chettri, etc., speak Nepali languages which belong to the Indo-Aryan group of languages with Nagri script like Hindi. Nepalese therefore is the mixture of Aryan and Mongoloid stock.

In the history of settlement of different ethnic groups in Sikkim, the Nepalese seemed to have followed a natural process due to the prevalence of free intercourse between the people of Nepal and Sikkim, the territorial contiguity existing between the two neighbours, porous and flexible borders and, of course, war. From the writings of many eminent historians, it is safe to argue that some of the Nepali tribes or communities belonging to the Mongoloid groups like the Limboos, Mangars, Gurungs, Tamangs, Rais, etc., either lives in Sikkim or in places contiguous to it even before the arrival of the Lepchas. This view is supported by Risley, who holds that the Limboos, Gurungs, Murnis, Khambus, and Mangars are more or less allied and it may be said that along with the Lepchas and Bhutias these are the main stocks in Sikkim.³⁶ The ruins of forts built by the Mangars, called Dzongs, are still found in many parts of Sikkim.

The Nepalese migration in Sikkim started with the emergence of the Gorkha power in the form of Prithivinath Shah in Nepal; the Nepalese made numerous raids eastwards and clashed with the Bhutias as well as with Kiratis in the middle of the 18th century. Some Gorkhalis like Khas (the Basnet), the Thakuris and the Chettris came and settled down in Sikkim during this period.³⁷ The Gorkha army overran the country,

³⁶ Risley, Op.cit, P. 27.

³⁷ Sinha, Op.cit, P. 7.

and temporarily occupied the whole of the territory to the west of the river Rongyu or Teesta, towards the end of 18th century. They stayed on till the time they were forced to vacate the occupied lands by the British, after what was known as the Nepal war, of 1816. The war had brought two brave and warlike peoples, the British and the Gorkhas, face to face in many encounters in the battle field stretching from the Sutlej to the Teesta. While the fortunes of war were ultimately to go to the British, the two adversaries had learnt, during the numerous encounters to respect each other for bravery and other qualities. Soon after the cessation of the hostilities, the British were to befriend Gorkhas, enroll them in their army, and exploit them for the furtherance of British imperialist interest.³⁸ Eventually with the signing of the treaty Titalia in 1817³⁹ between British and Nepal, the war came to an end. The treaty stated that “The Honorable East India Company cedes, transfers and makes over in full sovereignty to the Sikkimeputte Raja, all the hilly or mountainous country situated to the eastward of the Mechi river and to the westward of the Tessta river, formerly possessed by the Raja of Nepal but ceded to the Honorable East India Company the Treaty of Peace signed at Segoulee”. As a result most of the Nepalese stayed back in Sikkim.

The Bhutias and Lepchas made poor farmers partly because of their ignorance of the methods of cultivation and partly because of a natural indolence. The Lepchas has always been used to easy going ways and were averse to hard labour or, for the matter, any other form of strife and struggle. The Bhutias, while having a natural aptitude for trade, was reluctant to physical labour. So, the British encouraged the immigration of Nepalese settlers and opened up Sikkim. There were some among the Raja’s

³⁸ Basnet, Op.cit, P. 42.

³⁹ Sikkim State Archives. Treaty of Titalia 1817. www.sikkim-culture.gov.in. Accessed on 2/9/2014.

councilors who shared this view of the British and took active interest in settling the Nepalese immigrants. These councilors, prominent among whom were the two Khangsa brothers (Phodong Lama and the Khangsa Dewan), were greatly rewarded for this farsightedness.⁴⁰ As a result, today, the vast majority of people inhabiting the Sikkim are the people of mixed ethnic origin from the country of Nepal.

The second and final wave of immigrants came when the British took over power from the king in Sikkim, during the first half of the 19th century. They were primarily brought in to work on preparing and working on tea plantations, for building roads and bridges, as also for a political reason- for counteracting the strong Tibetan influence on Sikkim. They were encouraged to migrate. As already mentioned, the Bhutias and the Lepchas were poor farmers. British wanted to improve their ways of living by introducing modern agriculture among them. So, with this aim, they encouraged and brought in comparatively advanced people from the Nepal side for teaching the wild and carefree tribes, advanced methods of agriculture.⁴¹ The British may have done this for latter's good but, as seen later, the result proved to be complete disaster and sort of curse upon the people of Sikkim.

Another element, which should be taken into account, is that all Nepalese who have settled in Sikkim might not be migrants from places of Nepal. As mentioned earlier, many tribal communities, who are presently included into the Nepali fold, inhabited the western and southern parts of Sikkim long before the country got its present name. However, all these tribes now come under one umbrella term Nepalese.

⁴⁰ Basnet, Op.cit, P. 43.

⁴¹ Foning, Op.cit, P. 17.

Here, one should not forget to mention the role played by John Claude White, the political officer of Sikkim, who further accelerated the Nepali migrations. White wrote in his book:

“The country was sparsely populated and in order to bring more land under cultivation, it was necessary to encourage migration, and this was done by giving land on favourable terms to Nepalese, who, as soon as they knew it was to be had done freely in”.⁴²

People from the Nepal side formed the largest group among the different peoples who came and settled down in Sikkim. As such, although from this group there is no planned aggressive cultural domination over the people in Sikkim, like what the previous immigrants did, yet, like the inevitable mighty tide, it is sweeping along everything before it. It could be pointed out that it is not only the Lepchas that are affected. This giant sweep has been responsible for changing and altering the very life pattern of many other hill tribes. The other hill tribes like the Jimdars, Limboos, Mangars, Gurungs and others, although earlier they had their own distinctive culture, language and way of life, they have also become members of this group now known as Nepali.

The Nepalese have borrowed their culture from Indo-Aryan culture. So, for Nepalese, Sikkim is a new place where they went to settle for better economic and political future with the feeling to strengthen the Nepali ethnic groups rather than other existing groups in Sikkim. Nepalese are predominantly Hindus by religion and

⁴² Kutturam, Op.cit, P. 83.

linguistically different from that of Bhutias and Lepchas. Nepali language became one of the official languages in 1977,⁴³ though the language has been the lingua-franca of the State from the very early days.

Nepalese in Sikkim are classified into four groups namely Scheduled Tribes (Limboos and Tamangs), Most Backward Classes (Gurung, Rai, Mangar, Thami, Sunuwar, Bhujel, Dewan, etc), Other Backward Classes (Bahun, Chettri and Newars) and Scheduled Castes (Kami Damai, Sarki, etc).⁴⁴ At present, these communities form an overwhelming majority in the population of the State.

Table 1.3

Population Figure of Sikkimese Nepalese at a Glance (1911-2011)

Year	Population	Nepali Population
1911	87,920	50,000
1921	81,721	-
1931	109,808	84,693
1941	121,520	-
1951	138,093	97,863
1961	162,863	108,165
1971	210,205	134,236
1981	316,840	192,295
1991	406,000	256,418
2001	541,902	338,606
2011	607,688	407,150

Source: Various books and Census Records of India.

⁴³ Sikkim State Archives. *Sikkim Official Language Bill No. 7*. No. 100. Dated 16th September, 1977. sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 2/9/2014

⁴⁴ Sikkim State Archives. *Scheduled Castes Order, 1978. Notification. No. 18(3)-Home/75*. Dated 12th July 1978. Serial No. 95. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 2/9/2014.

Other small communities

In this section, discussions about certain other small communities of the Nepalese have been presented in the view of the ambiguity currently surrounding the groups and their ethnic identity. The ambiguity basically revolved around what do the groups think and other think about their ethnic connection. For instance as already mentioned, the Limboos in Sikkim are called Nepali but they themselves do not consider as Nepalese. Similarly, Sherpas or Yolmos, who are considered as Bhutias, but they consider themselves as Nepalese. So, it becomes necessary here to know about these communities, who in recent years have attempted to assert their separate identity.

Limboos (Tsong)

The community is known as Tsong or Chong in Sikkim, and 'Yakthumba' - a term which is popular in Nepal is an endogamous term generally used by the Limboos themselves. The honorific title 'Subba', which means chief, is also often used as synonym which was perhaps given by the Gorkha rulers after the conquest of the Limbuan, presently eastern Nepal, and the principle settlement area of the Limboos.

The word 'Limbu' is derived from 'Li' and 'Abu'; Li- meaning bow and Abu- meaning shooter. Hence 'Limbu' means 'bow shooter' or 'archer'. The Limboos call themselves Yakthumba, meaning 'Yak herders'. According to a different view, 'Yak' means 'fort' and 'thumba' means 'defender', hence 'yak-thumbba' meaning 'defender of the fort'. Yet another version says that 'Yak' means a place where house can be

built, and 'thumba' means 'hard worker', so 'yak thumba' means 'hard working person of a particular house'.⁴⁵ The Lepchas call them *Lum* and the Bhutias call them *Tsong*. Limboos belong to the Kirat race that came to settle down in the west and south-west of the State. The area they occupied came to be called Limbuan, now in Nepal. But then in older days it came under Sikkim. Many historians believe that Limboos are counted as the ancient inhabitants of Sikkim and this is supported by the fact that in the treaty of 'Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum', believed to have been signed in the middle of 17th century, also mentioned 'Tsong' (Limboos) along with the 'Lho' (Bhutias) and the 'Mon' (Lepchas). The treaty signed is the historical testimony of a blood relationship among the three communities of Sikkim.

The origin of Limboos called Yakthumba amongst the Kirat is shrouded in mystery, though the most accepted account relates that they came from Kasi (Benaras). They are said to have descended from ten brothers. The ten brothers with their spiritual advisers or priests decided to leave their home possibly due to the onslaught of the Aryan invaders and settled down in the mountains of Eastern Himalayas. Five brothers went directly to the mountain and five others first went to Lhasa and then came round to the same place where their brothers had already settled down. The first five became the ancestors of *Kashigotra* and the other five of *Lhasagotra*. These ten brothers settled in the place called Ambepojoma

⁴⁵ Singh, K.S. (1993). *People of Sikkim (Vol XXXIX). Anthropological survey of India*. Sea Gull Books Calcutta. P. 79.

Kamketlangma Sumhalangma. They had many children, and their descendents multiplied very quickly, till they became a nation and were called Limboo.⁴⁶

As mentioned earlier, Limboos used to live in Limbuan and were subjects of the King. These kings oppressed them. The Limboos thereupon organized themselves and drove out the kings. They decide to elect ten chiefs from the ten clans who would rule over the ten districts into which their country was divided. Thus it was a well organized tribal community that came to settle in the neighbourhood of the Lepchas. In the beginning there was some fighting between the two tribes. But then in course of time they seemed to have settled down as good neighbours. There were cases of inter-marriages and matrimonial alliance between the two tribes.

The Limboos or Yakhumbas along with the Rais are the Kiratis. Their legends and oral accounts maintain strong links with the Lepcha and in fact, one tradition even states that all the three have a common tribal ancestor. Limboos can neither be called the Hindus nor the Buddhist, but elements of both religions are found in their beliefs. The Limboos believed in a supreme God whom they called *Sham Mung*, the God of universe. Apart from that, they like the Lepchas, believe in deities and spirits, both good and evil. They did not build temples of worship images but they did sacrifice animals to propitiate the God. Though, there was no caste or class among them, the priest wielded considerable influence in the community. They had two classes of priests, called the *Bijowas* and the *Phloedangkos*.

⁴⁶ Kutturam, Op.cit, P. 23.

The Limboo language belongs to Tibeto-Burman family like many other Mongoloid languages. The script is called 'Siri Jonga', originally taken from Brahmi script, prevalent in Jonga who was the Limboo king of Limbuwan. In 1981 the language was recognized as one of the State Languages of Sikkim. One seat was reserved for the Limboos under the proclamation of the Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal in 1966 in State Council.⁴⁷ However, due to the opposition from the various political parties, the seat was removed and until now the Limboos do not have any seat reserved in the Legislative Assembly of the State. Though they were included in the Scheduled Tribe list in January 2003, they could not contest election from the seat reserved for Bhutia-Lepcha.

Sherpas

The Sherpas who came from a place called Solu in Khambuwan of Nepal are also known as Solikhambus. The word Sherpa is derived from the word 'Sharya', meaning 'east', and 'Pa', meaning 'resident/people. They are likely to have migrated from parts of Nepal, lying to the west of Sikkim. The Sherpa legend, however, indicates their original place as Shera-Ta in the Kham province of Tibet. Following their tantric leader, named Shyr-Toong-Gyal, the Sherpas migrated to the region of Solukhambu in Nepal and some of them advanced further towards the hilly areas of Darjeeling, Bhutan and Sikkim.⁴⁸ In another version, the Sherpas are considered to have originally lived in the frontier of districts in the Tsing-Lai-Sechwan province of China and possibly migrated to Sikkim and other parts of the region after Tibet's

⁴⁷ Kazi, Jigmi. N. (2009). *Sikkim for Sikkimese: Distinct Identity Within the Union*. Hill Media Publication. Gangtok, Sikkim. P. 32.

⁴⁸ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 135.

conversion to Buddhism in the middle of the 17th century.⁴⁹ Since the Sherpas were, and still are, by and large Buddhist by religion, their occupational indulgence as porters and guides in mountain expeditions till date provides valuable basis for the theory of migration into hilly areas of Darjeeling and Sikkim. They are also seen having leadership and organizational qualities.

The Sherpas are divided into number of endogamous clans which can be broadly divided into two groups- *Khadev* and *Khamdenu*- the former holding a higher status than the latter. Further, there are subdivisions or sub-clans or branches within these two bigger clans. A few of them are- *Gajra, Goporma, Golay, Pang Karma, Pang Dorjay, Pal Dorjay, Pinasa, Nay Junga, Rong Sherpa*, etc. the early account of the Sherpa population in Sikkim are not available. The census taken in Sikkim in 1891 does not provide details about the Sherpa population. Risley remarks that most probably, the Sherpa community was enumerated and shown as Bhutia. At present the Sherpa communities are spread in all the districts of Sikkim.

The Sherpas speak in their own language among them and use Tibetan script. Sherpa language falls under the Tibeto-Burman group of languages but there are some contentions that the Sherpa language is based on Tibetan language but it differs from Tibetan in pronunciation. The language is accorded recognition in Sikkim as a State language in 1995 and since 2000 it is being taught up to the senior secondary levels in government schools.⁵⁰ In Sikkim, the Sherpas are mostly engaged in agriculture activities. But, at present Sherpas are also engaged in the administrative

⁴⁹ Ibid. P. 135.

⁵⁰ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 136.

field in the State. In Sikkim, Sherpas have enjoyed Scheduled Tribe status as one of Bhutia sub-tribes since 1978.⁵¹ However, there is no seat reserved for them in the State Legislative Assembly. They can contest election from the reserved seats of Bhutia-Lepcha constituencies. Despite being Scheduled Tribe, the Sherpas, in general, have not been able to come up at par with other tribes of Sikkim and this is matter of concern for both the government and association.

Along with the above mentioned communities in Sikkim, there are many other small communities. It is seen that the Rais, the Limboos, the Mangars, the Tamangs and the Gurungs have somewhat similar physical characteristics, as much as they are all markedly Mongoloid, but each of these group has its own story of origins and mythology.

The Rais are also known as Kirrant/Kirantis, are one of the major communities amongst Nepalese in Sikkim. Of the main sub-division of Kirants, the Rais are the most numerous. They are also known as Jimdars and in some places as Khambus. 'Jim' means 'land' in the Sherpa dialect. As their traditional occupation was cultivation so they were called Jimdars. Rai is generally used as title but there are some who use 'thar' as a sub-title. Traditionally they were found in the hilly region of the Kirant Pradesh of Nepal, which is called Manjh Kirat and Walla Kirat. They prefer to live at an altitude of three to six hundred feet above the sea level. They have reportedly been settled in Sikkim from the 17th century, in the wake of the invasion of Sikkim by the Gorkhas.

⁵¹ Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribe Order, 1978.

Another tribe which comes under the Nepali fold is Gurungs. They are a hill people, with the reputation of one of the best fighting communities. The ancient kings of the Gurungs had their strongholds in Ghurdrung, Kashi and Lamjung. But, without any records, whatever is known is based largely on myth. The original settlement of the Gurungs is believed to have been somewhere in Tibet, beyond Nepal, from where they came to the southern slopes of the Annapurna Himalayas in west central Nepal and migrated in Sikkim. They are divided into two main groups: Chaar-Jaat (Four Clans) and Sola-Jaat (Sixteen Clans). They do not use any title. The word Gurkhali is used only to indicate the Gurungs, who are scattered in the all districts of Sikkim but concentrated in south and west districts. According to population census taken in 1891, Gurung population in Sikkim was 2,921.⁵²

Lastly, it will be important to mention about the plains people in Sikkim, who have migrated from the Indian region during the time of Chogyal and British in Sikkim, as traders. The plain people of Sikkim are the only ethnic group that has preserved its original social and cultural traditions due to its constant touch with their homelands.

So, at present the population of Sikkim is constituted by all the above mentioned ethnic communities. Though, these communities have different cultural and tradition, it is seen that they lived in peace and harmony with each other. There is also the exchange of culture and the inter-marriages among these different communities. So, the present population of Sikkim is more or less a mixture of these communities.

⁵² Risley, Op.cit, P. 27.

Chapter Two

EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

For a long period, Sikkim has been on the horns of a dilemma; to strike a balance between a theocratic monarchy and constitutional democracy. Sikkim was politically a theocracy. The various aspects of political life in Sikkim were bound to lead to a struggle between Lamaist traditionalism and secular democracy. During the Namgyal dynasty, the political system of Sikkim was typically Himalayan theocratic feudalism similar in many ways to the Tibetan Lamaist system. The ruler was not only the temporal head of the State, but also an incarnate lama with responsibility to rule the subjects in accordance with the tenets of 'Chos'- the Dharma, her social structure was based on social status and economic organization was basically feudal one. The political hegemony rested with the minority, namely the Bhutias-Lepchas community, which receives the royal support and patronage, while the Nepalese, the numerically large community, felt aggrieved over the denial of proportionate representation in the political domain.

Before the merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union, the ruling Namgyal dybelonging to a minority Bhutia racial community was ruling over subjects belonging to different racial-cultural communities. In the political as well as in the religious sphere, the Bhutia dominance was pronounced. In the past, the leadership of the society rested with the aristocrats, kinship based upon inheritance and the incarnate lamas. The socio-political structure and the life of the country centered on the monasteries which were

ruled by a hierarchy of lamas, the royal family and the nobles called Kazis who were mostly of Bhutia or pure Tibetan.

Apparently slavery was prevalent in the country as also forced labour. Graced with special rights and privileges from the Maharaja of Sikkim, the Sikkimese Kazis Thekedars (contractors) exploited and suppressed the masses of Sikkim. Old records speak of raids conducted for the capture of slaves.¹ The brunt of these raids possibly fell on the Lepchas whose children were carried away by the Bhutias as slaves. This was so common that the Lepcha mothers used to frighten their children into obedience by threatening them: “The Bhutia will take you.”² These Kazis were members of the Royal parishad and they were also the Zamindars. Using their power, they often claimed that they were members of the royal family, and that they have rights to exploit, to tax and to adjudicate the cases of the king’s subjects. In short they exploited the masses. Though the king was aware of these exploitations, he was passive owing to the circumstance which he was in. this exploitation took various forms. They are briefly discussed below;

Kalobhari and Jharlangi

The evolution of this practice was started in Sikkim after the latter’s contact with the British. Due to the lack of historical documents it is not possible to ascertain that since when the system was applied to the Sikkimese peasants. The literary meaning of the term *Kalobhari* in Nepali is Black Load. The British sold arms and ammunitions to Tibet. The terrain and the inclement weather condition made the trading difficult. The commodities to save them from rain and snow were wrapped in card boards and puts

¹ Kotturam, George. (1983). *The Himalayan Gateway (History and Culture of Sikkim)*. New Delhi. Sterling Publishers. Private Limited. P. 55.

² Ibid. P. 55

inside gunny bags bedaubed with tar. The tar protected the commodities from outside rain, and it also hid the commodities within. The black colour gave the load its name *Kalobhari* or black load. Besides using these as a means to transporting arms and ammunitions, they also used to transport viands necessary for British staying at Yatung of Chumbi Valley. On their way back they were loaded with gold dust, which came to Sikkim from there and thereafter transported to the British territory of Bengal.³

To carry this transport, porters were fixed. For the porters the British depended upon the Kazi-contractors. For the transport of each bag they paid 50 paisa, but the Kazi contractors kept the whole amount for themselves.⁴ They did not pay the amount to the porters, who were forced to carry the load through the difficult Tibetan terrain. This system of carrying on the trade and transport was called *Kalobhari*.

The British were supposed to maintain the pathway or trade routes along with the necessary security. But here too they depended upon the Kazi contractors. They paid them, but the Kazi contractors used their peasants to work for them without paying their wages. This system of labour without wages is called *Jharlangi* system. There was no fixed time or place for carrying on such tasks. The Kazi contractors could order any of their peasants to offer their unpaid labour according to their convenience. Once ordered, the labour had no choice, but to obey. Disobedience invited punishment. Besides these, the Kazi contractors demanded *Jharlangi* even to carry the bedding of government officials on transfer.

³ Subba, J.R. (2008). *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim*. Gyan publishing House. New Delhi- 110002. P. 64.

⁴ Chettri, A.B. and Giri, Mukunda. (2002). *History of Democratic Movement*. Department of Information and Public Relation. Government of Sikkim. P. 18.

Kuruwa

Literally '*Kuruwa*' means a long wait in Nepali. Sometimes on account of the road condition and other factors, people sent to transport the *Kalobhari* waited for several days for the arrival of the commodities. During such wait, they survived on their own supplies. This process of waiting for a long time on one's own resources was called *Kuruwa*.⁵ The process of serving as a *Kuruwa* labour was very much similar to the process of *Jharlangi*. For this labour also the British Officials offered contracts to the local Kazis and Thikadars for the supply of the labourers. For such contracts the Kazi-Thikadars were handsomely paid. But, as a *Kuruwa*, a peasant had to work without any wages. During the entire wait for the *Kalobhari*, the peasant himself had to manage his resources.⁶ Sometimes during their wait, they starved to death. No excuses of a peasant were granted by the Kazis-Thikadars. Under any circumstances the peasant had to discharge their duties as *Kuruwa*.

Theki-Bethi

In Sikkim, below the Zamindars, there was a class of people called *Mandals* or *Karwari*. The function of these *Mandals* or the *Karwari* was to collect the rents for the Zamindars. But they too, as middle-men, exploited the masses. On festive occasions they were supposed to be welcomed by gifts. These gifts were packed in special receptacle called the *Theki*. It contained meat, curd, bananas and other items. Along with *Theki*, the peasants also offered the *Mandals* and the Zamindars, their free labour. This free labour was called *Bethi*. Sometimes, the Zamindars or *Mandals* fed them, but that

⁵ Subba, Op.cit, P. 65.

⁶ Ibid. P. 65.

was all. There was no limit to the amount of time of labour that was to be given, nor was there any specified place for doing it.⁷

Zamingari System

With the appointment of John Claude White as the Political Officer in 1889, Sikkim witnessed the coming of the Zamindari system. A number of Lessee Landlords were created throughout Sikkim with untold powers to mortgage to confiscate the lands of the innocent peasants. In the beginning the Zamindars used the middlemen to allure people in areas, which they wanted to be inhabited. Then from those settlers, the Zamindars collected Re. 1 tax, per house; out of this, the Zamindar kept 10 annas for him and 6 annas were transferred to the government as land rent. Finally, from every house, the Zamindars collected Rs 6, out of which Rs 5 was kept for himself and Re 1 was transferred to the government.⁸ Later, the Zamindars collected taxes similarly from all the subjects of the king. The rent to be paid by the former was fixed according to the productive capacity of the land but there was discrimination between the Bhutias and the Nepalese. For equally productive land the Nepalese peasants paid 14 annas and the Bhutias 8 annas. In short, the Zamindars enjoyed from the sweat of the common people. Sikkimese feudalism became more severe and cruel after the interference of the British Government in the politics of Sikkim. In short, the responsibility for the introduction of feudalism in Sikkim also goes to the British.

The Kazis used the system of *Kalobhari*, *Kuruwa*, *Theki-Bheti* and rents to amass a lot of wealth. As Zamindars, they monopolized control over the agricultural land,

⁷ Chettri, Op.cit, P. 18.

⁸ Sikkim State Archives. *Administrative Report of Sikkim State for the year 1936-37 to 1937-38*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 3/10/2014.

where the people simply worked. In this way Sikkimese people were exploited by their own people. Most of all Nepali community was more aggrieved by these practice and they felt that they were more exploited and discriminated as compared to other community such as Bhutia-Lepchas. In this way the level of suppression and exploitation of peasants in general had become more severe.

In the history of every nation, the voice of revolt is heard when the level of suppression reaches beyond the limit of tolerance. In Sikkim also the level of suppression by the Kazis and Zamindars reached its highest point, so the voice of the downtrodden masses began to be heard. There were complaints of riots in Sikkim for over assessments and opening expenses by several *Thikadars*.⁹ The masses rose against the suppression of the Kazis without caring about their life and property. There were the incidents of Nepali or Lepcha, protest against the Bhutia domination. Just like in other native states, the independence movement in British India had given inspiration to similar movements in Sikkim also. The villagers arose, nightly meetings were held to find out the ways and means to do away with the oppression. At first, these movements were confined to isolated pockets with pre-dominantly social rather than political aims. The emergence of political parties can be traced back to 1940s, but these were more in the form of social organizations.

Political Organizations: Pre-Merger Era

Before 1947 the political environment was basically unfavourable for formation of political organization though elements representing the ruling elite like

⁹ Sikkim State Archives. *Complaints of Riots in Sikkim. Land Revenue. File No. 28/1/1911. Serial No. 37.* www.sikkim-culture.gov.in. Accessed on 3/10/2014.

Kazis/Landlords and lamas representing monasteries, had maintained organizations like *Denzong Lhade Tsogpa*, for their own parochial and vested interests. Thus, political parties as an institution based on democratic principles emerged only after 1947 in Sikkim.¹⁰ Soon after the independence of India, three political parties sprang up in Sikkim. At Gangtok, the capital, the Praja Sudharak Samaj was formed with Tashi Tshering, Sonam Tshering and Kezang Tenzing as its leading lights. A second party, the Rajya Praja Sammelan, was formed at Temi Tarku, west of river Tista, under the leadership of Gobardhan Pradhan and Dhan Bahadur Tewari. Further west, at Chakung, the Praja Mandal was formed by Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa, himself a member of the landlord family. The Gangtok party decided to hold a public meeting at Gangtok football ground- then known as polo ground- on the 7th of December, 1947. The other two parties from Temi Tarku and Chakung were invited to participate.¹¹ A pamphlet entitled “A few facts about Sikkim State” prepared by Tashi Tshering was distributed among the people.¹² The pamphlet was an attempt to educate people with nature of exploitation and atrocities perpetuated by the Kazis and Thikadars upon them. Eventually, the leaders of all three parties decided to form a strong political party by merging the three said parties. Thus the Sikkim State Congress was formed. The State Congress was organized as the counterpart of the Indian National Congress, and affiliation to the parent body was sought.¹³

¹⁰ Gurung, Suresh Kumar. (2011). *Sikkim, Ethnic Political Dynamics: A Triadic Perspective*. Kunal Books Publication. New Delhi. P. 316.

¹¹ Basnet, L.B. (1974). *Sikkim, A Short Political History*. S. Chand and Co. (Pvt) Ltd. New Delhi. P. 76

¹² Gurung, Op.cit, P. 317.

¹³ Sinha, A.c. (1975). *Politics of Sikkim, A Sociological Study*. Thomson Press (India) Limited. P. 24.

Sikkim State Congress

The formation of Sikkim State Congress on 7th December 1947 marked the beginning of political process in Sikkim. Tashi Tshering was elected the President while Raghubir Basnet became the Vice-president of the party. Bhim Bahadur Rai and Dimik Singh Lepcha became the Joint Secretaries and Chandradas Rai, Brishaspati Prasai, Sonam Tshering, Martam Topden, Dathup Tshering, Chuk Tshering, Chedup Lepcha and Ram Prasad were the members of the working committee. On December 9, 1947 a five member delegation of the party met the Chogyal (King) and submitted a memorandum consisting of three major demands:

- (a) Immediate abolition of landlordism.
- (b) Installation of an interim government leading in due course to full-fledged democratic government,
- (c) Accession of Sikkim to India.¹⁴

The pamphlet titled “A Few Facts about Sikkim State”, was enclosed with the memorandum.

The Maharaja could no longer afford to ignore the popular demand for fear that the rising fury of the winds of change should sweep away his unstable house, which stood on the support provided by the crumbling structure of a society based on old-fashioned feudal privileges and prerogatives. He promised to immediately curtail the powers of the landlords and assured the delegation of eventually abolishing landlordism. As for the second item in the list of demands, he agreed to accept the three nominees of

¹⁴ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 318.

the State Congress to function as ‘Secretaries to His Highness the Maharaja of Sikkim’ as an interim arrangement, until a popular mode of sending representatives to the State Council were evolved after due deliberations. The third one of the demand, namely, Sikkim’s accession to India, was not considered at all.¹⁵

The Congress party nominated three members, one each from the three communities, to function as secretaries to the Maharaja. The State Congress in its meeting held on 2nd and 3rd February, 1948, recommended Tashi Tshering and Raghbir Singh Basnet as the party’s representatives to the Chogyal’s administration. Later, Tashi Tshering was replaced by Dimik Singh Lepcha.¹⁶ In this way, the Maharaja, by acceding to the most urgent parts of the demand, at least in principle, was successful in buying time. However, the activities of the three party’s nominees appeared to be against the three basic demands of the party. Asked by the party high command to resign their offices and come back to the party, the Secretaries chose to stick to their offices. Though Dimik Singh Lepcha apologized and joined the party again, the exit of Sonam Tshering from the State Congress affected the party tremendously. This attitude of Sikkim’s first lot of politicians was later to grow rapidly and was indicative of a dissatisfaction that was to inflict Sikkim politics time and again.

In November, 1948, Tashi Tshering and Chandradas Rai met the Prime Minister of India and apprise him of Party’s three basic demands- bringing about a democratic set up in Sikkim, abolition of landlordism and Sikkim’s merger with India. After returning from Delhi, the Party launched a “No Rent Campaign” in February 1949 and some of its

¹⁵ Basnet, Op.cit, P. 78.

¹⁶ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 318.

leaders were arrested. The State Congress launched a formal agitation in 1949 which led to the formation of an elected government, also called “popular Ministry”, which unfortunately lasted just over a month. This collapsed owing to contradictions prevailing between the supporters of the two rival parties regarding abolition of landlordism, and also due to the absence of rules delineating powers between the Chogyal and the Ministry. The Maharaja, who was then the Maharaja-Kumar, played his cards shrewdly. He highlighted the distinct culture and separate identity of Sikkim. If Sikkim, which had been treated by the British differently than the other princely states of India under a special treaty, were to accede to India, it would be the end of the indigenous people who represented the real personality of the State.

Although, the 1949 agitation by the Sikkim State Congress against the ruler exemplified the new trends in Sikkimese politics, it did not bring any major changes at the political and economic level. The palace did not take any decision regarding the abolishment of the evil feudal practices like *Zamindari*, *Jharlangi*, *Theki-Bheti*, *kalobhari and Kuruwa*. This indecision, coupled with the inimical role of the National party of Chogyal, irritated the State Congress. The government of India could read the signs of rising discontent; so fearing an ominous turn, it sent its deputy foreign minister Balkrishna Vishwanath Keskar to smoothen the matter. On June 6th Keskar decided to dissolve the 29 days old ministry and transfer the powers into the hands of the Political officer, Hariswar Dayal. In spite of the opposition of the State Congress, the plan was put in place on 11th August 1949. From then onwards, Dewan rule started in Sikkim.¹⁷

¹⁷ Chettri, Op.cit, P. 23.

The “No Rent” campaign launched by the State Congress was successful. It took J.S. Lall, who was then Dewan of Sikkim, some a time to realize that, without the cooperation of the State Congress, revenue collection would be a difficult task. He got a first-hand experience of the people’s mood when, during his visit to Namchi, he had to face a demonstration by a 3000-strong crowd led by Chandradas Rai and Nayan Tshering Lepcha.¹⁸ To ease the Congress leadership, Lall, with one stroke of the pen, abolished forced labour and house-tax.¹⁹ In the political history of Sikkim, the Congress led struggle against the forces of feudalism, and the success that it achieved in freeing the masses from the clutches of feudalism were memorable events.

In 1950, abrogating all former treaties between India and Sikkim, the Government of India entered into a new agreement with Sikkim. The treaty was signed by the Indian Political Officer, Harishwar Dayal and the Maharaja of Sikkim, Sir Tashi Namgyal, at a small ceremony held in the palace chapel on 5th December, 1950, which came to be known as Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950.²⁰ The treaty of 13 articles came into effect the very day it was signed. Sikkim’s status as protectorate was confirmed. Defense, external Affairs, Customs and Communication of Sikkim became the responsibility of India. The Indo-Sikkim treaty gave India far more sweeping power over Sikkim than the 1861 Treaty had given the British. The government of India agreed to pay Rs. 3 Lakh per annum to Sikkim as rent. The Supreme Court of India was to be the last arbiter in case of any dispute in the interpretation of the terms of treaty. The new arrangement enabled the Maharaja to emerge as the dominant personality on the Sikkimese scene.

¹⁸ Basnet, Op.cit, P. 92.

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 92.

²⁰ Sikkim State Archives. *Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 4/10/2014.

But this agreement could not satisfy the leaders of the State Congress, because nowhere in the agreement was there any provision dealing with the issue of establishing a responsible government in Sikkim. And, also the internal autonomy granted to Sikkim was, to all intent and purposes, granted to the Maharaja. The treaty totally ignored the aspirations of people. Due to this, the Congress leaders were shocked once again and disillusioned. They boycotted the State banquet given by the Maharaja to mark the occasion of the signing of the Indo-Sikkim Treaty. The working committee of the State Congress held an emergence meeting and passed a resolution reiterating their demand for the establishment of responsible government functioning in accordance with the democratic principle. The working committee also decided to send a delegation to Delhi to voice their disappointment.²¹ Hence, with the signing of the Treaty of 1950, Sikkim was declared as protectorate of India. The establishment of a democratic government became Sikkim State Congress's first priority. The Sikkim Congress leaders were too dazed by the unexpected turn of events, and that with such rapid succession, to take stock of the situation and reorient its policies by trying to strike roots in the native soil. The Indian patronage was taken for granted and now it was no longer available to them. The Indo-Sikkim Treaty had demolished their pet notion in one go. The clamour of the Sikkim State congress for a popular representative government gradually receded into the background. The main factors responsible for this was the Indo-Sikkim Treaty; the Dewan's administration- which in fact meant that the Government of India itself had taken over the administration and the party's subservient allegiance to India and the Indian National Congress. The party had been flooded by a host of new leaders. Of the

²¹ Sengupta, N. (1985). *State Government and Politics: Sikkim*. Sterling Publishers Privated Limited. New Delhi. P. 11.

leaders who had fostered the growth of the State Congress since its inception, only old Tashi Tshering remained on the stage. A great majority of the new leaders had been attracted by the promise of the vast opportunity. And it was in the hands of this group that the hope of Congress leaders was fast going to.

Panchayat elections were held in Sikkim in December, 1950. The Sikkim State Congress participated in the election, but it was boycotted by the National Party on the grounds that the interest of indigenous population had not been safeguarded. By indigenous people, the National Party meant the Bhutias and the Lepchas. The Nepalese, it was argued by the leaders of the National Party were later immigrants, while the Bhutia and the Lepchas, by virtue of their having already settled in Sikkim when the Nepalese were unknown, were classified as indigenous population. It may be noted here that the Lepchas were arbitrarily bracketed with the Bhutias. At that time, as even now, the Nepali people constituted the majority of the population. The National Party now openly shed its nationalistic pretensions and emerged as the champions of the Bhutia-Lepcha community. The National Party was able to convince the people that Sikkim State Congress sought the domination of Nepalese community. As a result, the Sikkim State Congress lost the support of a large section of the Bhutias and the Lepchas.

In May, 1951, for the purpose of the matter of communal representation, an Advisory Committee was formed under the Presidentship of the Dewan. The members consisted the representatives of the three parties: Maharajakumar Palden Thondup Namgyal represented the Maharaja, Sonam Tshering represented the Bhutia-Lepcha interest as projected by the National Party and the State Congress was represented by Dimik Singh Lepcha and Kashi raj Pradhan, a Lepcha and a Nepali. The Congress

leaders deputed by Tashi Tshering with clear instruction that they were to discuss things from a nationalistic angle and they were not, on any account, to take any decision, which was to left to the party high command. The main point of discussion was the question of distribution of seats and jobs in the government among the three principle communities of Sikkim- Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese.²² The Parity formula was the focal point of the discussion in the meetings. It aimed at the equal distribution of seats between the three ethnic communities of Sikkim. As a result, despite the clear instruction given to the Congress leaders, the Parity Formula was signed whereby the elected seats in the future State Council was to be divided equally among the Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepalese communities and Maharaja was to appoint five nominees. The two representatives were removed from the party. In fact, the Parity Formula was designed to check the domination of the Nepali in the affairs of the State.

Hectic preparation for the first general election of the State Council of Sikkim resulted in the formation of an all-party agreement in May 1951. The agreement finalized the matters regarding the electorate, reservation of seats, mode of election, etc. a proclamation based on the above agreement was issued by the Maharaja on March 23, 1953. The proclamation, besides mentioning the numbers of seats allotted to different communities, also laid the powers and function of the State Council and Executive Council. The State Council and Executive Council proclamation of 1953 envisaged a system based on communal representation. This system provided for the equal representation of the Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepalese of Sikkimese origin in the State Council. The arrangement, in which a calculated balance is formulated in order to satisfy

²² Kazi, Jigme.N. (2009). *Sikkim For Sikkimese. Distinct Indentity Within Union*. Hill Media Publication. Gangtok, Sikkim. P. 29.

the majority and at the same time safeguard the special privileges of the minority, is known as Parity System.²³ A system of diarchy was established to share the powers between the Chogyal and the State Council. The Chogyal had the right to veto any decision made by the executive council and to substitute his own decision thereof.

Distribution and Reservation of seats in the Sikkim Council (1953-1972)

Table No. 2.1

1953

Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha	6
Sikkimese Nepalese	6
Nominated by the Chogyal	5
Total	17

Table No. 2.1

1958

Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha	6
Sikkimese Nepalese	6
General Seat	1
The Sangha	1
Nominated by the Chogyal	6
Total	20

²³ Ibid. PP. 29-30.

Table No. 2.3

1966

Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha	7
Sikkimese Nepalese	7
The Sangha	1
Scheduled caste	1
Tsong	1
General seat	1
Nominated by the Chogyal	6
Total	24

Source: Jigme N. Kazi, Sikkim for Sikkimese, 2009, P. 30.

The same number of seat reservations for different communities of Sikkim was followed in the third election in 1967, and also in fourth and fifth elections in 1970 and 1973.

Sikkim went to the poll in mid- 1953, on the basis of this parity formula. The Sikkim State Congress and National Party entering the field. Though the Congress won all the 6 Nepali seats in 1953 council election, all the leading Vhutia-Lepcha candidates contesting from Sikkim State Congress, including the part President Tashi Tshering and Kazi Lhendup Dorji, were defeated in the primary election itself due to the communal nature of the election rules. Tahsi Tshering died shortly after his defeat in the 1953 council election and Kazi Lhendup Dorji became the President of the party. But the growing understanding between the Sikkim State Congress councilor, Kasi Raj Pradhan, and the Chogyal intensified differences between the President Kazi and the Councilor, which necessitated the Kazi to leave the party sometimes in 1957. Kazhi Raj Pradhan

became the President of the party while the Kazi Lhendup Dorji formed his own 'Swatantra Dal' Party.²⁴

Before Sikkim went to the polls for the second time in 1958, two seats (one for the Sangha/monasteries and other for the Sikkimese in General) were added to the State Council.²⁵ The State Congress demanded representative government with the Chogyal as constitutional head and abolition of communal pattern of election rules introduced in 1953. The election rules were modified in 1958 but the essential motives, i.e., division of society on ethno-cultural and religious grounds, continued. The Sikkim State Congress won 8 out of 14 elected seats including one Bhutia-Lepcha and 1 General seat. Thus it admirably fulfilled all the conditions needed to form a one-party Executive Council. Yet no voice was raised in this line. Kashi Raj Pradhan did not stake claim to form the government. He was apparently, highly satisfied by the fact that he and his nephew Nahkul Pradhan were two State Congress Executive Councilors.²⁶ He perhaps also did not like to antagonize the Dewan and the Chogyal by making such demands. Basnet writes that:

“The Sikkim State Congress under the Presidentship of Kashi Raj Pradhan had come to completely identify itself with the interest of the Maharaja (Chogyal)...though it continued to talk democracy and responsible government and pass pious resolutions to that effect as sop to the masses. An election Tribunal was appointed to investigate the certain alleged malpractices. On 25 May, 1956 the Tribunal announced that the two Sikkim State Congress

²⁴ Gurung, Op.cit, PP. 319-320.

²⁵ Sinha, A.C. (1975). *Politics of Sikkim. A Sociological Study*. Thomson Press Limited. P. 28.

²⁶ Basnet, Op.cit, P. 111.

councilors (Kashi Raj Pradhan and Nahkul Pradhan) and Sonam Tshering President of National Party had been found guilty of corrupt practices and dissemination of false propaganda, and were disqualified for holding office for six years.”²⁷

They participated in the ‘Joint Convention’ organized by the Kazi Lhendup Dorji (Swatantra Dal), Sikkim National Party of Sonam Tshering faction, Dhan Bahadur Tewari (Praja Sammelan) and Scheduled Caste league at Melli on the 24th of September, 1959.²⁸ The Chogyal, however, reduced the sanction of disqualification against the duo to 6 months with effect from the 15th May, 1959 which made them eligible to contest the Council bye-election while Sonam Tshering, the Sikkim National Party Councilor, was banned for 3 years who by this time had seized to enjoy the goodwill of the Chogyal. Interestingly, Chandradas Rai, who was persuaded to resign from the post of Magistrate and projected as the official party candidate in the bye-election by none other than Kashi Raj Pradhan himself, was eventually denied party ticket. Chandradas Rai, however, contested as an independent candidate and defeated Kashi Raj Pradhan by a huge margin.

It appeared that by the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, the Sikkim State Congress had virtually become the family party in the hands of Kashi Raj Pradhan and his nephew, Nahkul Pradhan. The competition over party leadership led to the desertion by those who founded the party in 1947. Apart from this, the concerted effort by the Chogyal and the Dewan, N.k. Rustomji, at the time of selection of members of the

²⁷ Ibid. P. 111.

²⁸ Gurung, Op.cit. P. 320.

Executive Councilors also facilitated the division and differences within the Sikkim State Congress leadership. For instance, when Chandradas Rai was elected as independent candidate from the Namchi constituency in the February 1960 bye-election, he was denied the executive post whereas Nahkul Pradhan who retained his candidature from North-Central constituency was appointed as the Executive Councilor. As a consequence, under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorji, ex-president of Sikkim State Congress and the then President of Swatantra Dal, various factions of all the existing political parties were induced to form a new party at Singtam on 20th May, 1960, and this party gained dominance over the Sikkim State Congress within a short period after it was formed.

Sikkim National Party

The growing popularity and organizational success of the Sikkim State Congress naturally created alarm among the ruling elite who, in order to counteract the Sikkim State Congress politically, encouraged the formation of a loyalist party called the Sikkim National Party, also called Chogyal's party, on the 30th April, 1948.²⁹ The party was composed mainly of the minority communities of the Lepchas and Bhutias. The Sikkim National Party was in favour of the monarchy and advocated independence for Sikkim. The National Party was basically a party of the status-quo under the leadership of the emerging Bhutia 'new rich'.³⁰ It stood for an independent Sikkim as against the demand by the State Congress for accession to India. The Nepalese, as was argued by the leaders of National Party, were immigrants while the Bhutias and Lepchas were indigenious.

²⁹ Gupta, Manas. Das. (1992). *Sikkim Problem and Prospects of Development*. Indus Publishing Company. New Delhi. P. 30.

³⁰ Sinha, Op.cit, P. 59.

Thus, the National Party emerged as a proclaimed champion of Bhutia-Lepcha communities. Sonam Tshering, formally the Sikkim State Congress's nominee to the Chogyal's government, who was removed from the party for his anti-party activities, became the President of the Party. The party leadership asserted that "a time honoured institution" like landlordism could not be suddenly wiped out of existence, without giving rise to grave consequences; it also called the democratic movement in a small state a farce and strongly opposed the accession to India under any circumstances. This party was the very antithesis of the Sikkim State Congress. This is evident from the resolution which the Sikkim National Party passed on April 30, 1948.³¹ It said:

- (a) Historically, socially, culturally and linguistically, Sikkim has closer affinities with Bhutan and Tibet.
- (b) From the geographical and ethnic point of view, Sikkim is not a part of India. She has only political relation with the latter, which were imposed on her.
- (c) From the religious point of view, being Lamaist, she is quite distinct from India.
- (d) The policy of the party is to maintain intact by all means the indigenous character of Sikkim and to preserve its integrity.

The resolution said, the party would make all effort to establish a separate entity and to maintain outside the Indian Union. To force Sikkim to accede to the Indian Union, either by direct or indirect means would be a denial to Sikkim of her rights to stick to her natural affinities. As such, the National Party opposed the State Congress's demand for the establishment of an interim government. It raised a counter slogan demanding the retention of effective powers in the hands of the Chogyal. The State

³¹ Grover, B.S.K. (1974). *Sikkim and India. Storm and Consolidation*. Jain Brothers, New Delhi. P. 36.

Congress leadership called it as a “Party of the Palace.” The resolution further stated, “Taking into account the various vital points specified above, the party firmly resolves that the necessary arrangements should forth with be made to revise Sikkim’s political relation with the Indian Union on the basis of equality....”³²

The two members of the Sikkim National Party, namely Kazi Dorji Dadul and R.P. Alley, was appointed in the Popular Ministry of May 1949. They, from the very beginning were opposed to the demands of the Sikkim State Congress. The contradiction prevailing within the members of the Ministry led to the dissolution of the same. The Panchayat election was held in December 1950 but the Sikkim National Party boycotted the election on the ground that the indigenous population. i.e., Bhutias and Lepchas, were not given adequate safeguards. The contention of National Party was that the Nepalese were later immigrants, while the Bhutias and Lepchas constituted the indigenous population.

The leaders of Sikkim National Party used racial-cultural issues to oppose the demands of State Congress, in general, and interests of the Nepalese in particular. They began to reach to the Bhutia-Lepcha communities and were successful in convincing them to support the party. The National Party through its various pro-Bhutia-Lepcha campaigns succeeded in creating its own image as the nationalist party representing the Bhutia and the Lepcha communities and committed towards preservation of ‘independence of Sikkim’ and ‘rule of Chogyal’, while the Sikkim State Congress was branded as the Nepali Party and its sympathizers as anti-Sikkimese and supporters of the rule of Indians. Thus, according to National Party’s logic the Nepalese were anti-

³² Basnet, Op.cit. P. 83.

national and anti-Sikkimese too. The birth of the National Party, therefore, facilitated ethnic and ideological polarization among the Sikkimese both at the social and party levels. Interestingly, involvement of ethnicity in the political parties of Sikkim started only after the formation of the Sikkim National Party on 30th April, 1948.

The politics of Sikkim National Party clearly reflected its effort to polarize Sikkim into two camps: the Nepalese on the one hand and Bhutia-Lepcha community on the other. By this division the Sikkim National Party intended to retain and perpetuate not only the monarchy (as against any movement for democratization) but also the privileges enjoyed by the Bhutia landlords and the elites. Democratization, therefore, was perceived by the Sikkim National Party as a threat to prevailing privileges. Thus, the struggle between the monarch and feudal system on the one hand and forces of democracy on the other was transformed into a struggle between Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepalese due to the manipulation of the Sikkim National Party.

The emergence of the Sikkim National Party, backed as it was by the most strongly deep-rooted elements of the Sikkimese society, enjoying the Maharaja's patronage- assured by the Maharajakumar's active part in organizing the party and in defining its role, posed a serious challenge to the early people's movement launched by Sikkim State Congress. It now became clear that the citadel of feudalism was determined to make a stand against the onslaught of the people. The spirit of the Congress leadership was put to test. Some of its leaders, like the three secretaries to the Maharaja, had amply demonstrated their weak resistance to the temptation of power and privilege and the opportunity for self-development that went with it.

In December 1950, when Panchayat elections were held, Sikkim National Party did not participate in the elections on the ground that the interest of the indigenous population was not safeguarded.³³ In fact it did not like the idea of introducing an alien system of Panchayati Raj at the cost of indigenous and age old institution of village administration, called *Dzumsa*.³⁴ The *Dzumsa*³⁵ system actually symbolized the cultural-political identity and domination of the Bhutia in rural administration but by introducing the Indian system of village administration, i.e., Panchayati Raj, it could have certainly diluted the Bhutia identity besides facilitating Nepalese to be at the helm of rural administration which the Bhutias always resented, it can be said that in a small country with low literacy and extreme all round backwardness, the combined force of the National Party, the ruling house, the landlords and the lamas succeeded in legitimizing an anti-national, anti-Chogyal and anti-Bhutia-Lepcha image of the Sikkim State Congress and the Nepali alike.

The Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950,³⁶ which was signed between the Indian Political Officer, Harishwar Dayal and the Maharaja of Sikkim, Sir Tashi Namgyal, at a small ceremony held in the palace chapel on 5th December, 1950, confirmed Sikkim's status as an Indian protectorate and defense, external affairs, customs and communications of Sikkim became the India's responsibility. It also provided internal autonomy to Sikkim, which was for all purposes, granted to the Maharaja. The establishment of responsible government, people's participation in the administration, etc, was nowhere mentioned in

³³ Sengupta, Op.cit, P. 12.

³⁴ Gurung, Op.cit. P. 322.

³⁵ Dzumsa is the traditional institution of rural/village governance. The institution has been recognized as the lowest tier of the Panchayati Raj institution since 1882 and the 73rd Amendment Act, 1972 has maintained its constitutional status. At present the institution exist in two villages of Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim.

³⁶ Sikkim State Archives. *Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 5/10/2014.

the treaty. The treaty totally ignored the aspirations of the people. The State Congress leaders were disillusioned by this and the working committee of the Congress held an emergency meeting and passed a resolution reiterating their demand for the establishment of a representative government function in accordance with the democratic principles.

In the view of the communal representation which was projected by the National Party in the 1950 Panchayat election, which boycotted the election on the ground that the interest of indigenous population, i.e., Bhutia-Lepcha was not safeguarded and also considering the demand for a representative government by the Sikkim State Congress, a Parity Formula was worked out in 1951 which arbitrarily clubbed the Bhutia-Lepcha communities into one and 6 seats were reserved for them in the 17-member State Council whereas Nepalese got 6 seats.³⁷ On 23rd march, 1953, the Maharaja issued a Proclamation called “Constitutional Proclamation.” This proclamation laid down the rules governing the formation of State Council, and the Executive Council and along with this, the provision of 5 nominated members by the Chogyal together with the communal pattern of voting system was introduced by the Proclamation which was intended to perpetuate ethnic division and domination of the ruling elite in the legislative affairs of the State. The proposal of Sikkim State Congress favouring one representation each from the three major communities of Sikkim was opposed by the Sikkim National Party. The effect of the communal system of seat reservation and peculiar nature of voting was reflected in the 1953 Council election. The communal infection had penetrated deep into the body-politic of Sikkim. The National Party won all the six

³⁷ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 323.

Bhutia-Lepcha seats and was thus confirmed by the electorates as the champion of Bhutia-Lepcha community. The State Congress won all the six Nepali seats and was confirmed as representing Nepalese interests. The great majority of the Bhutia-Lepcha voters rejected the State Congress as much as did the Nepalese voters reject the National Party. Here, we can see that the Bhutia-Lepcha candidate contesting from the State Congress, including Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa and Tashi Tshering were defeated at the election. The result of election shows that the body-politic of Sikkim largely revolved around in affiliation of ethnic communities. The defeat of the leading Sikkim State Congress members together with differences over the issue of 'Parity Formula' led to split in the Sikkim State Congress.

In view of the 1958 election, the State Council was enlarged while the communal and complicated system of election continued.³⁸ The Sikkim National Party supported the decision of Maharaja for the formation of one Sangha seat for the monasteries and one General seat. And this was done by the Proclamation dated 16th March, 1958.³⁹ The Sangha seat was yet another means to legitimize religious polarization between the Bhutia-Lepcha, who were Buddhist and Nepalese who were basically Hindus. The logic behind the creation of the General seat was also confusing as it was not meant for the plainsmen community settled in Sikkim. Along with the above arrangements, the members to be nominated by the Chogyal to the State Council were to be six, bringing the total to 20 as against 17 in 1953. The system of primary election was modified and

³⁸ Grover, Op.cit, P. 46.

³⁹ Coelho, V.H. (1970). *Sikkim and Bhutan*. Indian Council for International Relation. Vikas Publication. New Delhi. P. 31.

the winning candidate of particular community was required to obtain a minimum of 15 percent of votes of the other community to be concluding winner.

After the polls, the Sikkim National Party ousted its President Sonam tshering and elected Martam Topden in his place. In the election results, the Sikkim State Congress won the majority of eight seats, which included one Bhutia-Lepcha seat and general seat. Rival parties made allegations of malpractices by some of the leaders. An election Tribunal was appointed by the Durbar and as a result of the enquiries and subsequent findings he was found guilty of the charges and was deprived of his seat in the Council and disqualified for contesting election for 6 years. Later, the ban was reduced to 3 years. Sonam Tshering left the party after he was removed from party's Presidentship and formed a faction within the Sikkim National Party, nursing grievance against the Durbar for he believed that his disqualification was effectively to bar him from contesting the bye-election scheduled in February 1, 1960. Sonam Tshering along with other dissidents like Chandradas Rai and Kazi Lhendup Dorji formed Sikkim National Congress in 1960.

In view of the political development of the 1960s and the early 1970's in favour of 'separate political identity of Sikkim', the Sikkim National Party adopted a more persuasive approach. Martam Topden, old and sick, retired from the leadership of the Sikkim National Party leaving the command in the hands of a 66 years old Netuk Tshering (Lama). Under his leadership the nature of the party as an exclusive Bhutia-Lepcha party had been diluted to some extent. It had Nepali Councilors from the North, a Nepali General Secretary in Man Bahadur Basnet and a vice-President in Harka Bahadur Basnet. The Party's 1973 election manifesto promised to serve "the country,

the king and the welfare of the Sikkimese masses” and announced that “the main objective of the party is to work for and lead the country and her people towards prosperity and advancement commensurating the progress of the immensely and in the 1973 Council Election, the Party won 11 seats (7 Bhutia-Lepcha, 2 Nepali seats), including the support that the Party enjoyed from the Sangha candidate and the Scheduled Caste candidate.⁴⁰

Apparently, Netuk Lama believed in constitutional monarchy with people’s representatives exercising more powers and rights of the majority party in the Council to form government in Sikkim. The Chogyal however, was adamant against any drastic change and continued with the usual coalition of 6 member Executive Council- 4 from the Sikkim National Party, 1 Sikkim Janata Party and 1 Sikkim National Congress.⁴¹ But, the allegation regarding the rigging⁴² of election result in favour of Sikkim National Party was followed by political turmoil which ultimately resulted in signing of the so-called Tripartite Agreement of the 8th May, 1973.⁴³ The Agreement postulated the formation of a responsible government, wider legislative and executive powers for the elected representatives of the people, equitable representation to all sections of the people based on adult suffrage and one-man-one-vote principle, a Legislative Assembly to be elected for four years term and appointment of Election Commissioner by the Government of Sikkim to conduct and supervise the elections in Sikkim.⁴⁴ The introduction of new election rules and reduction of Chogyal’s powers in the affairs of

⁴⁰ Sinha, Op.cit. P. 32.

⁴¹ Basnet, Op.cit, P. 181.

⁴² Ibid. P. 179.

⁴³ Sikkim State Archives. *May 8, 1973 Agreement*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on. 4/10/2014.

⁴⁴ Ibid

the State had damaged the prospect of the Party tremendously. In the 1974 election it won only one seat out of the 32 elected seats.

Sikkim National Congress

Another significant event of the contemporary history of Sikkim was the emergence of Sikkim National congress, which made its debut in the politics of the kingdom on 20 May 1960, as a powerful force in Sikkim's political landscape. "Keeping in view the futility of the existence of small political parties", said the resolution establishing the new party, "and bearing in mind the larger interests of the people of Sikkim, the four parties, namely the Sikkim Swatantra Dal led by Kazi Lhendup Dorji, the Sikkim National Party led by Sonam Tshering , the Sikkim Praja Sammelan led by Dhan Bahadur Tewari and the Sikkim State Congress (Progressive Group) led by Chandradas Rai decided at the joint convention held at Singtam, sponsored by Kazi Lhendup Dorji of Chakhung, to kerge into one compact body to be known as Sikkim National Congress.⁴⁵ The objective of Party, outlined in the memorandum submitted to Prime Minister Nehru, was:

- (a) A constitutional monarchy for Sikkim.
- (b) A Council based on communal parity, but elected by joint electorate, and
- (c) An independent judiciary with a High court established by a charter.

Hence with establishment of Sikkim National Congress as a significant political unit capable of tremendous influence on the Sikkimese people, the entire political picture of Sikkim underwent drastic changes.

⁴⁵ Grover, Op.cit, PP. 50-51

Kazi Lhendup Dorji was elected President. Sonam Tshering and Dhan Bahadur Tewari were elected Vice-President, and Bhim Bahadur Gurung was elected the General Secretary.⁴⁶ Since its inception Sikkim National Congress has been demanding a written constitution incorporating fundamental rights, for codified laws and for representative government. The National Congress, with four members, was the second largest group in the Legislative Council while the National Party occupied the first position with five members. On 1st June, 1960 no member belonging to the National Congress was taken in the Executive Council even though it occupied second position in the Legislative Council. In this connection it is significant that National Congress commanded the support of the Nepali-Bhutia members whereas National Party had the support of Bhutia members only.

The election to the third State Council was due in 1961 but the political situation was not suitable for holding election due to the promulgation of the Sikkim Subject Regulation of July 1961⁴⁷ and the decision to enhance the strength of the Sikkim Guards by the Maharaja, without the consent of the State Council, to provide citizenship to three categories of person:

- (a) All person of Sikkimese domicile, if born in Sikkim and resident there or if ordinarily resident of Sikkim for not less that fifteen years prior to the promulgation of the regulation.
- (b) Persons not domiciled in Sikkim but of Lepcha, Bhutia or Tsong origin whose father or grandfather was born in Sikkim, and

⁴⁶ Basnet, Op.cit, P. 117.

⁴⁷ Sikkim State Archives. *Sikkim Subject Regulation 1961*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on. 4/10/2014.

(c) Persons not domiciled in Sikkim but whose ancestors have deemed to be Sikkimese subjects before 1850.

There was also a provision for naturalizing, subject to a qualifying residence of fifteen years. The regulation referred to Sikkimese Bhutias, Lepchas and Tsong as among categories of persons entitled to citizenship but excluded Nepalese who form about 70 percent of the population of Sikkim. This led to a certain amount of apprehension among Nepalese of possible discrimination against their community. The Sikkim National Congress criticized the Regulation of 1961 as anti-Nepali designed to split the Nepali community by separating the Tsong (Limboo) from the community.

The political parties, other than the Sikkim National Party, were unanimous in their criticism of the Durbar. They also criticized the government of India for approving it and for practicing double standards. In a joint conference held at Gangtok on the 26th July, 1961 they requested the Maharaja to withhold enforcement of such an important regulation pending determination of public opinion. Chandradas Rai of Sikkim National Congress demanded amendment to the proclamation before when the issue was place for discussion at the Council. The National Congress also criticized the Durbar's decision to increase the strength of the Sikkim guards and expressed apprehension that the force would be used to suppress political opposition. However, in deference to public fear, the proclamation was amended on 16th January, 1962 and all references to communities were removed.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Rao, P. Raghunadha. (1978). *Sikkim, The Story of its Integration with India*. Cosmo Publication. New Delhi. P. 21.

The third General Election was held in 1967. The Sikkim National Congress emerged as the strongest political party of Sikkim. It polled about 55 percent of the total votes and won eight seats in the Sikkim State Council (5 Nepali seats, 2 Bhutia-Lepcha seats and one general seat). Soon after the elections, the Chogyal nominated Bhim Bahadur Gurung one of the eight successful candidates of the National Congress, to the Executive Council. Kazi Lhendup Dorji, President of National Congress saw this as an attempt to undermine his position. He, therefore, expelled Gurung from the party. Gurung could not remain for long in the government. He was forced to resign due to a financial scandal. But, later, he was reinstated and permitted to contest the fourth general elections. He had formed his own faction in National Congress. Thus, the National Congress split into two factions. Yet another Nepali stalwart, Lal Bahadur Basnet, defected from National Congress and formed his new party called Janata Party.⁴⁹

The period between the third and fourth general elections was one of the pathetic betrayals of democracy by the old guards among the popular leaders. The young and turbulent elements among the National Congress wanted to organize agitational programmes on popular issues. The weary and tired leadership did not agree to this. This led to the split in party. In such a political situation the fourth general election was fought in April 1970. The parent National Congress won five seats. The most significant point was that, in spite of the large scale defections, the National Congress emerged as a common political platform for the different communities. It not only won the general seat covering the entire Sikkim for the second time but also managed to get Nepalese, Bhutia-Lepcha and Tsong candidates elected on its tickets. By the fourth general

⁴⁹ Ibid. P. 24.

elections the people of the State had become even more politically conscious. The National Congress led by Kazi Lhendup Dorji, in spite of a split in its rank, again came out as the single largest party in the State Council.

The Sikkim National Congress had been able to present before the Sikkimese people a clearer picture of the real role of the different political parties. The Sikkimese people has, however, come to look upon the Sikkim National Congress leaders as the only votaries of democracy left in the political field of Sikkim, thanks largely to an effective propaganda by the party.

Political development during the 1970s saw the formation of a new party called Sikkim Janata Party in October 1972 by merging the Janata Party of Lal Bahadur Banet (1969) and Sikkim Stae Congress of Nakhul Pradhan. The party accused the Durbar for the deteriorating condition of the Nepalese and demanded joint electorate system and abolition of the “Parity Formula.”⁵⁰

The 1973 election too was followed by allegations of rigging. A minor political altercation between the candidates of Sikkim National Congress and the Sikkim National Party flared up into a communal tension between the Nepalese and Bhutias. A joint Action Committee consisting of the members of the Sikkim Janata Congress and Sikkim National Congress was formed in March, 1973 with Kazi Lhendup Dorji as Chairman,⁵¹ to fight for their joint demands, which is abolition of ‘parity formula’ and communal voting system, full fledged democracy, a written constitution and fundamental rights, substitution of the discriminatory Sikkim Subjects Regulation of

⁵⁰ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 327

⁵¹ Basnet, Op.cit, P. 181.

1961, an Advisory Council with people's representation, etc. the joint Action Committee also alleged the Chogyal for arming Tibetan refugee and using them against the people observing peaceful movement. The committee, in other words, was essentially demanding for representative government and abolition of preferential treatment or special privilege status for the ruling community.

On the 8th May, 1973, a so-called Tripartite Agreement was signed between the Chogyal, the government of India and the two major political parties namely Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim Janata Congress.⁵² this Agreement promised for the establishment of a full responsible government, a democratic constitution, fundamental rights, the rule of law, an independent judiciary, greater legislative and executive power for the elected representatives of the people and one man one vote principle of voting.⁵³ The election to a 32 member Legislative Assembly was held in April 1974.⁵⁴ The Sikkim Congress, formed after merging the Sikkim Janata Congress and Sikkim National Congress, swept the poll by winning 31 seats, including the Sangha seat. The National Party won only one seat. On 10th May, 1974, the Chogyal inaugurated the newly constituted Sikkim Legislative Assembly but the task of formation of Ministry was delayed till July due to contradictions prevailing between the Chogyal and the Assembly over the passage of the Government of Sikkim Bill, 1974. The Chogyal, however, assented to the Bill on the 4th of July, 1974⁵⁵; a five member Sikkim Congress

⁵² Sikkim State Archives. *May 8, 1973 Agreement*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on. 4/10/2014.

⁵³ Ibid. text of Tripartite Agreement of May 8th 1973.

⁵⁴ Sinha, Op.cit, P. 35

⁵⁵ Kazi, Op.cit, P. 39.

Ministry led by kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa was installed.⁵⁶ Care was taken to maintain the ethnic balance in the Ministry (i.e. 2 Lepcha, 2 Nepalese and 1 Bhutia). Even after the formation of the Kazi Ministry and the subsequent Associate Status⁵⁷ relationship with India, the political climate in Sikkim was far from stable. The friction between various political parties and the Chogyal on the controversial Bill passed by the Sikkim Legislative Assembly on June 1974 caused much apprehension in the minds of the people of Sikkim. The situation grew worse and finally the State Assembly, in an emergency declared Sikkim to be a constituent unit of India, thus putting a sudden end to the Associate Status enjoyed for almost a year.

The resolution was then placed before the people for its approval. The majority of the people voted for the resolution, which was then placed before the Indian Government for consideration. After a few days, Indian Parliament passed the Constitution (Thirty-sixth Amendment) Act, 1975, which made Sikkim the 22nd State of the Indian Union with effect from April 26, 1975. The Constitution (36th Amendment) Act, 1975,⁵⁸ laid down special provision for protecting the rights and interest of the different sections of the population of Sikkim through the insertion of Article 371F (f)⁵⁹ deals with reservation of seats in Assembly.

⁵⁶ Sikkim State Archive. *Appointment of L.D. Kazi as CM of Sikkim*. Gazette No. 28. Notification No/Date. Skm/Governor(1)75. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on. 5/10/2014.

⁵⁷ After the formation of Kazi Ministry, Sikkim Bill, 1974 was placed before Indian Government. Accordingly the Constitution (Thirty-fifth Amendment) Act 1974 was passed in the Indian Parliament on September 3, 1974, to provide legal constitutional frame work to Sikkim as an "Associated State" of India providing her representation in the Indian Parliament.

⁵⁸ Sikkim State Archives. *36th Amendment Act 1975*. Gazette No. 38. Notification No/date. S.O.280(E)-16.5.1975. sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on. 5/ 10/2014.

⁵⁹ Sikkim State Archives. *Article 371F of the Indian Constitution*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on. 5/10/2014.

Political Parties: Post Merger Era

Soon after the merger of Sikkim with India, the Sikkim Congress, as a part of political strategy, merged with the Indian National Congress. Later, the lone member of the National Party in the Assembly too joined the Congress Party and with it the State Assembly was virtually with no opposition. But dissention within the party persisted.

Till 1977, the Chief Minister Kazi Lhendup Dorji maintained a complete grip over the party. In February 1977, Nar Bahadur Khatiwada, the youth Congress leader, along with three other MLAs deserted Kazi Lhendup Dorji and formed a state unit of the Congress for Democracy⁶⁰ formed by Jagjivan Ram.⁶¹ Nar Bahadur Khatiwada criticized the Chief Minister Kazi for depending completely on the “imported bureaucrats” who, according to Khatiwada, “knew nothing of Sikkim and felt nothing for Sikkim”.⁶² By emphasizing the need for maintaining Sikkim’s distinct character and needs, Mr. Khatiwada sowed the seeds of regional politics in Sikkim after the merger. When the Janata Party came to power at the Centre, Kazi along with 26 MLAs merged with the Janata Party. Kazi was criticized by the opposition as the ‘man of mergers’.⁶³

It was during this period that a series of agitations and public demonstrations took place all over Sikkim in protest against the performances of the government and the merger with India. As an alternative to Kazi’s Party, Nar Bahadur Bhandari formed the

⁶⁰ The Congress for Democracy (CFD) was an Indian political party founded in 1977 by Jagjivan Ram. It was formed after Jagjivan Ram left the Congress Party of Indira Gandhi and denounced her rule during the Indian Emergency. The Party contested the Indian general election, 1977 with the Janata alliance and later merged with it.

⁶¹ Sengupta, Op.cit, P. 166.

⁶² Ibid. P. 167.

⁶³ Das, B.S. Reprinted (2002). *The Sikkim Saga*. Vikas Publication House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi. P. 105.

Sikkim Janata Party, a regional political organization, on 22nd March, 1977.⁶⁴ Later he changed its name to Sikkim Janata Parishad. After realizing no immediate political benefit, Khatiwada too changed the name of his party as the Sikkim Prajatantra Congress and joined hands with the anti-merger forces.⁶⁵ He became not only a bitter critic of Delhi, but also demanded that Sikkim be restored to the status prior to 1974. He and three MLAs of the party also submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, stating that “neither the Kazi nor the Sikkim Congress nor we as leaders had the mandate of the people to seek for the merger of Sikkim with India”. During the period (1977) a number of leaders like Krishna Chandra Pradhan, Bhim Bahadur Gurung, the merger veterans too began to question the merger. Their main allegation was that the government of India headed by the National Congress was violating the condition of merger of Sikkim with Indian.⁶⁶

There were disappointment and apprehensions among the people. The Kazi government failed to prove a better administration in Sikkim. The prices of essential commodities continued to rise, influx of outsider could not be checked, the land reforms could not be implemented, agriculture sector remained neglected, corruption continued unabated and the gap between the rich and poor was ever widening. It was said that the economic opportunities remained confined to privileged few. As a result, anti-merger and anti-Indian feeling prevailed among the people. The political parties, which were founded virtually to oppose the Chogyal and his administration, were devoid of long-

⁶⁴ Sengupta, Op.cit, P. 167.

⁶⁵ Das, Op.cit, P. 105.

⁶⁶ Gurung, op.cit, P. 329.

term objectives and far sight and hence had fallen prey of factional politics, which further weakened the prospects for political stability.

Sikkim Prajatantra Congress

Nar Bahadur Khatiwada, owing to growing differences with the Kazi Lhendup Dorji, left Indian National Congress in February 1977 and formed the state unit of the Congress for Democracy (CFD) under the tutelage of Jagjivan ram. Later it was renamed as Sikkim Prajatantra Congress. The party criticized the Kazi government for failing to implement land reform laws, for facilitating the influx of Indian plainsmen and increasing number of the Indian servicemen to work in various government departments on deputation, and for failing to abolish the parity system and the Revenue Order No. 1. The party also demanded recognition of Nepali language as State language and its inclusion in the 8th Schedule of the Indian constitution. He also questioned the legal basis of the merger and demanded referendum to ascertain the wishes of the people of Sikkim regarding merger.⁶⁷ Considering the merger as illegal he stated, “All our question with regard to the Bill were harshly brushed aside by the Chief Executive, B.S. Das, inside the Assembly, and by the Political Officer, K.S. Bajpai, and his senior staff members, outside the House. We were forced into supporting the Bill or else face the consequences... There was a spontaneous demonstration by about ten thousand people of Gangtok, including government employees, objecting the passage of the Bill. The members of the Assembly and the leaders along with Kazi were virtually confined and kept hidden by the CRP... The proceedings of the Assembly were over in less than a record time of 15 minutes, which gives an indication as to the indecent haste with which

⁶⁷ Sengutpa, Op.cit. P. 169.

the Assembly was forced to pass the government of Sikkim Act in midnight session of the Assembly. The Act was in English and about 20 members, including the Chief Minister Kazi, were not at all conversant with the language.”⁶⁸

In the 1979 Assembly election, the Party demanded inclusion of Nepalese left out of the electoral rools, restoration of Nepali seats in the State Assembly, maximum representation of the Sikkimese in the State administration and promotion of the interest of the Indian Nepalese settled in Sikkim after the merger. The party also vehemently criticized the grant of political rights to the plainsmen, i.e., to contest and cast votes, in the Assembly election and did not give ticket to the plainsmen. There was anti-incumbency wave against Kazi government in 1979, but Sikkim Prajatantra Congress could not reap the best out of the situation as the other two political parties carried out relentless propaganda campaign against Khatiwada branding him as the right hand man of Kazi in disguise. It managed to win only three seats in the election. In 1985 Assembly election the party did not win a single seat and with it the party gradually disappeared from the public eye. Khatiwada later became a sympathizer of the Indian National Congress (I) and even contested unsuccessfully in 1995 Lok Sabha election from the Darjeeling constituency as a Congress (I) candidate. In 2002, he was appointed as the Deputy Advocate general of the Government of Sikkim but resigned in 2004 because of the political pressure owing to his involvement with an ethnic organization, called Gorkha Apex Committee. In 2005, he, along with G.M. Rai and Chandradas Rai, founded a new regional political party, called Sikkim Gorkha Prajatantra Party.

Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP)

⁶⁸ Gurung, Op.cit. P. 332.

The Sikkim Janata Party, was formed by Nar Bahadur Bhandari on 22 March, 1977 at Gangtok,⁶⁹ was renamed as Sikkim Janata Parishad after the ruling Congress (I) party headed by Kazi joined the Janata Party which came to power at the centre following the Lok Sabha election. Democracy and Socialism were its main objectives. The party brought into lime light the drawbacks of the Kazi Government and promised three important things:

- (a) Establish real democracy in Sikkim,
- (b) Undertake all-out development of the State,
- (c) Curb corruption.

The first Assembly election held in October 1979 witnessed a great political upheaval. In the 1979 Assembly election the party took up the issues of citizenship and reservation of seats for the Nepalese. Mr. Bhandari contended that the good number of genuine Sikkimese was left out of the electoral rolls. He also alleged that the 1974 electoral rolls were full of discrepancies because names of many persons who were neither Indian citizens nor Sikkim Subjects were included in the voters list. The party also accused the Kazi government of selling Sikkim to the 'Dhitiwalas', raised issues like abolition of the Tsong and Nepali seats in the Assembly, protection of the rights of the Sikkimese by implementing 'Sons of Soil' policy. The other notable slogans raised by the party in 1979 election were 'Sikkim for Sikkimese', 'Bring back Sikkim', 'Ushering in Democracy', 'Destry Communalism' and 'Discontinue Divisive Policy', etc.⁷⁰ the party also assured self-respect and self-dignity to the people, if voted to power.

⁶⁹ Sengupta, Op.cit, P. 167.

⁷⁰ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 333.

Regarding the issue of reservation of Nepali seat in the State Assembly, the party emphasized on the Agreement of 1973.⁷¹ It expressed the fear that “the people from the plains would gradually oust them from all the position of importance”. Further, the party was also critical of the Kazi government for importing bureaucrats from Delhi on deputation and demanded dissolution of the Ministry for the sake of free and fair election. The Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP), Thus emerged as strong political force winning 17 seats in the 32 member Assembly under the leadership of Nar Bahadur Bhandari. It was, perhaps, Bhandari’s anti-merger stand in 1979 which played a role in his victory. Bhandari became the first Chief Minister of Sikkim after the merger. Bhandari’s anti-merger stand and demand for reservation of seats for Tsong and Nepalese in the Assembly received overwhelming support both from the tribal, including the members of the defunct Sikkim National Party, and the Nepalese. The party also won the lone Lok Sabha seat in 1980 but lost Khamdong (SC) and Chakung Assembly seats in the bye-election held alongside the Lok Sabha election. In 1981 it joined the Congress Party (I). Thus, by merger Bhandari became the second Congress (I) Chief Minister, after Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa.

Before the party could complete its first term of office, the government was dismissed by the Governor on May 11, 1984 under Article 164 (1) of the Constitution of India. Corruption charges were leveled against Bhandari by 13 legislators of his party including his four cabinet ministers; they also expressed their lack of confidence in him.⁷² Bhin Bahadur Gurung, the Finance Minister in the Bhandari government became

⁷¹ Sikkim State Archives. *May 8th Agreement 1973*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on. 5/10/2014.

⁷² Sikkim State Archives. *Gazette No. 58. 11th May, 1984*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on. 6/10/2014.

the third Chief Minister of Sikkim but the government could survive for just 13 days.⁷³ As a result of the failure of the constitutional machinery, Sikkim was brought under Presidential rule by the Centre. In the meantime, Bhandari formed a new political party, Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) and returned to power on March 11, 1985 ending the 10 months of Presidential rule securing 30 out of 32 seats.⁷⁴ Political parties like the Congress (I), Janata Party, CPI and the CPI (M) and two regional parties like Sikkim Sangram Parishad and Sikkim Prajatantra Congress and some unregistered parties contested elections. For contesting Assembly election of 1985, Ram Chandra Poudyal's Rising Son Party made an alliance with the National Front and Left Front. The Assembly election went in favour of Sikkim Sangram Parishad which won 30 out of 32 seats in the State and Bhandari became the Chief Minister of Sikkim for the second time. In 1985 Assembly election the Sikkim Sangram Parishad contested on the basis of cardinal issues namely:

- (a) To maintain parity and restore seats reserved for erstwhile for Sikkimese Nepalese.
- (b) To grant citizenship for people rendered stateless in Sikkim and to fix cut off year at 1970.
- (c) To implement 'son o soil' policy regarding all government jobs and trade licenses for maintaining Sikkimese identity.
- (d) To work for the constitutional recognition of the Nepali language under 8th schedule of the Constitution of India, and

⁷³ B.B. Gurung worked under L.D. Kazi's Sikkim National Congress in 1972 and was elected in 1974 Assembly election of Sikkim.

⁷⁴ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 336.

(e) To demand for more financial and political freedom for the States of the Indian Union.

It is to be noted that Mr. Bhandari condemned his opponents namely Kazi, Bhim Bhahadur Gurung, Ram Chandra Poudya etc, as architects of merger and 'Desh Bechuwas' (sellers of the country) or 32 thieves. Thus, by raising the issue of Sikkim's merger with India, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad under Bhandari's leadership popularized the notion of Sikkimese identity as distinct from the Indian identity. It may be considered as a systematic exploitation of identity issue for political gains through he was not specifically using ideas of Nepali identity or Bhutia identity. Since then, the Sikkimese view Indian identity as different from the Sikkimese identity.

During the elections of 1989 all the political parties raised this issue, along with others of ethnic sentiments and of social significance. Bhandari projected himself as pro-Nepali leader and demanded seat reservations for the Nepalese of Sikkimese origin. At the same time, he was in favour of keeping the reserved seats for the Bhutia-Lepcha intact. In this election, Ram Chandra Poudyal, the Rising Sun Party's supremo also projected himself as pro-Nepali and demanded more reserved seats for the Nepalese at par with their numerical strength. As a result, he lost the faith of Bhutia-Lepcha community. The third political force, the Congress remained as a party of the plainsmen. Bhandari emerged as the only choice, for his non communal image appealed to the large section of the Nepalese as well as Bhutia-Lepcha people of Sikkim. All the 32 seats were won by the Sikkim Sangram Parishad and Bhandari became the Chief Minister for the third consecutive ter,. Bhandari, a teacher-turned politician, ruled Sikkim for more than 14 years. During his tenure the higher caste Nepali dominated every sphere of

governance. The Pradhans captured the higher levels of the administration and representatives of the Bahun and the Chettri communities dominated Sikkim's political scenario. These upper castes were referred to as the NBCs (the Newars, the Bahuns and the Chettries) or the non-backward classes. A large section of the Nepalese, especially the other backward classes (OBC) among them, remained neglected. However after Bhandari's defeat in the 1994 elections, the NBCs too gradually lost their foot-hold in Sikkim politics. One of Bhandari's close associates, Pawan Kumar Chamling, broke away to form a new party, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF). Chamling projected himself as a leader of downtrodden. The Sikkim Democratic front emerged as the representatives of the backward classes. The Sikkim Democratic Front's victory ended Bhandari's long domination of Sikkim politics.

Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)

The party was founded by Pawan Kumar Chamling on March 4th, 1993.⁷⁵ The main ideology of the party is Democracy, Secularism, Socialism, Welfare, Rules of Law, etc. Policies are democratic-oriented for the welfare of the people from grassroots level. The party's document states that the "Sikkim Democratic Front, firmly upholds the cause of Sikkimese people in their struggle for democracy and rule of law. This party truly stands democratic principles which always strive to protect and preserve the democratic rights and privileged of the people." The party has ruled the State since 1994 with Pawan Kumar Chamling as the Chief Minister. The party consolidated its position sweeping the 1999 and 2004 State elections. It won 31 out of 32 seats in the 2004

⁷⁵ Dr Syangbo, Genevive. (2012). *The Sikkim Democratic Front: The Politics of Popular Mobilisation in Sikkim (1993-2004)*. P. 55.

election.⁷⁶ In the 2009 Assembly election, the party made a clean sweep, winning all 32 seats.⁷⁷ It also retained the lone Lok Sabha seat. Aims and objectives of the party are as follows:

- (a) Sikkim Democratic Front shall bear true faith and allegiance to the sacred Constitution of India as by law established and to the principles of Socialism and Democracy and shall uphold the Sovereignty, Unity and Integrity of the Indian Union.
- (b) It shall fight to uphold the political, social and economic rights and privileged of the people of Sikkim as provided under the Indian Constitution.
- (c) It shall strive hard for the uplift of the socially and economically backward sections of people of Sikkim.
- (d) Sikkim Democratic Front shall work ceaselessly to promote peace, progress and communal harmony among the people of Sikkim and shall make utmost endeavour to promote fraternity, tolerance and harmony with all other communities of Sikkim.
- (e) The party is committed to save equal opportunity to all Sikkimese people and shall ceaselessly work for the emancipation and uplift of Sikkimese women and other sections of oppressed people.
- (f) The party shall be ever ready to fight against all forces that threaten to disrupt the unity and integrity of the nation.
- (g) While giving due recognition to the principle of human dignity, this party shall pledge to fight against all kinds of injustice and inequality perpetuated on ground of caste, creed, colour, religion and gender.

⁷⁶ Statistical Report (2004) election of Sikkim.

⁷⁷ Statistical Report (2009) election of Sikkim.

- (h) The party shall especially not yield back from working for the interests and welfare of the backward and depressed communities, constitutional rights of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes and security and prosperity of the entire Sikkimese people.
- (i) The party is committed to uphold, preserve and promote the age-old traditions, customs and rich cultural heritage of different ethnic communities of the State who have been living in perfect communal harmony down the ages.
- (j) The party holds enduring faith in the “Son of Sikkim’ policy and sincerely safeguards the interests of the Sikkimese people.
- (k) Sikkim Democratic Front shall tirelessly wage a struggle against poverty, illiteracy and internal backwardness in the State possible means to raise the average conditions of Sikkimese of at levels so as to make them educationally, socially and above all; economically self-reliant and self-sufficient and work justly for the poor and depressed people of Sikkim.
- (l) The party is predetermined to bring upon improvement in the existing situation in Sikkim and will resort to all.⁷⁸

In the 2009 Assembly and Lok Sabha election the Sikkim democratic Front won all the 32 Assembly seats and the lone Lok Sabha seat despite the fact that about fifty percent of its candidates were contesting for the first time. This landslide victory of the Sikkim democratic Front may be attributed to the ideological shift from the parochial caste identity politics of earlier days to the politics of performance. “Vote for performance” was its avowed slogan in this election. People were euphoric about the way

⁷⁸ Syangbo,, Op.cit. PP. 56-57.

that the party had created employment and economic opportunities through its holistic development initiatives and self-employment schemes. The immediate causes of the success, however, could be credited to exemption granted to the Sikkimese from the central income tax in 2008 and the failure of the opposition parties to work jointly. In the last election held in 2014, also Sikkim democratic Front swept the polls by winning 22 seats in the Assembly.

During the last twenty years of its continuous rule under the leadership of Mr. Pawan Kumar Chamling, the SDF party seems to have, to a large extent, substituted parochial aspiration with the politics of performance and economic opportunities. In the last one decade of the SDF rule there had been no ethnic disturbance in Sikkim which in itself is most remarkable achievement of the Party. Using state resources to the advantage of most sections of society, the SDF has managed to create an atmosphere favourable to it and its government. The Sikkim Democratic Front's policy is all-inclusive: there is no Sikkimese now who does not fall within state-sponsored categories such as scheduled tribes (STs), scheduled castes (SCs), most backward classes (MBCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). There are reservations for all these categories in the posts and services of the state government and public sector undertakings.

In conclusion we can assume that politics in Sikkim before the merger and after till 1980s, was based on ethnic orientations. Political parties used ethnic issues to achieve their political gains in the State. At the same time ethnic communities look upon political parties to support their demands in the State. But, after the formation of the Sikkim Democratic Front party there have been changes in the state politics. Sikkim Democratic Front party has managed to create a atmosphere of no ethnic disturbance by

taking several steps for different communities. But, somehow it is assumed that the State, through such 'equalizing' policies actually creates the new identities among the various categories of persons. In Sikkim, there has been one party domination, as a result of the failure of opposition party to work jointly. In recent time, the new Political party came into being called Sikkim Krantikari Morcha headed by Prem Singh Golay. This party's performance was tremendous in the last Assembly election by winning 10 Assembly seats. It seems that gradually one party domination in Sikkim will come to an end with the emergence of new opposition party like Sikkim Krantikari Morcha.

Lastly, the ethnic mobility process and political organizations very often behave in mutual relationship. In a parliamentary democratic system where election becomes sole means of legitimate power, political parties find ethnic group as prospective source for fulfillment of their articulated objectives. On the other hand, the ethnic groups also use political organizations as a platform for articulating community's demands and grievances. Since ethnic demands generally include issues of protection and preservation of one against the other, the regional parties, by virtue of their homogeneous nature and local outlook, naturally become favourites of ethnic organizations in comparison to the National Parties. The bitter experience of the people of Sikkim with the national parties, especially with the Indian National Congress and the Janata Party in the post- 1975 era, also seemed to be significant behind the emergence and support of the people towards the regional parties in Sikkim.

Chapter Three

THE ASSEMBLY SEAT ISSUE

Since the beginning of institutional politics in the 17th century till present time maintenance of ethnic equilibrium has been the primary political goal upon which rested the success and failure of the rulers/leaders/political elite in Sikkim. The question of power and privilege has given way to the issues of equal rights in the economics, social and political sense and of opportunity which, to a large extent, depended upon the initiative of political leaders to maintain ethnic balance without harming or causing to harm the interests of other communities and endangering the prospect for development of the State.

Sikkim, which was a tiny Himalayan Kingdom tucked between China and India till its merger with the latter in 1975, is at present one of the smallest states of North East India. Sikkimese society consists of multiple cultural-racial groups like Nepalese, Lepchas, Bhutias, etc of which the Nepalese constitute the majority. Together with them, exist some smaller groups like Sherpas, Tsongs (Limboos) etc., who are identified as Nepalese in Sikkim. Sikkim, like other parts of India, has been witness to ethnic mobilization since the introduction of parliamentary democracy after the merger with India. Before the merger, the ruling Namgyal dynasty belonging to a minority Bhutia racial community was ruling over the subjects belonging to different communities and this helped the Bhutia community to acquire a predominant position, though members of other communities also occupied important positions in the monarchical administration.

After the merger, Parliamentary democracy and notions of equality, individual freedom, and modern legal system have been introduced. It was hoped that the cultural differences and ethnic politics would be gradually marginalized with the slow permeation of notions of individual rights and equality. But contrary to the general expectations, cultural or ethnic consciousness and the political

actions based on ethnic identity have become more frequent. New political parties and organizations have been formed with community oriented claims and demands, and are competing with each other for the ethnic space. A quick look at the manifestoes of the various political parties generally reflect attempts at mobilization of ethnic categories by raising community oriented issues either in isolation (i.e., emphasizing a particular community interests) or in a conglomerate form (i.e., common issues concerning more than one group). By raising community oriented issues, political parties have facilitated the process of articulation as well as legitimization of demand of various ethnic categories.

Apparently, ethnic mobilization process in Sikkim cannot be regarded as an expected development. As mentioned earlier, that Sikkim does not have a long history of conflict among different communities though some communities were discriminated against. There were evidences showing cultural exchanges and inter-community marriages among the members of the three communities in the past though it was not as common as in the present day. There is no history of perpetual religious conflict or a history of ethnic violence and social conflict among the groups apart from the resentment expressed sporadically against the rulers and their agents. In other words, history does not appear to be a strong basis for the emergence of ethnic politics in Sikkim. Yet ethnic politics did not only emerge, it is sustained and proliferated further in Sikkim in the recent past.

As of now Sikkim has its Legislative assembly which consists of 32 members. For the formation of the Legislative Assembly, Sikkim had to go through various political events. Most importantly the political upheaval which sparked off after fifth general elections in early 1973, under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorji of the Sikkim National Congress and Krishna Chandra Pradhan of the Sikkim Janata Party, led to complete breakdown of law and order situation in Sikkim. Finally, the Indian government took over the administration of Sikkim through a Chief Executive on April 9, 1973 after being requested by the Chogyal. An all-party agreement was reached within a month after the Indian

government stepped in. An important agreement was signed on May 8, 1973 between the Chogyal, the leaders of the political parties, and the Government of India.¹

The Agreement envisaged the establishment of a fully responsible government with a more democratic constitution, guarantee of fundamental rights, rule of law, and an independent judiciary and legislative and executive powers to the elected representatives of the people and adult franchise based on one man, one vote. Article 5 of the above Agreement kept the parity system of communal representation in the Assembly:

“The system of election shall be organized as to make the Assembly adequately representative of the various sections of the population. The size and composition of the Assembly and of the Executive Council shall be such as may be prescribed from time to time, care being taken to ensure that no single section of the population acquires a dominating position due mainly to its ethnic origin, and that the rights and interests of the Sikkimese of Bhutia-Lepcha origin and of the Sikkimese Nepali, which includes Tsong and Scheduled Castes origin are fully protected.”

Seat Distribution Pre-merger Period

Before going through the Assembly seats issue in Sikkim, it is necessary to come delve into the history of seats distribution in Sikkim. At the time of Phuntsog Namgyal's reign in 1642, Sikkim was very much bigger than it is today. The aim of the ruler was to build a firm foundation for his Kingdom. For this, he needed the help and cooperation of the Lepchas, Bhutias and Limboos who inhabited Sikkim at that time. Phuntsog Namgyal divided the Kingdom into 12 Dzongs (districts) and placed each under 12 Lepcha Dzungpons (governor). He also appointed 12 Kalons (ministers) from the

¹ Sikkim State Archives. *May 8, 1973 Agreement*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on. 7/10/2014.

influential Bhutia families of Sikkim and formed a Council of 12 ministers.² Since then, a dual system of administration in which the feudal bureaucracy on the pattern of the lamaist theocracy of Tibet was firmly laid. From time to time a Tibetan Regent stayed in Sikkim to help the Ruler on various occasions. These Regents have played a vital role in shaping Sikkim's history and political development. They were aided by representatives of various communities and interests of the people in Sikkim.

Sikkim came under the British influence early in the 19th century and finally became a British dependency, by signing a peace treaty at Tumlong- the Sikkim capital- on 28th March, 1861.³ John Claude White, the first political officer, arrived in Gangtok in 1887. He was appointed as political officer of Sikkim by the British Raj in 1889.⁴ During his stay (1889-1908), White exercised effective influence in the administration of Sikkim and reorganized the entire system while keeping its basic structure. John Claude White, the first Political Officer, has described this period in the following terms:

“Chaos reigned everywhere, there was no revenue system, the Maharaja taking what he required as he wanted it from the people, those nearest the capital having to contribute the largest share, while those more remote had toll taken from them by the local officials by the name of the Raja, though little found its way to him; no courts of justice; no police, no public works, no education for the younger generation. The task before me was a difficult one, but very fascinating; the country was a new one and everything was in my hands.”⁵

² Sinha, A.C. (1975). *Politics of Sikkim, A Sociological Study*. Thomson Press (India) Limited. P. 14.

³ Sikkim State Archives. *Treaty of Tumlong 1861*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 7/10/2014.

⁴ Coelho, V.H. (1970). *Sikkim and Bhutan*. Indian Council of Cultural Relations, Vikas Publications. New Delh.i P 23.

⁵ Ibid. P. 24.

He created a State Council to advise the Ruler (Thutob Namgyal) in the administration of the State. White's first State council consisted of Khangsa Dewan, Phodong Lama, and Sheo Dewan with himself as head. In later years, landlords and lamas from various monasteries were also appointed to the Council and this included Nepali Thikadars as well.⁶ With the formation of State Council, the foundation was laid for further democratic setup in Sikkim.

The period between 1914 and 1965 in Sikkim witnessed a gradual evolution towards a democratic form of government. During this period Sikkim went through a number of significant changes in the social, economic and political realms. At first the members of the State Council were nominated by the Maharaja and in later years the Majority of them were elected. In the beginning, the State Council consisted of 9 members, who were nominated representatives of all interests and every caste and creed in Sikkim. They were old and experienced men drawn from all parts of the country to help in the administration. They generally met twice a year where they criticized the budget which invariably went through the Council for the final sanction of the Maharaja.

The demands of political party- bringing about a democratic set up in Sikkim, abolition of landlordism and Sikkim's merger with India led to the political turmoil in the State, eventually led to the formation of an elected government also called "Popular Ministry" in 1949. With Tashi Tshering (President of Sikkim State Congress) as Chief Minister and four other members namely- Reshmi Prasad Alley, Captain Dimik Singh Lepcha, Kazi Dorjee Dadul and Chandradas Rai.⁷ It was clearly evident from the start that due to the lack of unity within the Council itself and dissident clash of party politics this so-called popular government could not function, which unfortunately lasted just

⁶ Kazi, Jigme. N. (2009). *Sikkim for Sikkimese, Distinct Identity Within the Union*. Hill Media Publication Gangtok Sikkim, India. P. 26.

⁷ Coelho, Op.cit, P. 27.

over a month. Meanwhile the palace did not take any decision on above demands. This led to the instability in the State.

Because of the political instability in Sikkim, the Government of India, after being requested by the Maharaja, appointed an Indian Dewan in Sikkim to take over the administration of the State until the situation improved. The first Dewan, J.S. Lall, took office in August 1949.⁸ The representatives of political parties in Sikkim were invited to Delhi for talks in March 1950. The subjects discussed were explained in a press release on March 20, 1950, issued by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. It states:

“The Government of India has had consultation with the Maharaja of Sikkim and the representatives of the political parties in Sikkim, who were invited recently to Delhi. The discussion covered the entire field of future relations between Sikkim and Indian and necessary administrative arrangements within the State, including the association of popular representation in the Government of the State. Provisional agreements have been taken regarding the administration.”

“As regards the status of Sikkim it has been agreed that Sikkim will continue to be a protectorate of India. The Government of India will continue to be responsible for its external relations, defense and communications. As regards internal government, the State will continue to enjoy autonomy subject to the ultimate responsibility of the Government of India for the maintenance of good administration and law and order.”

“For the present an officer of the Government of India will continue to be the Dewan of the State. But the Government of India’s policy is one of the progressive associations of the

⁸ Sinha, Op.cit, P. 26.

people of the State with its Government, a policy with which, happily His Highness the Maharaja is in full agreement. It is proposed, as first step, that an Advisory Council, representative of all the interests should be associated with the Dewan. Steps will also be taken immediately to institute a village Panchayats system on an elective basis within the State. This is an essential and effective process of education in the art of popular Government and it is the intension that these panchayats should, in due course, elect a council for the State, whose functions and responsibility will be progressively enlarged.”⁹

The Indo-Sikkim Treaty enshrining the above principles was signed at Gangtok on 5th December 1950 by the Maharaja Tashi Namgyal and Harishwar Dayal, the Indian Political officer in Sikkim.¹⁰ Nobody was more thoroughly disillusioned than the leaders of Sikkim State Congress by the Treaty. The internal autonomy granted to Sikkim was, to all intents and purposes granted to Maharaja. The establishment of responsible government, people’s participation in the administration, etc., was nowhere mentioned. The Treaty totally ignored the aspirations of the people. They boycotted the State banquet given by the Maharaja to mark the occasion of the signing of the Indo-Sikkim Treaty. They reiterated their demand for representative government with least delay.¹¹

In this unstable situation in the State, the Panchayat elections were held in Sikkim in December, 1950. The Sikkim State Congress participated in the election but the Sikkim National Party boycotted it on the grounds that the interest of the indigenous population had not been safeguard. By indigenous people, the National Party meant the Bhutias and the Lepchas.¹²

⁹ Basnet,, L.B. *Sikkim a Short Political History*. S. Chand and Co. (Pvt) Ltd. New Delhi. PP. 93-94.

¹⁰ Sikkim State Archives. *Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. accessed on 8/10/2014.

¹¹ Coelho, Op.cit, P. 29.

¹² Basnet, Op.cit, P. 98.

In May, 1951, for the purpose of the matter of communal representation, an Advisory Committee was formed under the Presidentship of the Dewan. The members included the representatives of three parties: Maharajakumar Palden Thondup Namgyal represented the Maharaja, Sonam Tshering represented the Bhutia-Lepcha interest as projected by the National Party and the State Congress was represented by Dimik Singh Lepcha and Kasi Raj Pardhan, a Lepcha and Nepali.¹³ The main point of discussion in the Committee was the question of distribution of seats and jobs in the government among the three principal communities of Sikkim- Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese. The Parity Formula was the focal point of the discussion in the meetings. It aimed at the equal distribution of seats between the three ethnic communities in Sikkim. The Maharaja had to find out a formula that could satisfy the demand of Sikkim National Party in so far as the protection of the interests of the local people was concerned. The famous parity formula was agreed upon, in which Nepali was equated with the Bhutia-Lepcha in the distribution of seats by giving six seats for Bhutia-Lepcha and six for Nepales in the State Council and the Maharaja was to appoint five nominees.¹⁴ At one stroke the Maharaja introduced the curse of communalism into the very constitutional framework. Even then there was no equity in the distribution of seats to the communities. The majority Nepali was reduced to the position of a minority group. The parity system denied separate representation to the Lepchas. In fact, the Parity Formula was designed to check the domination of the Nepali in the affairs of the State.

A Proclamation based on the above agreement was issued by the Maharaja on March 23, 1953.¹⁵ The Proclamation, besides mentioning the number of seats allotted to different communities, also laid the powers and functions of the State Council and Executive Council. The Proclamation

¹³ Ibid. P. 99.

¹⁴ Ibid. P. 99.

¹⁵ Kazi, Op.cit, P. 29.

was a clear evidence of the Sikkim Government's attempt to frame a constitution as desired by the people. A system of dyarchy was established under which the administration of Sikkim were divided into reserved and transferred subjects. The reserved subjects were administered by the President (then called Dewan or Principal Administrative Officer) while the transferred subjects were administered by executive councilors. The State Council and Executive Council Proclamation of 1953 envisaged a system based on communal representation. This system provided for the equal representation of Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepalese of Sikkimese origin in the State Council. The arrangement in which a calculated balance was formulated in order to satisfy the majority and at the same time safeguard the special privileges of the minority.

Distribution and Reservation of seats in the Sikkim Council (1953-1972)

Table No. 3.1

1953

Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha	6
Sikkimese Nepalese	6
Nominated by the Chogyal	5
Total	17

Table No. 3.2

1958

Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha	6
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Sikkimese Nepalese	6
General Seat	1
The Sangha	1
Nominated by the Chogyal	6
Total	20

Table No. 3.3

1966

Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha	7
Sikkimese Nepalese	7
The Sangha	1
Scheduled caste	1
Tsong	1
General seat	1
Nominated by the Chogyal	6
Total	24

Source: Jigme N. Kazi, Sikkim for Sikkimese, 2009, P. 30.

It was on the basis of the Parity System that the first general election was held in 1953. The Sikkim State Congress and Sikkim National party entered the field. The election results were such that the Sikkim State Congress won all the six Nepali seats and The Sikkim National Party won the Lepcha-Bhutia seats. The Sikkim State Congress did in fact participate in the election although it had earlier criticized the elections as a farce.

Elections were again held for the second time in Sikkim in 1958, the State Congress demanded representative government with the Chogyal as constitutional head and abolition of communal pattern of election rules introduced in 1953. As a result, discussion between the Darbar and the representatives of the political parties followed and a new formula for the distribution of seats in the Council was arrived at and announced in March 1958 in a Proclamation of Maharaja.¹⁶ This proclamation stipulated that there would be six elected seats for Bhutia-Lepchas, six for Nepalese, one representative of the monasteries as Sangha seat and in addition one for the entire electorate without communal or other conditions attached to it as general seat. The members to be nominated by the Maharaja were to be six, bringing the total to 20 as against 17 in 1953 as shown in table no. 3.2. Although, the election rules were modified in 1958, the essential motives, i.e. division of society on ethnic grounds continued.¹⁷ Under this proclamation one seat was reserved for the Sangha (lamas). In a note issued by the Sikkim Durbar on March 17, 1958, it stated:

“It has long been felt that, as the Monasteries and the Sangha have constituted such a vital and important role in the life of the community since the earliest known history of Sikkim, and have played a major part in the taking of decisions in the Councils of the past, there should be a seat specifically reserved for the Sangha in the Sikkim Council. It is for this reason that a seat has been provided specifically for their representation.”¹⁸

The Sangha was an important unit in the policy-making body called ‘Lhadi-Medi’, which existed in Sikkim for several centuries prior to the formation of Sikkim Council in the later part of the 19th century. The term ‘Lhadi’ means a congregation of monks and ‘Medi’ means a congregation of the

¹⁶ Coelho, Op.cit. P. 31.

¹⁷ Gurung, Suresh. Kumar. (2011). *Sikkim Ethnicity and Political Dynamic: A triadic perspective*. Kunal books. New Delhi, India. P 320.

¹⁸ Grover, B.S.K. (1974). *Sikkim and India; storm and Consolidation*. Jain Brothers. New Delhi. India. P. 48.

laity. The main function of this body was to advise and guide the ruler in the running of the country. The reservation for the Sangha seat is the most unique feature of the political set up in Sikkim.

The general seat was also introduced under this proclamation of 1958. It was meant to accommodate those who had not yet been represented in the Council but were permanent residents of Sikkim. Both the Sikkim Congress and also some leading members of the other parties have, from time to time, expressed the need for representation in the Council of such persons as have fixed habitation in Sikkim, but who do not fall under the category of Bhutia, Lepcha or Nepali. It is in response to these representations that it was decided to constitute one additional General seat.¹⁹

Under this proclamation the complicated communal system of voting was also introduced. A system in which all the communities had to cast their votes together in a single election was introduced. In fact it was a very complicated system of communal voting. Section 2(b) of the proclamation laid down:

“The candidate securing the highest number of votes of the community which he represents will ordinarily be required to have secured also at least 15% of the total votes of the other community for which seats have been reserved to entitle him to be returned. If, however, he fails to secure 15% of the votes of the other community, the candidates securing the next highest votes of their own community and who have also succeeded in securing 15% of the votes of other community will be eligible to be returned, provided the difference between the number of votes of their own community secured by them and the highest candidates does not exceed 15% of the total votes secured by the latter. If the difference is in excess of 15%, latter

¹⁹ Kazi, Op.cit, P. 32.

will be regarded as returned, notwithstanding that he shall not have secured 15% of the votes of the other community.”²⁰

Thus the most complicated voting procedure was adopted which could block the way of the most suitable candidates being elected.

Despite the complicated and communal system of voting in the general elections held after the proclamation, the State Congress won eight seats including one of the seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha communities, showing itself as a non-communal party. However, there were widespread allegations of corruption and rigging in the conduct of the elections. An Election Tribunal was appointed by the Durbar and as a result of their enquiries three members of executive council were unseated.

After these general elections there were splits in the two main political parties, the State Congress and National Party. In the resulting division of political forces the veteran Kazi Lhendup Dorji came up to the foregrounds as the principle figure who stood for communal amity and social and economic progress. Under his leadership was formed Sikkim National Congress which has ever since stood in the vanguard of political changes in the State. The declared aims of new party, as outlined in its memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister Nehru, were:

- (a) A constitutional monarchy,
- (b) A Council based on communal parity, but elected by a joint electorate, and
- (c) An independent judiciary with a High Court established by a charter.²¹

²⁰ Ibid. P. 46.

²¹ Kotturam, George. (1983). *The Himalayan Gateway: History and Culture of Sikkim*. Sterling Publishers Private Limited. New Delhi. P. 106.

In the internal sphere, the growing communal discord and the mutual distrust among the ethnic groups became a serious matter for concern to the political leaders. While the leaders were in search of ways to associate Bhutia-Lepcha-Nepali communities with a single political unit (Sikkim National Congress) for the promotion of large interest of the people of Sikkim, the situation was made complicated by the Sikkim Subject Regulation devised by the Durbar in 1961,²² without the consent of the State Council, to provide citizenship to three categories of persons:

- (a) All persons of Sikkimese domiciles, if born in Sikkim and resident there or if ordinarily resident of Sikkim for not less than fifteen years prior to promulgation of the regulation.
- (b) Persons not domiciled in Sikkim but of Lepcha, Bhutia or Tsong origin whose father or grandfather was born in Sikkim, and
- (c) Persons not domiciled in Sikkim but whose ancestors have deemed to be Sikkimese subjects before 1850.²³

There was also provision for naturalization subject to a qualifying residence of fifteen years. The regulation referred to Sikkimese, Bhutias, Lepchas and Tsongs as among categories of persons entitled to citizenship but excluded Nepalese who formed about 70% of Sikkim's population. This led to a certain amount of apprehension among the Nepalese of possible discrimination against their community. Though the Darbar thought that the regulation clearly defined the status of Sikkim subjects, it gave rise to unrest which continued till the Government of India intervened and the Durbar made essential changes by deleting the all the reference to the communities from the regulation with effect from 16 January, 1962.²⁴

²² Sikkim State Archive. *Sikkim Subjects Regulation 1961*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 10/10/2014.

²³ Ibid, Text of Sikkim Subject Regulation 1961.

²⁴ Rao, P.R. (1972). *India and Sikkim 1814-1970*. Sterling Publisher. New Delhi. P. 153.

The third general election was approaching fast, however the election was postponed in the wake of Sino-Indian border conflict. In November 1962, a People's Consultative committee was constituted. The main function of the committee was to strengthen internal security and national defense. The idea behind it's constitution was to organize popular participation and to mobilize and co-ordinate all civilian efforts. Its members were principally drawn from the political parties. The Dewan was the chairman of the committee. The Sikkim National Congress was given a very negligible representation in the committee. So the party submitted a memorandum to the Maharaja and to the Government of India. It urged upon the Government to widen popular representation in the system of administration or else to run the administration of the state directly by the Dewan, dissolving the Executive Council.

In spite of the limitations imposed by the communal voting system, and postponement of elections in 1962-63, intense political activity during the two decades hitherto, in the tiny State, a drastic and extensive process of political, social and economic change had taken place in. During the last twenty years a brief period in the context of the development of a country, Sikkim had emerged as a modern welfare state from the darkness of feudalism. Revolutionary changes had taken place since 1947 when the seeds of political consciousness were first sown in the King.

It in this background, Sikkim went for the third general election in 1967. The Proclamation of 1966 added four more seats to the State Council. The seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha and the Nepali people were raised from six to seven while the two seats, one for the Tsongs and one for the Scheduled Castes, were created (as shown in Table no. 3.3). The Durbar's policy of associating the people more closely with the political process was manifested in the steady increase of the elected elements of the Council. Number of seats was raised to 24 of which 18 were to be elected.

The increase in the Bhutia-Lepcha and Sikkimese Nepali seats was welcomed by all the political parties but the reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and Tsongs was criticized by the Sikkim National Congress (which captured the maximum number of seats in the election) and the Sikkim State Congress. They felt that the introduction of communalism and casteism would disintegrate the people of Sikkim. However, the National Party supported the reservation.

The Chogyal reiterated that the Tsongs were not Nepalese although they had been lumped with the Nepalese. From time immemorial, the Tsongs have played a vital role in shaping the history of Sikkim. They are a distinct identity in themselves and as such have been given separate identity. And, the Scheduled Castes community included those who were Kami, Damai, Sarki etc. Traditionally, this community has been socially and economically backward due to rigid caste system prevalent in society. The introduction of the reserved seat for the Scheduled Castes in the Sikkim Council was an attempt to give more opportunities for this community to come forward in all respects.²⁵

In the fourth general elections held in April 1970, the people of the State had become even more politically conscious. The Sikkim National Congress led by Kazi Lhendup Dorji came out as single largest party in the enlarged State Council. A new political party, Sikkim Janata Party, under the Presidentship of Lal Bahadur Basnet was formed on the eve of election. But it could not capture any seat. Lal Bahadur Basnet resigned both from the Party membership and its leadership after the elections.²⁶ The political atmosphere in the State was not too healthy as could be read from the multiplicity of political parties. The uneasy peace reigned in the State till it was again rocked by the

²⁵ Kazi, Op.cit, P. 32.

²⁶ Grover, Op.cit, P. 59.

fifth general elections held in January 1973. The aftermath of this election was a wave of unrest in Sikkim which eventually led to its integration with the Indian Union on May 16, 1975.

Till 1972 the Sikkim Council consisted of 24 members, excluding the President. Initially, the Sikkim Council consisted of 17 members: 12 of them were elected and 5 nominated by the Maharaja. Earlier, the Dewan of Sikkim and later on the Principal Administrative Officer were entrusted with the duty to preside over the Council's deliberations. Afterwards, the Sidlon (the traditional Sikkimese title for Chief Minister) of Sikkim presided over its meetings.

The political development in Sikkim took a sharp turn in the fifth general elections in 1973. In its wake, Sikkim witnessed the political upheaval which radically transformed the political scenario of this landlocked Kingdom. On the eve of the election, the Sikkim State Congress and Sikkim Janata Party were merged into a new political party, the Sikkim Janata Congress.²⁷ There were three important political parties in the election fray; namely the Sikkim National Congress, the Sikkim National Party and the Sikkim Janata Congress, with almost identical political agenda. The National Party stood as the party of the Bhutia and Lepcha people while the Sikkim National Congress and the Sikkim Janata Congress stood as parties of the Nepali people. In the election, the National Party won eleven seats, securing all the seven Bhutia-Lepcha seats, two Nepali, one Sangha and the lone Scheduled Caste seat. The Sikkim National Congress won five seats including the general and Tsong seat, while the Sikkim Janata Congress secured two Nepali seats. During the counting of votes the representatives of Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim Janata Congress complained against the officers of aiding the National Party and rigging the elections. They boycotted the counting and lodged a protest against the pro-palace and pro-National Party officials on election duty. The long standing demands for popular government, written constitution, fundamental rights and universal

²⁷ Ibid. P. 60.

adult franchise based on joint electorate, etc., brought the two Congress parties closer together. They formed a Joint Action Committee with Kazi Lhendup Dorji as Chairman. Both the parties started to organize masses in favour of these demands. They declined to join the six members Executive Council, in which they were offered one member each. In the meantime, the President of Sikkim Janata Party was arrested on the charge of sedition. This action of the Durbar further infuriated the masses. The Joint Action Committee urged upon the Chogyal to fulfill their demands failing which they would launch the mass movement. But the Darbar simply failed to measure the anguish of the masses.²⁸

The political upheaval, which sparked off after the fifth general elections in early 1973, under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorji of the Sikkim National Congress and Krishna Chandra Pradhan of the Sikkim Janata Congress, led to the complete breakdown of law and order situation in Sikkim. Finally the Indian Government took over the administration of Sikkim through a Chief Executive on April 9, 1973 after being requested by the Chogyal. The Indian Government acted promptly. A swift move by the army prevented further deterioration in law and order.²⁹

An all-party agreement was reached within a month after the Indian Government stepped in to take over the situation. An important agreement was signed on May, 1973 between the Chogyal, the leaders of the political parties, and the Government of India.³⁰ The Agreement envisaged the establishment of a fully responsible government with a more democratic constitution, guarantee of fundamental rights, rule of law, and an independent judiciary and legislative and executive powers to the elected representatives of the people and adult franchise based on one man, one vote. Under Article 2 of the agreement it made clear for the establishment of Assembly in Sikkim. The Assembly

²⁸ Sengupta, Op.cit, P. 25.

²⁹ Kazi, Op.cit, P. 37.

³⁰ Sikkim State Archives. May 8, 1973 Agreement. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 9/10/2014.

shall be elected every four years. Elections shall be fair and free and shall be conducted under the supervision of the Election Commission of India, by the Election Officer who shall be appointed by the Government of Sikkim.

Article 5 of the agreement kept the parity system of communal representation in the Assembly: “The system of election shall be so organized as to make the Assembly adequately representative of the various sections of the population. The size and composition of the Assembly and of the Executive Council shall be such as may be prescribed from time to time, care being taken to ensure that no single section of the population acquires a dominating position due mainly to its ethnic origin, and that the rights and interests of the Sikkimese of Bhutia-Lepcha origin and of the Sikkimese Nepali, which includes Tsong and Scheduled Castes origin are fully protected.”³¹

Thus, the basis of political organization in Sikkim to a great extent is community oriented. In fact, the parity system, though much criticized by many of the politicians in Sikkim, gave shape to the formation of a representative form of government. Since the inception of elections in Sikkim in 1953 right down to 1973 the pattern of communal basis of parity structure remained the same. The Sikkim National Party which stood for the preservation of the distinct identity of Sikkim and for the rights of the minority Bhutia-Lepcha, captured most of the seats reserved for these two communities. On the other hand, the Sikkim National Congress, which wanted accession to India, supported the demands of the majority Nepalese and won those seats in turn. This is seen in all the elections held between 1953 and 1973.

³¹ Ibid. Article 5.

Previous elections in Sikkim has been held under a system of balanced representation of different communities based on the principle of “communal parity”, which was bitterly opposed by the those parties such as Sikkim State Congress and Sikkim Janata Congress, which had Nepali support. Under the parity system a successful candidate for the State Council had to obtain at least a minimum of 15% of the votes from the community other than his own. In addition, under the election rule, proclaimed in March 1953, the Sikkim Council consisted of six Nepalese members, six Bhutia-Lepcha members and five nominated by the Chogyal. The declared objective of this system was to safeguard the rights of the minority. But the political leaders urged that the parity system was really intended to stop a predominantly Nepalese majority government from taking office. The Chogyal wanted adequate safeguards for the minority communities, and he did not see how this could be done without parity formula. The Sikkim Congress and the Janata Congress did not want elections under the parity formula. The Election Commission of India was asked to resolve the impasse.

The other major issues were the delimitation of the constituencies and revision of the electoral rolls. The May agreement provided for a thirty member Assembly. According to the parity formula, fifteen seats were allotted to the Bhutia-Lepchas and the remaining fifteen to the Nepalese including one for the Scheduled Castes. Soon, both the sides demanded separate seats for the monks, the Scheduled Castes and a castes called the Tsongs, who though Nepalese in origin, claimed to be a distinct ethnic group.³² This was a subject of intense debate and discussion between the Chogyal, the political parties, and the Government of India during the year 1973-1974.

Finally a plan was evolved under which the 32 seats in the Assembly were divided as follows: 15 reserved for Bhutia-Lepcha, 15 for the Nepalese, one for the Sangha and one for the Scheduled

³² Das, B.S. Reprinted (2002). *The Sikkim Saga*. Vikas Publishing House. Pvt Ltd. New Delhi. P. 39.

Castes. This maintained the parity, the Scheduled Castes being of Nepalese origin and the monk coming from the Bhutia-Lepcha group.³³ This was finally accepted by all the parties. But the Election Commission rejected the claim of the Tsongs as they had always been a part of the Nepalese. This appeared to be the only formula that could safeguard the interests of the minority Bhutia-Lepcha communities and at the same time satisfy the majority Sikkimese Nepalese.

Preparations for the first elections to the Legislative Assembly were being made in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement of 1973. In 1974, elections were held for the first time under the management of the Election Commissioner of India. The Sikkim National Congress and the Sikkim Janata Congress merged to form a new party known as Sikkim Congress. The Party promised to ensure full-fledged democracy, rule of law, clean and efficient administration, social justice, economic progress and protection to the rights of minorities. Elections under the 1973 Agreement were held in April 1974. The Sikkim Congress swept the poll by securing 31 seats while the National Party could secure only one seat. The Congress victory was undoubtedly a shock to the pro-palace elements. The moves and counter moves of the two forces gradually led to confrontation which precipitated a crisis. Most of the elected members refused to take oath in the name of the Chogyal and asserting their loyalty to him. The situation was further aggravated when the leaders of Sikkim Congress and particularly the legislators boycotted the lunch hosted by the Chogyal on the eve of the Assembly Session. The new Sikkim Assembly was inaugurated by the Head of the State, the Chogyal, on the 10th of May, 1974.³⁴

The newly constituted Sikkim Assembly met on 10th May, 1974. In pursuance of the historic Agreement of the 8th May, 1973, between the Chogyal, the leaders of political parties representing

³³ Ibid. PP. 39-40.

³⁴ Sengupta, Op,cit, PP. 27-28.

the people of Sikkim and the Government of India and of the unanimous desire of the members of the Sikkim Assembly expressed in the meetings of the Assembly held on 11th May, 1974, for the progressive realization of fully responsible Government in Sikkim and for furthering its close relationship with India, the Sikkim Assembly considered and passed the Government of Sikkim Bill, 1974, unanimously. For the speedy development of Sikkim in social, economic and political fields, section 30 of the Government of Sikkim Act, 1974, empowered the Government of Sikkim, inter alia, to seek participation and representation for the people of Sikkim in the political institutions of India. The Bill was passed in the Sikkim Assembly in Gangtok on June 28, 1974.³⁵ This Act made the provision for the Ruler to be the head of the State. The Chief Executive was to be the head of the administration and responsible for Home, Finance and other reserved subjects. It also envisaged an Assembly elected on adult franchise based on “one man one vote” principle. The leader of the Assembly would form the cabinet which would be responsible to the State Assembly. The Ruler did not hide his displeasure with the section 30 (c) of the Government of Sikkim Act, 1974, which sought “representation for the people of Sikkim in the political institutions of India”. The Ruler’s contention was that the above provision in the Sikkim constitution was against the “separate identity and international personage of Sikkim”. The Sikkim Congress stood for the consolidation of the gains of its movements in 1973-74 and considered such moves of the Ruler as anti-democratic. Thus, the situation presented a very limited choice to the Ruler: either to be a party to the process of democratization or to abdicate.³⁶

There was much opposition to this Bill from the Bhutia-Lepchas and certain sections of the Nepali communities. But all attempts to stop the members from signing the Bill failed. However, due to the political pressure exerted on him from various quarters, the Chogyal finally promulgated this

³⁵ The Constitution (Thirty-fifth Amendment) Act, (1974). www.constitution.org.cons/india/tamnd35.htm. Accessed on 10/10/2014.

³⁶ Sinha, Op.cit, P. 158.

Bill on the 4th July, 1974, as the Government of Sikkim Act 1974.³⁷ This led to the installation of the first democratically elected cabinet in Sikkim under the Chief Ministership of Kazi Lhendup Dorji, the leader of the Sikkim Congress Legislature Party on 23 July, 1974.³⁸

After the formation of the popular Government, the Chief Minister Kazi made two formal requests to the Government of India; to take steps as may be legally or constitutionally necessary to give effect to the Government of Sikkim Act, 1974, and to provide representation for the people of Sikkim in Indian Parliament. Now it was left to the Indian Parliament to modify the Indian Constitution to admit Sikkim as an Associate State of the Indian Union. After having a careful and detailed study of the request of the Government of Sikkim, the Union Cabinet took the crucial decision to accord Sikkim the status of an “Associate State” of India on 29th August, 1974. The Constitution (Thirty-fifth Amendment) Bill, 1974 was introduced in the Parliament on 3rd September 1974 to that extent. The Bill inserted article 2A which stated that Sikkim, which comprises the territories specified in the Tenth Schedule, shall be associated with the Union on the terms and conditions set out in that schedule.³⁹ This Bill made Sikkim an Associate State of India. The passing of the 35th Constitutional Amendment Bill was the logical conclusion of the various events and developments that took place in Sikkim since 1950.

Even after the formation of the Kazi ministry and the subsequently Associate Status relationship with India, the political climate in Sikkim was far from stable. The friction between the various political parties and the Chogyal on the controversial Bill passed by the Sikkim Assembly in 1974 caused much apprehension in the minds of people of Sikkim. The situation grew worse and finally the Sikkim State Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution on the 10th April, 1975 which,

³⁷ The Constitution (Thirty-fifth Amendment) Act. (1974). www.constitution.org/cond/india/tamnd35.htm. Accessed on 10/10/2014.

³⁸ Sinha, Op.cit, P. 159.

³⁹ The Constitution (Thirty-fifth Amendment) Act, 1974, Op.cit.

inter alia, noted the persistent harmful activities of the Chogyal which were aimed at undermining the responsible democratic government set up under the provisions of the May 8th Agreement of 1973 and the Government of Sikkim Act, 1974. The resolution declared that the Assembly had satisfied itself that these activities of the Chogyal not only violated the objectives of the Agreement of May 8th, 1973, but also ran counter to the wishes of the people of Sikkim and impeded their democratic aspirations and participation in the political and economic life of India. Accordingly the Assembly declared and resolved that “the institution of the Chogyal is hereby abolished and Sikkim shall henceforth be a constituent unit of India, enjoying a democratic and fully responsible Government.”⁴⁰

The resolution was then placed before the people for its approval. The majority of the people voted for the resolution, which was then placed before the Indian Government for consideration. After a few days, Indian Parliament passed the Constitution (Thirty-sixth Amendment) Act, 1975, which made Sikkim the 22nd State of the Indian Union with effect from April 26, 1975.⁴¹ The Constitution (36th Amendment) Act, 1975, laid down special provisions for protecting the rights and interests of the different section of the population of Sikkim through the insertion of Article 371(f). Article 371(f) deals with the reservation of seats in the Assembly:

“Parliament may, for the purpose of protecting the rights and interests of the different sections of the population of Sikkim make provision for the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim which may be filled by candidates belonging to such sections and for the delimitation of the Assembly constituencies from which candidates

⁴⁰ Pylee, M.v. (2010). *Constitutional Amendments in Indian (Third Edition)*. Universal Law Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd. P. 155.

⁴¹ Sikkim State Archives. *36th Amendments Act 1975*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 11/10/2014.

belonging to such sections also may stand for election to the Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim.”⁴²

Thus Sikkim became the 22nd State of Indian Union ending the 332 years old Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim.

The evolution of political and social history of Sikkim during the 19th and 20th centuries clearly indicate that unequal, more specifically, differential treatment of subjects was an accepted policy of the Royal Government of Sikkim. The basis of differential treatment was race, religion and culture, though often it was masked as categories like hereditary subjects and non-hereditary subjects. The categorization of the population of non-hereditary and hereditary subjects effectively was a racial categorization which placed the Bhutia-Lepcha under the category of hereditary subjects while the Nepali and others were considered as non-hereditary subjects; this, notwithstanding that many Nepali groups were living in Sikkim even before the formation of the Bhutia rule in Sikkim and hence should have been included in the fold of hereditary subjects.

The position of Tsongs (Limboos) who constituted a large part of the pre-Bhutia population of Sikkim was strange. Sometimes they were clubbed with the Bhutias and Lepchas as in the Sikkim Subject Regulation of 1961 or as in the popular expression ‘Lho-Men-Tsong Sum’, meaning Bhutia-Lepcha-Limboo. And sometimes, the Tsongs had to pay a higher rate of land revenue along with the other Nepalis. The State policy towards Tsongs was confusing and accordingly sometimes they were considered as original inhabitants and sometimes discriminated. Political development and state behavior in Sikkim during the pre-merger days clearly indicates that the modern state system often

⁴² Ibid. Article 371F (f).

works deliberately in favour of a particular community and attempts at limiting the space of another community completely.

Political developments and state behavior in Sikkim during the pre-merger days clearly indicates that the modern state system often works deliberately in favour of a particular community and attempts at limiting the space of another community. Sometimes the state system may exclude a community completely. Sometimes the government of Chogyal defined the Sikkimese notion in such a manner as to exclude the Nepalese including those Nepalese tribes who were in Sikkim even before the establishment of the Bhutia rule in Sikkim. Land revenue systems, parity formula, definition of Sikkim Subjects Regulation etc. all are reflective of the exclusionist policies of the government.

Seats Reservation post merger period

The introduction of parliamentary democracy as a consequence of merger in 1975 generated the expectation that ethnic or communal discrimination and ethnic politics revolving around community interest would gradually make way for undifferentiated policies, rule of law and secular political mobilization. The constitution of India envisaged equality and individual rights irrespective of caste, race, religion, etc., and it was expected that such a legal constitutional framework would gradually minimize the prevailing inter-ethnic mistrust and conflict among Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese. But the expectation has not materialized. Rather ethnic cultural politics became a norm pursued and practiced by almost all the political groups and parties to such an extent that even smaller communities and cultural groups which until now identified themselves with the larger cultural groups began to assert their separate political identity with a view to claiming larger share of resources and power.

After Sikkim became a constituent State of the Indian Union, Kazi Lhendup Dorji was appointed as the Chief Minister of Sikkim on 16th May, 1975.⁴³ The Sikkim Congress decided to merge with the Indian National Congress. In December 1975, it ceremonially merged with the Indian National Congress and became a State unit of that party. The lone National Party representative in the Assembly also joined the Congress, making the House a single party affair. Practically there was no other party in Sikkim during this time. The Congress Party could, however, keep its unity intact up to 1977. But differences were already developing within the Party. Inner party conflict, clash of interests, impact of communalism, all these found their ways immediately after 1977.

Bipen Bihari Lal, was appointed as first Governor of Sikkim by President on 16th of May, 1975.⁴⁴ The Governor of Sikkim by constitutional provision of 371F (f) has been entrusted with some special responsibilities not applicable to the governors of other states. It reads:

“The Governor of Sikkim shall have special responsibility for peace and for an equitable arrangement for ensuring the social and economic advancement of different sections of the population of Sikkim and in the discharge of his special responsibility under this clause, the Governor of Sikkim shall, subject to such directions as the president may, from time to time, deem fit to issue, act in his discretion.”⁴⁵

As stated above, the Governor under the new arrangement was vested with the power of special responsibility to act in his discretion for the maintenance of peace and for securing equitable social and economic advancement subject to such discretion as President may, from time to time, consider fit to issue. This special power of the Governor was perhaps given in the view of the

⁴³ Sikkim State Archives. *Gazette No. 28. Notification No./Date (Skm/Governor(1)75. Appointment of L.D. Kazi as Chief Minister of Sikkim.* Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 9/10/2014.

⁴⁴ Sikkim State Archives. *Gazette No. 43. Notification No.H(GA)IX/75/9.* Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 9/10/2014.

⁴⁵ Sikkim State Archives. *The Constitution (36th Amendment) Act, 1975.* Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 9/10/2014.

unstable condition prevailing then in Sikkim. According to constitutional norms of Indian Union, the Governor during the normal time was to act on the advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister. But during the formative stage of democracy in Sikkim, the first Governor, always acted as the real executive head of the state. The Ministers, being learners, had limited knowledge of the complex working of the democratic government which made them dependent on the Governor.

An impression was created that the Governor also enjoyed overwhelming influence in the Legislative business as well. As early as in 1976, Mr. Nar Bahadur Khaditwada raised the issue of involving the Governor in each and every issue discussed by the Assembly.⁴⁶ The Governor was also alleged by the leaders of various political parties viz. Sikkim Janata Parishad, Sikkim Congress, Sikkim Prajantra Congress etc. of being proactive in Legislative business as well as party politics during the October 1979 Assembly election.⁴⁷ Such interventions and special powers to the Governor sometimes generated resentment among political leaders and ministers, and often the political parties exploited the issue.

Till 1977, the Chief Minister Kazi Lhendup Dorji maintained a complete grip over the party. In February 1977, Nar Bahadur Khadiwada, the youth Congress leader, along with three other MLAs deserted Kazi and formed a state unit of Congress for Democracy formed by Jagjivan Ram. Khatiwada criticized Kazi for depending completely on the imported bureaucrats who, according to Khatiwada, knew nothing of Sikkim and felt nothing for Sikkim.⁴⁸ By emphasizing the need for maintaining Sikkim's distinct character and needs, Mr. Khatiwada sowed the seeds of regional politics in Sikkim after the merger. When Janata Party came to power at the Centre, Kazi along with

⁴⁶ Proceedings of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, October (1976), P. 43.

⁴⁷ Sengupta, Op.cit, PP. 238-239.

⁴⁸ Ibid. PP. 166-167.

26 MLAs merged with the Janata Party. Kazi was criticized by the opposition as the 'man of merger'.⁴⁹

During this time, a series of public demonstration all over the Sikkim took place in order to protest against the working of the Government and merger with India, which led to the formation of Sikkim Janata Party by Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari on the 22nd March, 1977. Later, he changed its name to Sikkim Janata Parishad, and which was recognized by the Chief Election Commissioner of India on 24th November, 1979.⁵⁰ After realizing no immediate political benefit, Khatiwada too changed the name of his party as the Sikkim Prajatantra Congress and joined hands with anti-merger forces. He demanded the restoration of Sikkim to pre-1974 status.

There were disappointments and apprehensions among the people of Sikkim. The Kazi government failed to provide a proper administration in Sikkim. The prices of essential commodities continued to rise, influx of outsiders could not be checked, the land reforms could not be implemented, agriculture sector remained neglected, corruption continued to be more in practice and the gap between the rich and poor was ever widening. It was said that the economic opportunities had remained confined to the privileged few. As a result anti-merger and anti-Indian feeling prevailed in the hearts and minds of people.

It was in this background that the first election after the merger was to be held in April 1979. But, due to the emergency, Sikkim was placed under Presidential rule on 18th August, 1979, so the Election Commission fixed the date of election in Sikkim to be held on 12th October, 1979.⁵¹ The political parties like Sikkim Prajatantra Party and Sikkim Janata Parishad used merger issue as a major political campaign to expose the failure of the Kazi government. Though the leaders of both

⁴⁹ Das, Op.cit, P. 105.

⁵⁰ Sikkim Herald (Vol. 20). Saturday, November 24, 1979. P. 4.

⁵¹ Sengupta, Op.cit, P. 100.

the parties belonged to the Nepali community, Nar Bahadur Bhandari and his Sikkim Janata Parishad had an edge over the Khatiwada and his Sikkim Prajatantra Party by virtue of not being a party to the merger. This image of him went well with the forces of anti-merger aspirants, particularly the pro-Chogyal Bhutia community; while a significant section of the Bhutia-Lepcha people were apprehensive of Khatiwada for his anti-Bhutia-Lepcha image. His land reform recommendation of 1977, demand for the abolition of the private estate and Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917⁵² which prohibited transaction of Bhutia-Lepcha land to others were viewed as being against the interests of the landed Bhutia-Lepcha people.

The election rules by which the Kazi Government was formed in May 1974 were based on the Proclamation of Representation of Sikkim Subject Act, 1974. After the merger, the election rules prevailing in Sikkim needed modification in accordance with the election rules prevailing in India. Accordingly, the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (43 of 1950) was amended in 1976 (Act 10 of 1976) and Section 7A in the said Act was included with retrospective effect from September 9, 1975. Section 7A, clause (1) and (3) provided for a 32 member Legislative Assembly chosen by direct election from Assembly constituencies and continuation of reservation of seats as provided immediately before the commencement of the constitution (Thirty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 1975.⁵³ Similarly, Section 25A was inserted validating Sangha constituency, including the election held in Sikkim in April, 1974 for the purpose. It also provided for the preparation or revision of the electoral rolls for the Sangha constituency in such a manner as directed by the Election Commission of India, in consultation with the Representation of the People Act, 1950 legitimized the Assembly elections,

⁵² Sikkim State Archives. *Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 12/10/2014.

⁵³ Sikkim State Archives. *Representation of People Act, 1950. Gazette No. 27. Notification No. 961/H/(E)-75. 11th September, 1975*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 12/10/2014.

including total number of Assembly seats and seats reserved for various communities/class, held in April, 1974 in Sikkim.⁵⁴

As all Assembly seats in Sikkim were reserved for one or other community/caste under the 1974 Act and as the system was allowed to continue even after the merger, the Representation of People Act, 1950, as amended in 1976, was found to be inadequate in determining the eligibility of candidates contesting from the reserved constituencies. As such, the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which provides rules pertaining actual conduct of elections to Parliament and State Legislature, was amended and Section 5A was inserted in 1976 with effect from 9th September, 1975. The section inserted, i.e. 5A of the Act of 1951, state, “Notwithstanding anything contained in section 5, a person shall not be qualified to be chosen to fill a seat in the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim unless:

- (a) In case of a seat reserved for Sikkimese of Bhutia-Lepcha origin, he is person either of Bhutia or Lepcha origin and is an electorate for any Assembly constituency in the State other than the constituency reserved for the Sangha.
- (b) In the case of a seat reserved for Sikkimese of Nepali origin, he is a person of Nepali origin and is an elector for any Assembly constituency in the State.
- (c) In the case of a seat reserved for Scheduled Castes, he is a member of any of the castes and is an elector for any Assembly constituency in the State, and
- (d) In the case of seat reserved for Sangha, he is an elector of the Sangha constituency.⁵⁵

The amendment to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (as amended in 1976) was simply a legal political formality seeking to legitimize the election held in 1974, but, by and large, it

⁵⁴ Ibid. Section 25A.

⁵⁵ Ibid, *Representation of People Act, 1951, as amended in 1976*. Section 5A.

was against the true spirit and tradition of the parliamentary democratic constitution of India. By holding and supporting Chogyal's method of delimitation based on ethnic elements, the government of India not only supported communal and ethnic politics in Sikkim but under parliamentary democracy such elements found a new scope for growth and deepening of their roots further.

Subsequently, Bill No. 79 of 1979 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on May 18, 1979, seeking further amendment to the Representation of the People Act 1951 to provide for readjustment of the Assembly constituencies in the State of Sikkim. But the Bill could not be passed due to dissolution of the Lok Sabha. In the meanwhile, the President issued an ordinance, called the Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance, 1979, seeking to amend Section 5A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.⁵⁶ It stated that the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim to be constituted at any time after the commencement of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance, 1979, to be filled by persons chosen by direct election from Assembly constituencies shall be thirty-two, of which:

- (a) Twelve seats shall be reserved for Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha origin.
- (b) Two seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes of the State.
- (c) One seat shall be reserved for the Sangha referred to in section 25A, and
- (d) The remaining 17 seats were to be declared as General seats.

The provision of seats reserved for the Nepalese was abolished and the plains people were given the rights to franchise and contest the election for the first time. Apart from the 12 reserved seats, Bhuta-Lepcha could contest election from the General seats as well. Similarly, two seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes. After the Lok Sabha election of 1980, the Union Parliament passed

⁵⁶ Sikkim State Archives. *Gazette No. 75. Representation of the People (Amendment), Ordinance, 1979*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 12/10/2014.

the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 1980 and subsequently section 7(1A) in the Representation of the people Act, 1950 and sub-section 2 in the section 5A of Representation of the People Act, 1951 were inserted as rule governing Assembly elections in Sikkim.⁵⁷

The apprehension shown against the Act by the Nepalese and the Bhutia-Lepcha people alike therefore was not without substance. Since the 17 seats had been declared as open seats, anybody who was an Indian citizen and having names in the electoral rolls of any constituency in Sikkim could contest election. Nepalese feared that the people from the plains would gradually oust them from all position of importance. Similarly, the Bhutia-Lepcha people resented reduction of seats from 15 to 12 seats. The Amendment 1979 therefore set the issue of identity in motion in two ways: it generated the perception of Sikkimese identity and protection of Sikkimese culture and created tension due to the migration of plainsmen in to Sikkim. Further, it increased the gulf between Nepalese on the one hand and Bhutia-Lepcha on the other. Nepalese became unhappy because their seats were abolished while seats for Bhutia-Lepchas were retained. The Bhutia-Lepcha on their turn lamented the end of parity guaranteed in 1951 and subsequently in 1974. Besides, they were also apprehensive over the reduction of reserved seats and dilution of their identity due to inclusion of other Bhutias. The political decision, which was supposed to promote democratic distribution of power, actually became the cause of social division and ethnic tension in Sikkim.

Elections to the State Assembly was held on 12th October, 1979 with the above Assembly seat arrangements. The Presidential Ordinance of 1979 was the central issue in this election. Seven political parties took part in this election, namely: Sikkim Prajatantra Congress, Janata Party, Sikkim Janata Parishad, Sikkim Congress (R), Indian National Congress (U), C.P.I. (M) and Sikkim Scheduled Castes League. The Sikkim Janata Parishad won election with 16 seats of which 8 seats

⁵⁷ Sikkim State Archives. *Representation of the People Act, 1950/51. Gazette No. 27.* Sikkimarchive.gov.in. Accessed on 13/10/2014.

belonged to the reserved Bhutia-Lepcha seats. The total seats were raised to 17 when the Sangha candidate, an Independent, joined the Sikkim Janata Parishad. The Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) won 11 seats including 3 Bhutia-Lepcha seats and the Sikkim Prajatantra Congress secured 4 seats.⁵⁸ However, Kazi's Janata Party was completely routed in the election because of his soft stand against the Bill No. 79.⁵⁹ And attack on Kazi government by various political parties on the merger issue and its inability to safeguard the rights and dignity of the Sikkimese actually helped Sikkim Janata Parishad to win majority on the Bhutia-Lepcha seats and equal number of general seats. Soon afterward Nar Bahadur Bhandari, the leader of Sikkim Janata Parishad was installed as the Chief Minister of the State.⁶⁰

Opposition to Bill No 79, of 1979

The introduction of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill in May 1979 in the Parliament occasioned a rift within the ruling Janata Party in Sikkim. The Bill proposed to reserve 12 seats for the Bhutia-Lepcha, one for the Sangha, two for the Scheduled Castes and 17 as General seats. The Bill had no provision for reservation of seats for the Nepalese. Within the ruling Janata Party, Ram Chandra Poudyal and his group opposed the 'Black Bill' as they preferred to call it.

Sometime in June 1978, a section of the Bhutia-Lepcha communities, asked for the retention of the parity system. This was conveyed to then Governor, Bipen Bihari Lal, through a memorandum. The plea for the retention of the parity system by the representatives of the Bhutia-Lepcha community evoked sharp reactions from ministers of the Kazi cabinet, Ram Chandra

⁵⁸ Statistical Report (1979) election of Sikkim.

⁵⁹ According to Bill No. 79, Bhutia-Lepcha seats was reduced to 12 and Nepali seats was abolished. Various political parties resented this except Kazi.

⁶⁰ Sikkim Government Official Portal. Gazette No. 92. www.sikkim.gov.in Accessed on 12/10/2014.

Poudyal said communal representation had no place in the Indian Constitution. He however agreed that there must be safeguards for the minorities.⁶¹

The crisis within the ruling Janata Party led by Kazi Lhendup Dorji had deepened further over the issue of the reduction of Bhutia-Lepcha seats, abolition of reserved Nepali seats, and over the grant of political rights to plainsmen. The dissidents, under Ram Chandra Poudyal, blamed the Chief Minister Kazi for the present political development in Sikkim. Through a signature campaign Poudyal mobilized a significant number of legislators in his support. A memorandum signed by at least 14 ruling party leaders and legislators (6 of them withdrew support later) was submitted to the Union Minister, requesting him to reconsider the Bill No. 79. Poudyal contended that the provisions of the Bill are unconstitutional and were heavily weighted against a section of people. He is reported to have said that the seats should also have been reserved for the Nepalese.⁶² He also told a group of newsmen that a time would come when the majority Nepali community would be reduced to a minority. Chief Minister Kazi did not approve of the move made by certain section of his party men against the Bill. Eventually, this move of Poudyal led to his removal from the Council of Ministers by the Governor of Sikkim, Bipen Bihari Lal, using the powers vested on him under Article 154 (I) of the Indian Constitution on 16th June, 1979.⁶³

In a public meeting held at Gangtok on 8th July, 1979,⁶⁴ Poudyal justified “reservation of seats for the Nepalese as they were likely to be reduced to minority in near future, unless some safeguard were immediately provided. He further clarified that in 1975, people of Sikkim had accepted Sikkim’s merger with India subject to certain conditions. One among these conditions was that only

⁶¹ Kazi, Op.cit, P. 44.

⁶² Gurung, Op.cit, p. 335.

⁶³ Sikkim Herald. (Vol. 20, Saturday, June 16th, 1979). No. 51.

⁶⁴ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 233.

the people of Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha origin of Sikkim would be able to contest elections to the State Assembly. This condition was also made a part of Representation of the People Act by inserting a new provision in it in September 1975.⁶⁵ He questioned as to why this provision was now being changed by conferring electoral rights on the plainsmen. On July 31, 1979, he circulated copies of a petition among the members of Parliament intending to draw their attention towards the resentment of the Sikkimese people against the Bill No. 79 which, according to him, was brought to the Parliament without the knowledge of the Sikkim Assembly or that of the State Cabinet. He maintained that the Bill was an attempt to invalidate and nullify the sacred commitments given to the Sikkimese people prior to the merger and emphasized that in view of the influx of the people from other states, the seats for the Nepali in proportion to their population should be reserved.⁶⁶

In September 1979, he formed a new regional party, called the Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary). He condemned the Bill No. 79 as 'Black Bill' and personally did not contest the election, but he was the chief campaigner of his party. The Party maintained that it would work for the abolition of Bill No. 79, grant of citizenship to all the people living in Sikkim till 1970, to work for the recognition and inclusion of Nepali language in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution.

In the election Manifestoe released on September 22, 1979, the newly formed Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary), under the leadership of Ram Chandra Poudyal, stated:

“We are opposed to the Black Bill No. 79 of 1979. We are contesting election under protest and have filed a writ petition before the High Court in Delhi against the undemocratic and non-secular features of the Bill. As long as the Bill is not withdrawn or a suitable amendment

⁶⁵ Sikkim State Archives. Representation of the People Act, 1950/51. Gazette No. 27. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 13/10/2014.

⁶⁶ Gurung, op.cit, P. 233.

to it is not done, the Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) will launch a sustained movement against by legal, Parliamentary and Legislative measures.”⁶⁷

The Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary), which took part in the October 1979 election, won 11 out of 32 seats held under the Ordinance No. 7 of 1979. On September 18, 1979, Ram Chandra Poudyal filed a writ petition in Delhi High Court under Article 226 of the Constitution of India. The said writ petition, after withdrawing from the Delhi High Court, was filed before the Sikkim High Court on June 6, 1980. Finally, the case was transferred from the Sikkim High Court and was filed in the Supreme Court on July 30, 1983. The respondents were the Union of India, the State of Sikkim, the Chief Election Commissioner and 32 MLAs.

One of the main reasons for asking for the transfer of the writ petition from Delhi High Court to Sikkim High Court was to get people’s participation and support against the Black Bill. This was apparent on the day of filing the writ application before the Sikkim High Court when a huge crowd moved to the Court to witness the proceeding. In the days that followed a number of meetings were held by the Congress (Revolutionary) leaders in various places in Sikkim to gain public support for their anti-Bill stand. People from other areas around Sikkim, who were against the Bill, also lent their support through various organizations, associations, etc.

In the writ application filed before Delhi High Court, Poudyal contended that Section 5A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and section 7 (1A) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 introduced by the Representation of the People Amendment Ordinance are violation of Articles 14, 15, 170, 325 and 326 of the Constitution of India. This Ordinance, being Ordinance No. 7 of 1979, came into force on September, 1979. The Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) describes the

⁶⁷ Kazi, Op.cit, P. 50.

Ordinance and the Bill as 'Black Ordinance and Black Bill'. Ram Chandra Poudyal's main pleas in his petition filed before the Delhi High Court were:

- (a) Bhutia-Lepcha form a race and as such reservation of seats for a race is violation of Article 15 (I) and 325 of the Constitution of India.
- (b) The reservation of seat for Sangha is based on ground of religion and as such it is violation of Article 15 (I) and 325 of the Constitution. Constituency for Sangha being not a territorial constituency the same is also violation of Article 170 of the Constitution.
- (c) That a law made under Article 371F (f) cannot over-rule the provision relating to fundamental rights.
- (d) That Article 371F (f) is destructive of the basic structure of the Constitution.
- (e) That Nepalese in Sikkim constituting more than 70% of the population of Sikkim and as such reservation for others of disproportionately larger number of seats is violation of Article 15 (I) of the Constitution and also destructive of Rule of Law.⁶⁸

The final hearing of Assembly Seat reservation case, which had been kept pending for about five years, was taken up by a five Judge constitution bench headed by the Chief Justice Yeshwant Vishnu Chandrachud, on February 2, 1984. The other four judges were Justice Prafullachandra Natwarlal Bhagwati, Justice Manharlal Pranalal Thakkar, Justice A.N. Sen and Justice D.P. Menon. Justice Thakkar wanted to know whether the petitioner had come to the court on a personal basis or whether he was representing the Nepalese community. This was the delicate issue raised by the Judges repeatedly but they were not given any satisfactory answer. Though Poudyal and his brother, Somnath Poudyal had contested the case on their own, they were really political figures and were representing a political party of their own. Poudyal was the President of the Congress

⁶⁸ R.C. Poudyal Vs union of India. Indiankanoon.org. accessed on 13/10/2014.

(Revolutionary), which was making the seat reservation issue its main political platform. That the petitioner was a Nepali and belonged to a party, whom many in Sikkim regarded as a communal party, voicing issues which mainly concerned the Nepalese and raising demands against the minorities, were important points for the court to take a note of.⁶⁹ Responding to the petition Justice Bhagwati stated that under Article 371F (f) reservation of seats for the Bhutia-Lepcha and the Sangha in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly were justified. Therefore, the matter was kept pending until Supreme Court made a landmark judgment on February 10th, 1993.

The judgment on the above petition filed by the Poudyal in the Delhi court was given on 10th February, 1993. This time bench was headed by Justice Manepalli Narayana Rao Venkatachalliah and four other judges were Justice Lalit Mohan Sharma, Justice Jagdish Saran Verma, Justice K Jayachandra Reddy and Justice S.C. Agrawal. Following are the final judgment given on 10th February, 1993:

- (a) That although basically the monasteries are religious in nature, yet they form a separate section of the society on account of the social services they have been rendering mainly to Bhutia-Lepcha section of the population. The reservation of one seat for Sangha to be elected by an Electoral College of Lamaist monasteries is not based purely on religious distinctions and is, therefore, not unconstitutional as violative of Articles 15(1) and 325 of the Constitution.
- (b) Since the Constitution permits nomination to be made in the legislatures, the creation of separate electorates for the Sangha seat cannot be objected to,
- (c) That the constitutional amendment bringing in Article 371F (f), as also the relevant amended provisions of the Representation of the People Acts are legal and valid because a perfect

⁶⁹ Kazi, Jigme. N. (1994). *Inside Sikkim Against the Tide*. Hill Media Publication, Gangtok, Sikkim. India. P. 126.

arithmetical equality of value of votes is not a constitutionally mandated imperative of democracy and secondly, that even if the impugned provisions made a departure from the tolerance limits and the constitutionally permissible latitudes, the discriminations arising are justifiable on the basis of the historical considerations peculiar to and characteristic of the evaluation of Sikkim's political institutions.

- (d) That impugned provisions providing for reservation of 12 seats, out of 32 seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly in favour of Bhutias Lepchas, are neither unconstitutional as violative of the basic features of democracy and republicanism under the Indian Constitution nor are they violative of Articles 14, 170(2) and 332 of the Constitution. The impugned provisions are also not ultravires of Clause (f) of Article 371-F.
- (e) The extent of reservation of seats is not violative of Article 332 (3) of the constitution.⁷⁰

Poudyal, who was one of the leaders spearheading the anti-Chogyal movement in Sikkim in the early 1973, could not understand how in a democracy a minority could be equated with the majority. His comment on the parity system on seat reservation maintained in the Assembly even after Sikkim became the 22nd State of the Union was, “Parity system will not do”. If majority is equated with the minority, then majority will dominate.⁷¹ Poudyal did see that for all practical purposes the 17 general seats and the 2 seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes were actually Nepali seats. A section of the Nepalese belonging to the Limboo, Gurung, Newar and Tamang communities are Buddhists and therefore, the Sangha seat did not solely represent the Bhutia-Lepchas. Moreover, except for the tribal constituencies in North Sikkim, the rest of the 10 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas in the Assembly did not really belong to the minority community as the majority of the voters in these constituencies were Nepalese. Although no seats were reserved for the Nepalese in

⁷⁰ R.C. Poudyal vs Union of India. Indiakanon.org. Accessed on 14/10/2014.

⁷¹ Kazi, *Inside Sikkim Against the Tide*, Op.cit, P. 134.

the Assembly, at least 29 of 32 seats were actually representatives of the Nepalese in the Assembly. Therefore, it was clearly seen which community actually had a dominating role in the affairs of the State.

Mr. Nar Bahadur Khatiwada and his Sikkim Janata Parishad Party also raised the issue of Bill No. 79 and relative deprivation of seats of the Nepalese. He also condemned grant of political rights to the plainsmen.⁷²

Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari and his Sikkim Janata Parishad Party also expressed resentment over the extension of political rights to the plainsmen and did not give party ticket to them. In order to gather support of a cross section of people, Bhandari kept the other two local issues in low key: Bill No.7 of 1979 and the inclusion of Nepali language in the 8th Scheduled of the Constitution of India. In the election manifesto in 1979, the Sikkim Janata Parishad, under its President, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, stated: “We shall support the inclusion of the Nepali language in the 8th Scheduled. We shall strongly oppose Bill No. 79 and fight for safeguarding the interest of the Sikkimese Nepalese as has been done in case of the Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha.”⁷³

After about one and half years as a regional party, the Sikkim Janata Parishad finally merged with the Congress (I) in July 1981.⁷⁴ This was much against the wishes of many staunch supporters of the party. It also went against the party manifesto which declared: “It shall be constant attempt of the Sikkim Janata Parishad to promote the over-all interest of the Son of the Soil and to safeguard the regional interest of the State.” The gradual loss of credibility and popularity of the ruling party can be traced back to its merger with the Congress (I) at Centre.

⁷² Gurung, op.cit, P. 234.

⁷³ Kazi, *Sikkim for Sikkimese*. Op.cit, P. 54.

⁷⁴ Gurung, op.cit, P. 236.

Bhandari raised three demands all through 1980s and turned out to be the spokesman of the Nepali grievances:

- (a) Restoration of Assembly seats for Sikkimese Nepalese.
- (b) Granting of citizenship to the stateless Nepali residing in Sikkim for long and
- (c) Recognition of Nepali language and its inclusion in the 8th Scheduled of the Indian Constitution.

He could largely succeeded in getting his last two demands fulfilled, but getting the General seats reserved for the Nepalese could not be reached. It appears that now the community is reconciled to status quo and demands are made now to increase the seats in the State Assembly to partly answer the above grievance.

Sometimes in the beginning of the year 1983, Bhandari is reported to have aired his views to the Centre on the seat reservation issue. His formula was 13 seats for Bhutia-Lepcha, 13 seats for Nepalese, 2 seats for Scheduled Castes and 4 seats for General. This formula seemed more reasonable and acceptable to most people in Sikkim than the radical stand taken by Poudyal, who wanted proportionate representation based on population. The matter was pursued further, in his memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister on July 29, 1983; it gave brief background to seat reservation in Sikkim assembly since 1973 and urged the Prime Minister to consider the case regarding reservation of seats in the larger interests of the people of Sikkim.⁷⁵ Also on number of occasions, Bhandari declared that there would be no elections in Sikkim if the seats were not reserved for the majority Nepali community. “No Seat, No Vote” is Bhandari’s largest slogan.

⁷⁵ Kazi, *Sikkim for Sikkimese*, Op.cit, P. 56.

At the later stage Bhandari joined the line and openly took his stand for the cause of Nepalese in Sikkim. Bhandari's clear cut stand that there would be no elections in Sikkim if seats were not reserved for the Sikkimese Nepalese, convinced many doubting minds that he was serious about the whole thing. On the other hand Poudyal is firm on his stand as expressed in his writ petition. For almost five years, Ram Chandra Poudyal has relentlessly fought for the rights and interests of the majority Sikkimese Nepalese in Sikkim. History will judge Poudyal, not by whether he won or lost, not by whether he was right or wrong, but by how well he fought. It is ironic that Bhandari and Poudyal, who have consistently fought against each other in the political arena in Sikkim, have taken similar stand on two important issues which concern the State and Centre.

Assembly Seats and its Remarks: Recent Scenarios

As the result of seats issue in Sikkim since the time of Chogyal, there rose a consciousness among the various communities regarding their identity in Sikkim. Many of community including the Rais and Limboos are openly declaring that though they are also Nepali speaking people; Nepali is not really their mother tongue. While the Limboo language is a recognized language in Sikkim, having its own script, and the Rais also have their own language/dialect, and are making efforts to preserve them. In fact, there appears a race for getting recognition of individual community in Sikkim.

We have mentioned above that the Nepalese Sikkimese have been demanding restoration of reserved seats to them in the State Assembly since 1979, the year it was undone. But it has not been done and there appears to be little chance of its being restored in the near future. Meanwhile, Sikkim has joined the North Eastern Council (NEC) for the purpose development administration. There are a number of states within NEC, which are known as "tribal states" because they have more than half

of their population recognized by the Union Government as Scheduled Tribes. Taking a sign from the above practice, the government of Sikkim decided to approach the Union Government to accord the status of Scheduled Tribe to the communities listed in the State as the MBCs or Most Backward Communities. There are already 38 percent population of Sikkim recognized as Scheduled Tribes and another 5.93 percent of them as Scheduled Castes. The present ruling party – Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)- is committed to bring all the Nepalese Sikkimese under special constitutional categories like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and MBCs. In this way the demographically dominant Nepalese Sikkimese spent four decades between 1953 and 1994 towards consolidation of their ‘Nepali’ identity vis-à-vis the Lepcha-Bhutia combine in the politics of Sikkim. However, there began to realize that their continued emphasis on ‘Nepali’ identity had led to further consolidation of Bahun-Chhetri-Newar dominance. This realization came rather late, but it did. In case of Sikkim, Limboos have already won their battle for recognition as a Scheduled Tribe and now they appear to be more concerned with their ‘reserved’ representation in the State Assembly. In fact, there appears a race for getting recognition of individual community as a ‘Scheduled Tribe’.

The recent inclusion of the Limboos and Tamangs in the Schedule Tribe in 2006 has evoked bitter opposition from Lepchas and Bhutias who resent the dilution of their indigeneity and are not prepared to share their entitlements with other groups. This provides the context for debating these special provisions and revising them. The Limboos and Tamangs are demanding political reservation similar to what is provisioned for the Lepchas and the Bhutias in the Constitution. Currently, the Sikkim State Government has proposed to the central government that the strength of the State Legislative Assembly be increased from 32 to 40 seats in order to give the Limboos and the Tamangs the benefit of their tribal states. In the census of 2001, the Limboos and Tamangs were

enumerated as part of the Nepali population. Currently, these groups are demanding a fresh census enumeration as Scheduled Tribe in order to assert and ascertain their demand for a proportionate share in reserved seats for their political representatives, job in government employment and seats in educational institutions. While some other Nepali groups such as the Khambu, Rai, Gurung, Mangar, Sunwar, Thami, Dewan and Bhujel are pressuring the State Government and the National Commission of Backward Classes to include them in the list of Scheduled Tribe.⁷⁶

Also, it is very pertinent to remember that elsewhere in India seats in the Legislative Assembly have been reserved for the Schedule Tribes of the particular state, but in case of Sikkim an exception has been made by mentioning Bhutia-Lepcha by name. Similarly, considering the unique role played by the Buddhist monks and monasteries in the body politics of Sikkim in the past, India made a special provision to allot a seat to them in the State Legislative Assembly of Sikkim.

⁷⁶ Arora, Vibha. *Roots and the Route of Secularism in Sikkim*. Economic and Political Weekly. (Vol 41, No. 38) date September 23-29, 2006. P. 4066.

Chapter Four

CONTEMPORARY SCENE

Democracy as a new political system in Sikkim began its journey in the 1940's but most historians believe that real democracy was experienced by the people only after 1975 when Sikkim became the 22nd state of the Indian Union on 26th April, 1975. After the merger, a new political arrangement, until then unknown in Sikkim, was established. The principles of democracy, rule of law and the rights of the people, etc. were introduced as a basis of governance in a society which was until then a monarchy and social life was predominantly based on that. This also meant that contradictions owing to presence of primordial belief system and emerging modernity began to show. The contradiction became politically viable when political and non-political organizations emerged and used the issues for their respective political and socio-cultural advantages giving space for ethnic politics. As has been seen in Sikkim from the time of Chogyal (King) politics is based on ethnic issues, but after the merger it is perceived that these ethnic oriented issues has been more prominently used by the political and non-political organizations in the State.

In Sikkim, it is seen that there has been one party domination i.e., Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), which has been in power since 1994, and managed to overcome the anti-incumbency factor. The State is largely populated by the Nepali population, who were in the forefront of the democratic movement, which led to the merger of the Sikkim with India.¹ So, today's Sikkim is dominated, in demographic terms, by the Nepali population though, economically, the Bhutias and Lepchas continue to be influential. Considering the complex social composition and political history of the State, 13 seats in the Legislative Assembly has been reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha community

¹ According to 2011 Census Record of India. Nepali Population in Sikkim- 407,150.

including the Sangha seat. This ensures that though the Sikkim Democratic Front is dominated by the Nepalese and its leadership is also Nepali, it has to step cautiously lest it could lose support of the these 13 MLAs. Thus, while the Sikkim Democratic Front, which represents the interests of the Nepali community, enjoys political power, prudence compels it to accommodate the interests of the Bhutias and Lepchas. This paves the way for one-party dominance with a balanced policy of inclusion. Thus, by following the policy of including most of the ethnic communities, the Sikkim Democratic Front managed to remain in power till present time.

It is seen that many political parties emerged in Sikkim since the time of Chogyal till now but, these parties were unable to establish their foothold in the State. The role of political parties in Sikkim has been weak, due to the lack of unity, disagreement regarding the views among the members of the party and showing support towards single community which, as a result, created resentment among other communities, which were the causes of their failure in the State. However, Sikkim Democratic Front emerged as a political party in 1994 and since then this party managed to be in power till present. Many regional and national political parties tried to compete in the field of politics but, were unable to achieve political success in the State.

But, before we deal with the present scenario of emerging political parties, it is essential to look into the role played by the political parties in Sikkim in the pre-merger period. As has been already mentioned, Sikkim was ruled by the Namgyal dynasty for over 332 years. Before the merger of Sikkim with the Indian union, the ruling Namgyal dynasty belonging to a minority Bhutia-Lepcha community was ruling over subjects belonging to different racial communities. In the political as well as cultural sphere, the Bhutia dominance was pronounced. The leadership of the society rested with the aristocrats, kinship based upon inheritance and the incarnate lamas. The political hegemony vested with the minority, namely the Bhutia-Lepcha community, which received the royal support

and patronage, while the Nepalese, the numerically large community, felt aggrieved over the denial of proportionate representation in the State. The economic system of the state was feudal, there was practice of *Zamindari* system, and also slavery was prevalent in the state.² As a result, people started to show resentment towards the Chogyal and the political administration of the state.

Thus, the Sikkim State Congress as the first political party that opposed the system of government and the presence of evil feudal system came into being.³ The formation of Sikkim State Congress marked the beginning of political process in Sikkim. On December 9, 1947, as the only political party in Sikkim, it demanded the abolition of Zamindari system and also demanded the establishment of a responsible government and the merger of Sikkim with India.⁴ With these demands, the Sikkim State Congress emerged as the only political party in the state that was opposed to the ruling government. At the same time there was another political party named Sikkim National Party which was formed on 30th April, 1948.⁵ The party was composed mainly of the minority communities of Bhutias and Lepchas. The Sikkim National Party was in favour of Chogyal and advocated the independence of Sikkim as against the demand by the Sikkim State Congress for accession to India.

At that time Sikkim State Congress became the most popular party amongst the Sikkimese. The party stood for the democratic rights of the people with popular government and accession of Sikkim to India. As it was the only party which represented the resentment of the common people on the other hand Sikkim National Party was pro-Chogyal. Initially, Sikkim State Congress was

² During the Namgyal dynasty there used to be the system of *Kalobhari, Jharlangi*, etc., in the State. *Kazis, Zamindar* and elites used to exploit the masses by asking them to carry loads to the rough terrain and in return they were paid very less or not at all, sometimes these labour even starve to death. Source: Subba, J.R. (2008). *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim*. Gyan publishing House. New Delhi- 110002. P. 64

³ Sinha, A.C. (1975). *Politics of Sikkim, A Sociological Study*. Thomson Press (India) Limited. P. 24.

⁴ Gurung, Suresh. Kumar. (2011). *Sikkim, Ethnicity and Political Dynamics. A triadic Perspective*. Kunal Books. New Delhi. P. 318.

⁵ Gupta, Manas. Das. (1992). *Sikkim Problem and Prospects of Development*. Indus PUbliching Company. New Delhi. P. 30.

partially successful in the political field. As the Chogyal was ready to curtail the powers of the landlords and assured the delegation of eventually abolishing landlordism. And the State Council was made with the three nominees from the Sikkim State Congress to function as secretaries to Chogyal. However, Chogyal refused to accept the third demand put forward by the party on the issue of merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union. However, the activities of the three party nominees appeared to be against the three basic demands of the party.

The Sikkim State Congress in its “No Rent Campaign” in February, 1949, protested against the Chogyal of Sikkim and the Zamindari system at its annual session held at Rangpo. The peasants would not pay their rents to the Zamindars.⁶ The “No Rent” campaign launched by the State Congress was successful. It led to the abolition of forced labour and house-tax.⁷ In the political history of Sikkim, the Sikkim State Congress led struggles against the forces of feudalism, and the success that it achieved in freeing the masses from the clutches of feudalism were memorable events.

In 1950, abrogating all former treaties between India and Sikkim, a new agreement was signed between the Government of India and Sikkim, making Sikkim a protectorate of India.⁸ But this agreement could not satisfy the leaders of the Sikkim State Congress, because nowhere in the agreement was there any provision dealing with the issue of establishing a responsible government in Sikkim. And, also the internal autonomy granted to Sikkim was, to all intent and purposes, granted to the Maharaja. The treaty totally ignored the aspiration of people. Due to this the Congress leaders were shocked and disillusioned. Once again they reiterated their demand for the establishment of responsible government functioning in accordance with the democratic principle. The establishment of a democratic government became Sikkim State Congress’s first priority.

⁶ Basnet, L.B. (1974). *Sikkim, a Short Political History*. S. Chand and Co.(Pvt) LTD. New, Delhi. P. 86.

⁷ Ibid. P. 92.

⁸ Sikkim State Archives. *Indo-Sikkim Treaty 1950*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. accessed on 6/11/2014.

Unfortunately, the clamour of the Sikkim State Congress for a popular representative government gradually receded into the background. The main factors responsible for this were the Indo-Sikkim Treaty. Apparently, the party had been flooded by a host of new leaders. A great majority of the new leaders had been attracted by the promise of the vast opportunity. And now the party was getting under the control of this group.

It appeared that by the end of 1950s and early 1960s, the Sikkim State Congress virtually became the political field of competing party members over the party leadership which led to disunity within the party and frequent desertions. Apart from this, the concerted efforts by the Chogyal at the time of selection of members of the Executive Councilors also facilitated the division and differences within the Sikkim State Congress leadership. Apparently, the activities of the Sikkim State Congress began to be seen, in the minds of the people as communal party i.e., a party of Nepali community and it lost the support of other communities. As a consequence, various factions of all existing political parties were induced to form a new party called Sikkim National Congress.

The emergence of the Sikkim National Congress on 20th May, 1960,⁹ was another significant event in the political history of Sikkim. This party's main approach was to form a non-communal party which could give Sikkimese peace, prosperity and progress. The objective of party, outlined in the memorandum submitted to Prime Minister Nehru, was:

- (a) A constitutional monarchy for Sikkim.
- (b) A council based on communal parity, but elected by joint electors, and
- (c) An independent judiciary with a High Court established by a charter.¹⁰

⁹ Basnet, Op.cit, P. 116.

¹⁰ Grover, B.S.K. (1974). *Sikkim and India. Storm and Consolidation*. Jain Brothers. New Delhi. P. 51.

Hence with the establishment of Sikkim National Congress as a significant political unit capable of tremendous influence on the Sikkimese people, the entire political picture of Sikkim underwent drastic changes. People now started to look upon this party with the hope of democracy and security.

Contesting on this platform Sikkim National Congress emerged as the strongest political party in Sikkim, securing 8 seats in the third general election held in 1967.¹¹ President of the party Kazi Lhendup Dorji, formed the opposition in the Sikkim Council and tried to bring about the feeling of communal harmony. Soon after the election, there was split in Sikkim National Congress. The young and turbulent elements among the party wanted to organize agitational programmes on popular issues. The weary and tired leadership did not agree to this. But, in spite of the large scale defections, the National Congress emerged as a common political platform for the different ethnic communities, which was seen in the fourth general election held in April 1970. It not only won the general seat covering the entire Sikkim but also managed to get Nepalese, Bhutia-Lepcha and Tsong candidates elected on its tickets. The National Congress led by Kazi Lhendup Dorji, in spite of a split in its members, again came out as the single largest party in the State Council.

Out of all the parties, the Sikkim National Congress became the most popular party amongst the Sikkimese. The party had been able to present before the Sikkimese people a clearer picture of the real role of the different political parties. The Sikkimese people had, however, come to look upon the Sikkim National Congress leaders as the only one who would bring democracy in Sikkim. It is true that the emergence of political conscious started with the birth of Sikkim State Congress, but, unfortunately it could not stand up to the end due the defection within the party.

¹¹ Ibid. P. 58.

The general election of 1973, the last general election based on the parity formula, did not satisfy Sikkim National Congress. Sikkim became politically weak because of several political problems within the state. Disputes aroused between the people and the Chogyal administration on the Council election of 1973. On the eve of the election, the Sikkim State Congress and Sikkim Janata Party¹² were merged into a new political party; the Sikkim Janata Congress.¹³ Sikkim witnessed a rise in political consciousness among the people which led to the bloody revolution of 1973. There was an uprising in Gangtok when people raised anti-Chogyal slogans and riots broke out. Several demands raised by the political parties under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorji of the Sikkim National Congress and Krishna Chandra Pradhan of the Sikkim Janata Congress, led to the complete breakdown of law and order situation in Sikkim.¹⁴ The revolutionaries took over the government administration and in such a situation the king had to seek help from the Indian Government. On 10th April, 1973, B.S. Das formally took over the administration of the State as the representative of the Government of India.¹⁵ Peace was established in Sikkim when a Tripartite Agreement was signed between the political parties of Sikkim, the Chogyal and the Foreign Secretary of India. As per the terms of the agreement responsible government was to be guaranteed and in every four years elections were to be held in Sikkim.¹⁶ This agreement took away all the powers of the Chogyal.

The first historic election in Sikkim was held in April 1974.¹⁷ It was for the first time in the history of Sikkim, the people of Sikkim voted. The Sikkim Congress, formed after merging the Sikkim Janata Congress and Sikkim National Congress, swept the poll by winning 31 seats, and

¹² Sikkim Janata Party formed by Lal Bahadur Basnet after being defected from Sikkim National Congress.

¹³ Grover, Op.cit, P. 60.

¹⁴ Kazi, Jigme. N. (2009). *Sikkim for Sikkimese. Distinct Identity within the Union*. Hill Media Publication, Gangtok Sikkim. P.37.

¹⁵ Das, B.S. Reprinted (2002). *The Sikkim Saga*. Vikas Publication House Private LTD. New Delhi. P. 2.

¹⁶ Sikkim State Archives. *May 8th Agreement*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 15/11/2014.

¹⁷ Sinha, Op.cit. p. 35.

Kazi Lhendup Dorji emerged as the first Chief Minister and the undisputed leader of Sikkim.¹⁸ And, eventually on 26th April, 1975, the 332 years old Namgyal dynasty came to an end as Sikkim was merged with Indian Union and it became the 22nd State of India.¹⁹ This date is also marked as the fulfillment of a quarter century long struggle of the people of Sikkim. Sikkim acquired the status of full democracy by joining the political, economic and social mainstream of the Indian Union by giving up the three hundred year old feudal traditional monarchical system.

With the establishment of democracy several political parties emerged in Sikkim's political scenario. There was a great difference in the role and performance of the political parties in the process of democratization and economic development before and after 1975. Sikkim Congress, the ruling party in the state, as a part of political strategy, merged with the Indian National Congress. Later, the lone member of the National Party in the Assembly too joined the Congress Party and with it the State Assembly was virtually left with no opposition. Practically there was no other party in Sikkim during this time. But dissention within the party persisted.

Till 1977, Sikkim Congress maintained a complete grip in the state. The new government of Sikkim Congress depended upon the Central government funds to bring rapid socio-economic development in various sectors of the newly born state. There was some visible progress in the state but not to the extent it should have been. The Congress Party could, however, keep its unity intact up to 1977. But differences were developing within the Party. Inner party conflict, clash of interests, impact of communalism found their ways immediately after 1977. Soon after the merger, large inputs of aid and implementation of new schemes within a short period of time created several ethnic, political and economic problems which the new government failed to handle. The local

¹⁸ Sikkim State Archives. *Appointment of L.D. Kazi as CM of Sikkim. Gazette No. 28. Notification No. skm/Governor(1)75.* Accessed on 15/11/2014.

¹⁹ Sikkim State Archives. *36th Amendment act 1975.* Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 15/11/2014.

bureaucracy was inadequate and weak to handle the situation. Kazi Lhendup Dorji had fought against feudalism and corruption for over decades but when he finally succeeded and came to power he failed to satisfy the aspirations of the people. Moreover there was a split in the ruling party- Sikkim Congress in 1977. Nar Bahadur Khatiwada along with three sitting MLAs left the party and formed a temporary party called Provisional Unit for Democracy in 1977. Later in the same year this party was transformed into a new regional party- Sikkim Prajatantra Congress under Nar Bahadur Khatiwada.²⁰ By emphasizing the need for maintaining Sikkim's distinct character and needs, Mr. Khatiwada sowed the seed of regional politics in Sikkim after the merger. When the Janata Party came to power at the Centre, Kazi along with 26 MLAs merged with the Janata Party. Kazi was criticized by the opposition as the 'man of mergers'.²¹

As a consequence, Sikkim Congress the first ruling party in the state lost in the 1979 election to the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. The factor behind the failure of Kazi government was that it failed to provide a proper administration in the state. There were disappointment and apprehensions among the people, the price of essential commodities continued to rise, influx of outsiders could not be checked, the land reforms could not be implemented, agriculture sector remained neglected, corruption continued to be more in practice and the gap between the rich and poor was ever widening. Lastly, the merging attitude of the ruling party with party at the Centre created the feeling of anti-merger and anti-Indian among the people. Hence, Sikkim Congress which emerged as the first political party after the merger of Sikkim India manage to remained in power for four years.

²⁰ Sengupta, N. (1985). *State Government and Politics: Sikkim*. Sterling Publisher Private Limited. New Delhi. PP. 166-167.

²¹ Das, Op.cit, P. 105.

By winning the 1979 Assembly election Sikkim Janata Parishad formed the government in the State. Sikkim Janata Parishad was formed in 1977 by Nar Bahadur Bhandari.²² Democracy and Socialism were its main objectives. The party brought into limelight the drawbacks of the Kazi government and promised three important things:

- (a) Established real democracy in Sikkim.
- (b) Undertake all-out development of the State, and
- (c) Curb corruption.²³

Sikkim Janata Parishad under Nar Bahadur Bhandari formed the government in 1979 with new hopes and aspirations. It was, perhaps, Bhandari's anti-merger stand in 1979 which played a role in his victory. Bhandari became the first Chief Minister of Sikkim after the merger.²⁴ Bhandari's anti-merger stand and demand for reservation of seats for the Tsong and Nepalis in the Assembly received overwhelming support both from tribal and the Nepalis. Before the party could complete its first term of office, the government was dismissed by the Governor in May 11, 1984 under Article 164 (1) of the Constitution of India. Corruption charges were leveled against Bhandari by 13 legislators of his party including his four cabinet ministers and expressed their lack of confidence in him.²⁵ There has been other allegation made by the Ram Chandra Poudyal president of Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) who alleged "Goonda raj had come to Sikkim", that the recent activities of the supporters of the ruling party clearly indicated that the Chief Minister had let loose his goon

²² Sengupta, Op.cit, P167.

²³ Syangbo, Genevive. (2012). *The Sikkim Democratic Front. The Politics of Popular Mobilization in Sikkim (1993-2004)*. P. 42.

²⁴ Sikkim state Archive. *Gazette No. 92. 18th October, 1979*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 16/11/2014.

²⁵ Sikkim State Archives. *Gazette No. 58. 11th May, 1984*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 16/11/2014.

squads to beat opponents and spread fear among the people.²⁶ As a result of the failure of the constitutional machinery, Sikkim was brought under Presidential rule by the centre.²⁷

In the meantime, Bhandari dissolved Sikkim Janata Parishad and formed a new political party, Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) and returned back to power in 1985, ending 10 months of President Rule securing 30 out of 32 seats and became the Chief Minister of Sikkim for the second time.²⁸ The party was able to mobilize the people easily as there was no other political party which could be an opposition to the Sikkim Sangram Parishad. There was dominance of a single party in the state. This proved to be an advantage to the party in the next state Legislative Assembly and the election of 1989. In the 1989 election Bhandari rode successfully to power by winning all the 32 seats and again Bhandari became the Chief Minister for the third consecutive term.

Sikkim Sangram Parishad swept the assembly election for the three consecutive terms. Several political parties existed and function but these parties were engaged in solving their own problems instead of standing as a strong opposition to the ruling party. There were defection and dissidents in the political parties. As a result, Sikkim Sangram Parishad was successful in maintaining its strong hold from 1984-1989 as it was the only regional political party in the state which represented the people of all sections of society. But after his victory in 1989 Bhandari became quite different than what he was earlier. He was more powerful and confident and somewhat to his authoritative and autocratic. He wanted complete submission to his authority and did not tolerate any kind of dissension and criticism from both within and outside the party.

The nature of politics during the Bhandari rule was embroiled with many problems and challenges from within and also outside the party. Corruption charges were leveled against him,

²⁶ Eastern Express (Vol. 2. June 22-28, 1981). No. 10.

²⁷ Sikkim State Archives. *Gazette No. 69. 25th May, 1984*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 16/11/2014.

²⁸ Ibid. *Gazette No. 24. 8th march, 1985*.

there were also charges of anti-party activities and there were dissident within the party and all this led to the formation of factions in the ruling party. Bhandari lost vote of confidence in May 1994 in Sikkim Legislative Assembly and resigned from the government. The factors behind the downfall of Sikkim Sangram Parishad were during this time the higher caste Nepalese dominated every sphere of governance. A large section of the Nepalese especially the other backward classes (OBC) among them remained neglected. At the same time minority community like Bhutias-Lepchas felt threat of the growing Nepalese dominance. One of the main reasons for a setback of Bhandari government was that it failed to implement the recommendation of the Mandal Commission to include various communities like Rais, Bhujel, Mangars, Gurungs, Tamangs and Limbus in the lists of Other Backward Classes.²⁹ Pawan Chamling, one of his cabinet ministers strongly opposed Bhandari on the Other Backward Classes issue and the mal-administration of the state. He broke away broke away to form a new party, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF). Chamling projected himself as a leader of the downtrodden. The Sikkim Democratic Front emerged as the representative of the backward classes. For the first time in many years an alternative to Bhandari was seen. In 1994, Bhandari's party Sikkim Sangram Parishad lost the Assembly election to Pawan Kumar Chamling led Sikkim Democratic Front.³⁰ Sikkim Sangram Parishad also lost the 1999 Assembly election. Thus, the victory of Sikkim Democratic Front ended the Bhandari's long domination of Sikkim Politics.

Sikkim Democratic Front was founded by Pawan Kumar Chamling in 1993.³¹ The party aimed mainly at changing the social and political life of Sikkim. Its main objective was to fight against the anti-people policies pursued by the Sikkim Sangram Parishad government and replace it by a pro-

²⁹ Kazi, Op.cit. P. 127.

³⁰ Statistical Report on General Election (1994), Sikkim Legislative Assembly

³¹ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 340.

poor policy and programmes. The first priority in Chamling's political agenda was to restore the lost identity of the Sikkimese people and the economic and political development of the Other Backward Classes in Sikkim. The party was committed to restoration and strengthening the principles of democracy in the state. It also committed itself towards eradicating poverty in all forms.³² This party has ruled the state since 1994 with Pawan Kumar Chamling as the Chief Minister. The inspiring leadership of Pawan Kumar Chamling who claimed that his principle objective was to develop Sikkim and uplift the poor, deprived and the disadvantages section of the society was the main factor behind the party's initial success in Sikkim. The party consolidated its position sweeping the 1999 and 2004 state elections. It won 31 out of the 32 assembly seats in the 2004 election.³³ In the 2009 assembly election, the party made a clean sweep, winning all 32 seats. It also retains the lone Lok Sabha seat.³⁴ In the last election held in 2014, also Sikkim Democratic Front swept the polls by winning 22 seats in the Assembly.³⁵

Chamling became the first politician in the state to coin the slogan "Janta Raj ma Jantai Raja" (In a people rule, people themselves are sovereign). The slogan gave the people the feeling of empowerment. He was successful in getting massive support to stand against the ruling government. In its first election manifesto of the Assembly election of 1994, the Sikkim Democratic front promised to safeguard the democratic rights of the people and promised to give political, social and economic justice to the people. The party claimed that in Sikkim freedom of press and media was under the control of the Bhandari government so the party promised to restore the constitutional rights of the press and restore back the freedom of speech and Rule of Law.

³² Genevive, Op.cit, P. 57.

³³ Statistical Report on General Election (2004), Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

³⁴ Statistical Report on General Election (2009), Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

³⁵ Statistical Report on General Election (2014), Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

When one party domination seem to be on decline elsewhere, Sikkim, a late participant to the democratic politics of the country, appears to be presided over by one political party- Sikkim Democratic Front. It was because the Sikkim Democratic Front, which has been in power since 1994, not only managed to overcome the anti-incumbency factor but also bettered its past poll performance. Right from the 1994, the party has been focused on finding ways and means for the economic development of the State. Using state resources to the advantage of most sections of society, the Sikkim Democratic Front has managed to create an atmosphere favourable to it and its government. The party's policy is all-inclusive; there is no Sikkimese now who does not fall within the state sponsored categories such as Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), Most Backward Classes (MBCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). There are reservations for all these categories in the posts and services of the State government and public sector undertakings.

Finally, it comes to why the regional party like Sikkim Democratic Front in a newly emerged state has been able to win consecutive elections of the state Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary elections. Even though it is true that the party has attained popularity in the state because of a number of reasons, the policies of the government, strategies of mobilization, its organizational structure all has helped but one of the reason is that the absence of strong opposition both regional as well as national political parties. Party claimed to be the only political party which could take the people of Sikkim into prosperity. The strong organizational structure of the party and its close relation with the common people made the party to be the 'People's Party' in the state. More than the urban sector, party tends to get people involved from the rural sector because about 70% of the Sikkimese population lives in the rural areas and the rural people are less educated and illiterate lot. In Sikkim, it is found that the connection between the leader and followers is mostly based on direct contact and totally not on organizational level. The political parties in Sikkim, more importantly the

Sikkim Democratic Front has direct contact with the supporters. The party organizes meeting at all levels and meet the rural mass in personal.

During the last twenty years of its continuous rule under the leadership of Pawan Kumar Chamling, the Sikkim Democratic Front party seems to have to a large extent, substituted parochial aspiration with the politics of performance and economic opportunities. In the last one decade of Sikkim Democratic Front rule there had been no ethnic disturbance in Sikkim which in itself is most remarkable achievement of the party. The party posed itself to be the real guardian of the people, mainly the rural poor. Though, the party started its political journey with the issue of recognition of the left out Nepali communities in the Other Backward Classes list but the party in the later phases of its rule came up with various developmental schemes and policies in the state. This government places emphasis on Sikkim being the most developed and self-reliant state in the country. Sikkim Democratic Front government's contribution is great towards the development of the state as a whole. This government can be attributed with a positive mark that its shift from conventional politics of earlier days to politics of performance had led the party to its utmost success.

In Sikkim's history of democracy, there are two distinct eras- the first era was that of Nar Bahadur Bhandari, who ruled the state with an iron hand for 15 years between 1979 and 1994, except for two breaks in between.³⁶ Bhandari's rule described as one of the high-handed and dictatorial. It was because of this that Pawan Kumar Chamling, who was a member of the Bhandari government, resigned from the cabinet in the early 1990s and founded the Sikkim Democratic Front in 1993. The 1994 Assembly Election turned the tables in favour of Chamling and thus the second era of Sikkim's political history began. While Nar Bahadur Bhandari did not have much to claim from his 15 years rule, other than the inclusion of the Nepali Language in the Eighth Schedule of the

³⁶ Sikkim was under President's rule twice first on 19th August, 1979 and second on 25th May, 1984.

Constitution, however, Chamling had been praise for his contribution to the expansion of political democracy in the state. This year, he led his party to the victory in the assembly election for the fifth consecutive time.

For long, Sikkim has witnessed the dominance of one party, which was as a result of the failure of opposition party to work jointly. But, on 14th August, 2011, Sikkim saw the protest from the opposition parties against a bill that seeks to curb the strike and other modes of agitation to preserve public order.³⁷ The said bill was tabled by Chief Minister on 11th August, 2011, in the Assembly for a special law to address “social vices and offences” that might cause disturbance to public order. The bill seeks to ban processions, hunger strike, squatting, sloganeering and waving black flags or other forms of agitation that might “promote enmity or hatred between sections of the society” on the “grounds of religion, race or caste”. Such actions will be deemed disturbance to public order, the bill states.³⁸ The opposition party opposed to it by calling this bill as a “black bill”. They said that the provisions proposed in the bill are a total violation of the democratic values and norms. This is a black law that seeks to suppress the voice of the people and is against fundamental rights.³⁹ It was seen that the members of the Sikkim Himali Rajya Parishad (SHRP) burnt the effigy of Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling and waved black flags to protest against the bill, while the other opposition parties in the state boycotted the high tea party hosted by the Governor at Raj Bhavan on the occasion of Independence Day. As a result of these protest, the government of Sikkim withdrew the Sikkim Prevention and Control of Disturbance of Public Order Bill from the Assembly.

³⁷ The Telegraph, Calcutta, India. Monday, 15th August, 2011. *Title (Chamling effigy burnt)*. Front Page

³⁸ Ibid, Friday, 12th August, 2011. *Title (Sikkim Bill for Public Order)*. Front Page.

³⁹ Ibid.

Thus, Sikkim saw the emergence of opposition parties in State. On 17th December, 2012, the opposition parties formed an alliance called the Democratic Alliance of Sikkim (DAS) in Gangtok to counter Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling's 19th years of rule. The political parties in this alliance were the Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Sikkim Himali Rajya Parishad Party, Sikkim Liberation Front, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Sikkim Gorkha Prajantrantrik Party.⁴⁰ The opposition parties said that it was undemocratic for a single party to be in power for so many years. The non-political parties supporting the alliance were the All Sikkim Educated Unemployed and Self-employed Association and the Concerned Society of Sikkim, which was headed by Nakul Das Rai.⁴¹ Nar Bahadur Bhandari the former Chief Minister of Sikkim also showed support to these political parties saying that he too was in power for 15 years because of lack of strong opposition party in the State.

Sikkim saw the emergence of another strong political party in the state called Sikkim Krantikari Morcha headed by Prem Singh Golay on 4th February, 2013.⁴² After a fourth consecutive term in power, the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front led by Pawan Kumar Chamling faced a challenging Opposition in the form of rebel MLA and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) supremo Prem Singh Golay, who official resigned from the ruling party in September. Prem Singh Golay was the member of the Legislative Assembly, was also a founding member of the Sikkim Democratic Front and was the Minister in government of Sikkim. But since December 2009 he started to criticize to Pawan Kumar Chamling. Differences between Golay and ruling Sikkim Democratic Front Chief and Chief Minister Pawan Chamling surfaced in December 2009 when the rebel leader

⁴⁰ The Telegraph, Calcutta, India. Tuesday 18th December, 2012. *Title (Sikkim saw emergence of Opposition)*. Front Page.

⁴¹ Nakul Das Rai is the Former Lok Sabha MP, who is a Sikkim Democratic Front dissident.

⁴² Himalayan Mirror News. (Vol 7. No. 144. Gangtok, Tuesday 5th February 2013.

organized a picnic party in Rolu in South Sikkim.⁴³ Golay finally quitted from the Sikkim Democratic Front on September 4th 2013, citing that corruption and nepotism by the Chief Minister and poor leadership of the organization.⁴⁴ He alleged the Chief Minister of high-handedness in running the government and indulging in corruption. In his 14-page resignation letter to Chamling, Golay accused the Sikkim Democratic Chief of betraying the trust of people and working against the interest of the Sikkimese people. The letter reads:

“The first reason of my resignation is the difficulties I face while doing people’s work as the party’s policies is not people-oriented. Nepotism, favouritism and poor leadership of the party are few of the other reasons for my resignation.” Golay said the party had failed to discharge its responsibilities and become “a resource” for the Chief Minister. President Sir, SDF was never your private intellectual property. This was a political party dedicated to the people and formed with the support of the people against nepotism, communalism and exploitation. But under your leadership, this party was used as a resource only for you and exploiters and realizing the injustice towards poor Sikkimese people, I am writing this resignation letter. The SDF that claims to work for the poor has failed to secure health, education and employment for the poor in 19 years since its birth. Your pro-poor slogan has proved to be mere a false assurances. I was deeply hurt when a corruption case was filed against you (Chamling). I was under the impression that it was just a political allegation. But when you took out a gazette notification to prevent CBI from entering Sikkim, I became fully convinced of the corruption allegations. If you were innocent, then you would have definitely given permission to CBI to investigate.”⁴⁵

Since then Prem Singh Golay of Sikkim Krantitari Morcha have been working as opposition to the ruling government. It is seen that Democratic Alliance of Sikkim (DAS) urged Golay and his

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The Telegraph, Op.cit. Tuesday, September 5, 2013.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

party to join this opposition organization consistently to work jointly against the ruling government. But Golay, chose to remain on his own in this political fight. In his fight against the ruling government, the former Chief Minister of Sikkim Nar Bahadur Bhandari also lends his support towards Golay and his party by deciding not to contest 2014 general election.⁴⁶ On 29th March, 2014, the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) released its election manifesto and termed it as an “inclusive manifesto considering all sections with plans to be executed in the next 5 years.”⁴⁷ In the manifesto the party has promised to improve the rural economy, bettered metal led road connectivity, improved healthcare with an AIIMS like hospital, arrears for all regularized government employees and creation of 30,000 jobs for the local unemployed within 100 days of coming to power. Besides, 49 other issues have been mentioned in the manifesto. In the education sector, the party has stressed to establish a state medical board, state education board, and quality education system. On the financial front, the party has promised to enforce austerity measures at all level of governance, strong anti-corruption mechanisms like Lokayuktas and CBI investigations into all commissions and omissions, attacks on political workers and journalists during the past 20 years. It also laid special focus on investigating all corruption charges on the Sikkim Democratic Front government.⁴⁸

On 12th April 2014, Sikkim went for the 7th Assembly Election for the 32 Assembly seats. The participant political parties were Sikkim Democratic Front, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, Indian National Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, All India Trinamool Congress and Independent. In the last election Sikkim Krantikari Morcha gave a strong fight to the ruling party by winning 10 seats out of 32 seats including the Sangha seat. Whereas, the Sikkim Democratic Front won 22 seats and

⁴⁶ The Telegraph, Op.cit, Monday, April 17, 2014. Title (*Bhandari's support for SKM*).

⁴⁷ The Statesman. 31st March 2014. Title (*SKM Unveils 'inclusive' poll manifesto*).

⁴⁸ Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, Election Manifesto 2014.

once again became the ruling party in state for the fifth consecutive term.⁴⁹ But it can be seen that unlike in 2009, when the Sikkim Democratic Front won all the 32 seats in the state, this time, the Assembly will have an opposition. With the result of last assembly election it became clear that though the opposition party Sikkim Krantikari Morcha lost the election but it gave a strong fight in the election. Now, at least there will be an opposition in the Assembly. It seems that gradually one party's domination in Sikkim will come to an end with the emergence on new opposition political parties like Sikkim Krantikari Morcha.

Sikkim's election history reflects the trend of a dominant of one party system. Whichever party is in power whether is the Sikkim Democratic Front now or the Sikkim Sangram Parishad earlier, the ruling party enjoys a vast majority with virtually no opponent at all. The series of election results in Sikkim proved that the national parties have little hold in Sikkim politics. Regional parties have always enjoyed a clear dominance. It shows the fact that people of Sikkim give strong preference to the regional parties.

Ethnic Social Organization of Sikkim

In a multi-ethnic society, the community relationship often exhibit in dominant-dependent scenario. The sense of being dependent also breeds a feeling of alienation among minority groups and develops strength for resistance and asserts distinct identity challenging the process of assimilation under a dominant discourse. It reflects or produces deep emotional feelings, exhibits wider political result based on the ideas of freedom, pride, equality and justice, and emphasizes need for preserving symbols of primordality. This also creates an atmosphere in which the government

⁴⁹ Statistical Report on General Election, 2014. Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

policies or that of a dominant group, which might affect their cultural identity, which is viewed with apprehension; it unites them to act against such policy or development. Hence, the formation of organizations and their style of functioning reflect group's desire for identity in the changing political scenario. They articulate political demands and very often act as pressure groups intending to influence or alter political decisions in favour of the concerned group or groups.

In view of the introduction of modern democratic institution in the post-merger Sikkim, the rules governing the affairs of Sikkim were adapted to suit various political and administrative challenges. But along with these changes, the level of anxiety and apprehension among the various communities also increased considering the nature of functioning of a democratic government and the question of resource distribution. The Nepalese, though benefitted both in political and economic fronts, were apprehensive in view of influx of the outsiders and abolition of the Nepali seats in the Assembly in 1979 together with the extension of voting rights to the plainsmen. The Bhutias, on the other, suffered from loss of political and economic domination in the society.

The political administrative arrangement, which reduced the size of Bhutia-Lepcha seats in the Assembly in 1979 even though the definition 'Bhutia' was expanded to include eight other Bhutias, the inclusion of the Limboo and Tamang communities in the Scheduled Tribes list in 2003, further aroused a sense of insecurity among them. In view of the introduction of a new formula of seat reservation, the Bhutia-Lepcha were afraid of being dominated by the Nepalese while the Nepalese were apprehensive of losing control over state power. The Nepalese and Bhutias were educationally forward and thus dominated economic and political power, including the bureaucracy. While the Lepchas, by virtue of socio-economic and educational backwardness, were denied the fruits of economic and political opportunities and felt discriminated. The feeling of deprivation among the Lepchas led to strengthening of ethnic consciousness and articulation of community oriented

demands by forming organization. Similarly, on the issue of Mandal Commission recommendation, the Nepalese were divided along racial line- the Aryans and Mongoloid. Like the Lepchas, the mongoloid groups within the larger Nepali community too were educationally and economically backward groups and were deprived of economic and political opportunities. The inter-community resentments and feeling of deprivation and domination naturally culminated in the form of formation of socio-cultural organizations with a view to maintain separate identity and claiming larger share of the resources.

Sikkim Tribal Welfare Organization (STWA)

The Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association was formed in December 24, 1978 at Gangtok. Its President was Pasang Obed Pazo.⁵⁰ Officially, it was an organization of the Bhutia, Lepcha and Sherpa tribal communities of Sikkim. Some of the main aims and objective of the organization were as follows:

- (a) To effectively and efficiently establish a healthy and strong organization of the Bhutia, Lepchas and Sherpas of Sikkim.
- (b) To promote educational, cultural and economic advancement of the Scheduled Tribes mainly Bhutias, Lepchas and Sherpas of Sikkim.
- (c) To protect and work for the furtherance of the rights and privileges of the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim.
- (d) To create, foster and promote the spirit of fellow feelings, service, solidarity, cooperation and mutual help with members of the Nepali community and the plainsmen.

⁵⁰ Kazi, Op.cit, P. 108.

(e) To inculcate a sense of loyalty among the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim and also to subscribe allegiance, faith, confidence and cooperation to the government of India.⁵¹

Its primary intension was to function as pressure group in the interest of the tribal communities, including the Sherpas. It demanded for creation of a Standing committee for reviewing legislations which had or seemed to have adversely affected the social, economic, cultural and religious interests of the tribal in Sikkim. It was a non-political association though some of its members were also involved in political activities, including contesting elections.

In 1979, the Association emphasized on the need for evolving a suitable substitution to the “parity formula” for full protection of the interest of the Bhutias and Lepchas, fresh delimitation of the Bhutia-Lepcha constituencies, the continuation of the Revenue Order No.1 of 1917.⁵² Under the chairmanship of Pasang Obed Pazo, a Joint Action Committee (JAC) of all the tribal organizations of Sikkim was formed in 1985 to press for genuine demands and issues concerning the tribal of Sikkim.⁵³

Ever since the introduction of Bill No. 79⁵⁴ of 1979 in the Lok Sabha on May 18, 1979,⁵⁵ the Tribal association has, on many occasions, submitted a number of petitions to various Central and State Government authorities concerning the Bill. They have expressed their anxiety and

⁵¹ Gurung, Op.cit. P. 358.

⁵² *With the passing of this Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917, Bhutias and Lepchas were not allowed to sell, mortgage or sublet any of their lands to any person other than Bhutia or Lepcha without the expression sanction by Darbar, or officer empowered by Darbar in this behalf, whose order will be obtained by the landlord concerned. If anyone disobeys this order will be severely punished.* Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 18/1/2015.

⁵³ Kazi, Jigme. N. (1994). *Inside Sikkim, Against the Tide*. Hill Media Publication, Gangtok, Sikkim. P. 164.

⁵⁴ With the introduction of Bill No. 79. Bhutia Lepcha seats were reduced to 12 and the Nepali seat were abolished as it created new seat as 17 general seats in the Assembly.

⁵⁵ Sikkim State Archives. *Gazette No. 75. Representation of the People (Amendment), Ordinance, 1979*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 18/1/2015.

apprehension of the fate of the tribal in the state if the safeguards provided for Sikkim under Article 371F (F) is taken away.

On September, 18, 1979, Ram Chandra Poudyal had filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court on the Assembly Seat reservation issue.⁵⁶ Poudyal had alleged in the petition that the reservation of seats in Assembly for the Bhutia-Lepchas and the Sangha were based on race and religion and were therefore, illegal and unconstitutional. They wanted abolition of the Sangha seat and reduction of seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas from 12 to 6-7 seats. Poudyal claimed that the Bhutia-Lepchas in Sikkim represented only 23% of the state's three lakh population, and the 12 seats reserved for them was disproportionate to their population.⁵⁷ The said petition was pending. In the meantime, the nine member delegation of Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association in 1982 submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, the Tribal Association requested the Government of India to make suitable provisions to safeguard the interests of the Bhutia-Lepchas, who constitute the Tribal communities in Sikkim. The main points on seat reservation in the memorandum were:

“A minute section of our larger community of Nepalese of Sikkim is seeking to challenge some of the basic rights and traditional heritage of our communities through a writ petition. It is, therefore, imperative that the Government of India should not only bless and protect our communities but must kindly consider all possible measures in the armament of its legal and constitutional battles to ensure our legitimate rights and interests in our ancestral homeland. The Sangha in Sikkim constitute a very important and highly respected factor with our communities which profess a form of Mahayana school of Buddhism, the Sangha and our religious practice are

⁵⁶ Kazi, Op.cit, Sikkim for Sikkimese. P. 50

⁵⁷ Kazi, Op.cit, Inside Sikkim Against the Tide. P. 112.

inextricably linked with our social and traditional heritage. It is, therefore, absolutely imperative that there should be a separate reservation of a seat in the Assembly.⁵⁸

As a result of the involvement of Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association in the Assembly seat issue, ram Chandra Poudyal lost the case. It seems that, Poudyal may have won the case if the Tribal Association did not intervene.

In October 1985, the Association submitted a six-point memorandum to the State's Governor, Shri Bhisma Narain Singh, demanding restoration of 16 seats (including 1 Sangha seat) in the Assembly for the Bhutia-Lepcha, delimitation of Assembly constituencies to ensure genuine tribal representation in the Assembly, grant of Citizenship to the 'stateless person' on the basis of the Sikkim Subjects Regulation, extension of inner line permit system to check the influx of outsiders, protection and safeguards of the rights and interests of the tribal on the basis of Articles 371F of the constitution and deletion of the names of foreign nationals included in the electoral rolls. The memorandum further expressed concern over the gradual destruction and disintegration of the distinct socio-cultural identity of the Bhutia-Lepcha people after 1975 and also demanded for a fresh delimitation of the Assembly constituencies in order to ensure a genuine representation of the tribal in the Assembly.⁵⁹

The reason behind the demand for fresh delimitation of Tribal Association was that, so as to include all pockets dominated by the ethnic tribals for all seats. Presently, of the 12 reserved seats only three seats genuinely represent the tribals. These three constituencies, which are in the tribal dominated areas in north Sikkim, are Lachen-Mangshila, Dzongu and Kabi-Tingda.

⁵⁸ Kazi, Op.cit, Sikkim fir Sikkimese. P. 52.

⁵⁹ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 359.

During the Sikkim Sangram Parishad rule, the Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association had virtually lost its autonomous status. The Association, however, regained some of its lost autonomy with the coming of the Sikkim Democratic Front party in power in 1994. In 1995-96 the Association along with other organization was instrumental in having the ongoing Rathong Chu Hydel Project discontinued.⁶⁰ It installed the statue of Thekong Tek and Khye Bhumsa, called 'State on Unity', near Thakurbari, Gangtok, and constructed a conference hall, called Bhutia-Lepcha House or BL House, at Tibet Road, Gangtok.⁶¹ The Association also supported the inclusion of Limboo and Tamang in the Scheduled Tribe list. It emphasized on the protection of the Bhutia-Lepcha interests and extension of the existing reservation in the Panchayats also.

The Bhutia-Lepcha communities are the most privileged and protected communities in Sikkim. But despite being so, the Association fears that uncontrolled influx of Nepalese had been posing threat to their culture and existence. This shows an exclusive attitude on the part of Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association with a tendency to create ethnic disharmony. In fact, the feeling of being affected by another cultural group actually intensifies efforts for protection and preservation.

The main problem of the Association is factionalism. The tribal Lepcha alleged that the Bhutias have cornered the lion share of the privileges meant for the Tribals. The Lepcha Association demanded for a legal prohibition on the sale/purchase of their land by the Bhutias and 50% reservation in employment and the Assembly seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha in Sikkim. Similarly, the Sherpas, for whom the Association claims to work for, are denied protection under the Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917, and the demand for the removal of the Sherpas from the list of Bhutia-Lepcha regularly featured in most of the resolution of the Association since 1994 and to

⁶⁰ The Telegraph, Op.cit, Wednesday, September 22, 2010.

⁶¹ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 360.

counter the allegation, the Sherpas, too had formed separate association and demanded for separate reservation of seats in the Assembly from within the 12 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha and expansion of the Revenue Order No. 1 to include the Sherpas as the third beneficiaries of the provision. Eventually, the contradiction prevailing within the member communities have shaken the very foundation of the Association for which it was formed in 1978.

Lepcha Association

Through the legend of 'Blood Brother' the Lepchas in Sikkim are considered as close kin of the Bhutias and are referred in combined term 'Bhutia-Lepcha'. The lepchas who are described as mild, honest and culturally rich community have been subjected to discrimination and enormous suffering in the past. At present, majority of educated Lepchas emphasized on the need ofr maintaining a separate identity other than the 'Bhutia-Lepcha' combined identity.

It was only after the agitation of 1973 that some Lepcha elders namely Nayan Tashering Lepcha, Rinzing Topden Lepcha, Shypzong Lapcha, Adar Singh Lepcha, Nim Tshering Lepcha, Loder Singh Lepcha and Tasha Tengay Lepcha secretly conducted a meeting in the house of Shri A.D Rai at Sichey in the month of May 1973. The meeting was chaired by the late Nayan Tashering Lepcha. It was in this meeting the first ever apolitical organization of the ethnic Lepchas, called Rong Seyzum, and was born. The present day two Lepcha organizations, formed sometime in 1996, namely 'Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Ong Seyzum' (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association) and Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarzum (Sikkim Lepcha Association) owe their origin to this premier Lepcha Organization. In contrast to these two organizations, the Mayel Aahit Mutanchi Tarzum (Sikkim Original Lepcha Association), established in March 2004, is of recent origin. The resolution of the

Mayel Aahit Mutanchi Tarzum emphasized preservation and promotion of the Lepcha language and culture, opposition to the construction of Teesta Stages III and IV Hydel projects at dzongu, opposition to the delimitation process of the Dzongu constituency and safeguarding various interests of the Lepchas of Sikkim.⁶² Despite organizational variations, they share common objective, i.e. to fight against injustice of all kinds perpetuated against the Lepcha community and to protect the socio-economic, cultural and political rights guaranteed to them by the constitution of India.

In 1996 the Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association presented a charter of four point demands namely:

- (a) Separate delimitation of Assembly constituency for the Lepchas and 50 % reservation out of the 12 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha in Assembly.
- (b) 50 % reservation from the seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes in higher studies and services managed by the State Public Service Commission.
- (c) To prohibit sale of Lepcha land to other communities including the Bhutias.
- (d) To provide proper compensation either in cash or land and judicious rehabilitation of the Lepchas who have been displaced or whose lands have been used for various purposes by the government or non-governmental organizations.⁶³

The Association also asked for justification as to why the lands belonging to the Lepcha alone were being targeted for several governmental and non-governmental projects and proposal, including the proposal of National Hydel Project Corporation in the protected area of Dzongu. The Association also demanded to protect the cultural heritage and language of the Lepcha community and to declare

⁶² Now, Newspaper, Gangtok. (Vol. 2 No. 45). Saturday, 20 March, 2004. P. 4.

⁶³ Gurung, Op.cit, PP. 363-364.

the death of Changzod Bholek as the “Martyr Day” in Sikkim.⁶⁴ Changzod Bholek was the Lepcha Prime Minister of Sikkim reportedly murdered at the instance of the Chogyal Tsugphod Namgyal.

The Association’s main apprehension underlying the demands was that though the Lepchas had been invariably recognized as the autochthones of Sikkim, the use of hybrid term such as Bhutia-Lepcha had undermined their separate identity as Lepchas and this had in many ways also justified their discrimination and domination by Bhutias.

At the outset, it is important to know why the Lepchas have been demanding for 50 % reservation out of 12 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha in the Assembly. It is seen that from 1975 to till the Seventh Assembly election in 2004 about 60 Bhutia compared to 31 of the Lepchas have found place in the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim. This was despite the presence of parity as governing formula between two. As a response to these demands, Chief Minister, Chamling of Sikkim, on 8 August, 2003, during the Lepcha festival of Tendong Lho Rum Faat declared that 6 of the 12 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha communities will be for Lepchas and added that he would do his best to fulfill all their demands.⁶⁵ As a result, the parity between the two communities was restored in Seventh Assembly Election of 2004, Tendong Lho-Rum Faat, an important Lepcha festival celebrated in honour of the Mount Tendong, was declared a state holiday since 1997, Lepcha language was recommended for recognition in the eight scheduled of the Indian Constitution, the tribe was recognized as the premier tribe of Sikkim and election of a Lepcha Candidate to the Rajya Sabha in 2006.

Yet there are other issues of land reforms, decline in the number of Lepcha population and delimitation of Assembly constituencies which concern the Association. The distribution of land

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The Telegraph, Op,cit. Saturday, August 9, 2003.

among the tribals is very much unclear and reflects traditional pattern of land holdings. Similarly, Lepchas feared that the Dzongu Assembly constituency, the Lepcha protected area, would be done away in future.

The new generations of Lepchas are not only educated but also conscious of their separate identity. They articulate their grievances independently and want sincere implementation of governing formula of parity in every conceivable field including protection of their land from the Bhutias.

Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC)

The apex body of the 12 registered Bhutia-Lepcha organizations, called “Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee” (SIBLAC), was formed in September 1999 at Gangtok. Mr. Tashi Phempo, former General Secretary of Denzong Yargay Chogpa (DYC), and Mr. Nima Lepcha, former President of Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha Unity Organization (NEBHULA), were elected as ad-hoc conveners of the committee.⁶⁶ The objectives of the Committee are:

- (a) Amendment to the Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribe Order 1978: to restore the original identity and definition of ‘Sikkimese Bhutia’ community in Sikkim.
- (b) Amendment to the Representation of People Amendment (Act), 1980.
- (c) Proportionate increase in the Bhutia-Lepcha seats.
- (d) Bhutia-Lepcha seat reservation in Sikkim Local Bodies: seat reservation to the Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha as BL seat in all the local bodies (Municipality and Panchayat) across Sikkim, much on the line of Assembly Seat Reservation under the ambit of Article 371F of the Indian Constitution is accorded.

⁶⁶ Gurung, Op.cit. P. 367.

(e) Delimitation of Bhutia-Lepcha Assembly Constituencies.⁶⁷

The Apex Committee expressed no objection against the inclusion of the Chumbipas (the people of Chumbi Valley) with the Bhutia, but for other seven Bhutia (Dopthapa, Tromopa, Sherpa, Yolmo, Tibetan, Kagatey, Drukpa) the Committee demanded for the preparation of a separate list of tribals.

On 2nd October, 1999, the Committee observed hunger strike for the restoration of Assembly seats reserved for bonafide Sikkimese belonging to the three ethnic communities of Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese of Sikkim origin.⁶⁸ The committee also boycotted the Assembly election in protest against fielding of the Sherpa candidates from the reserved Bhutia-Lepcha seats by both the major political parties i.e. Sikkim Sangram Prishad and Sikkim Democratic Front and also asked the Bhutia-Lepcha candidates to withdrawal their nomination from the election. It is to be noted that in 1994 and 1999 Assembly election Sherpa candidates, one each from Sikkim Sangram Parishad and Sikkim Democratic Front, contested from the Rakdong-Tontek (BL) reserved constituency.⁶⁹ The Committee strongly resented this and termed it as the political conspiracy of the regional political parties. The Committee contended that they being the descendents of Khye Bhumsa should alone enjoy the claim over the seats reserved for the Bhutias in the State Assembly. In 2004 Assembly election also Shri Mingma Tshering Sherpa contested from the Pathing reserved Bhutia-Lepcha seat and defeated the Congress (I) candidate and the President of the Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee, Shri Tseten Tashi Bhutia.⁷⁰ Reacting to the continuous fielding of a Sherpa candidate in the Bhutia-Lepcha seats, the Apex Committee expressed fear that “if the present trend of fielding

⁶⁷ SIBLAC official website. www.siblac.org. Accessed on 19/11/2014.

⁶⁸ Kazi, Op.cit, Sikkim for Sikkimese. PP. 263-264.

⁶⁹ Statistical Report on General Election, 1994 and 1999, to the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim.

⁷⁰ Statistical Report, Op.cit, 2004.

non-Bhutia Lepcha candidates from the reserved constituencies continued, then the inclusion of more communities in the list will wipe out all the rights we have.”

The Committee’s call for boycott of election and withdrawal of nominations by the Bhutia-Lepcha candidates proved ineffective because there was no response from the Gangtok and New Delhi. In fact, the leaders were targeted and lured. The Chief Minister, Pawan Kumar Chamling during the public meeting held on 19th April, 2004, lashed out against the Apex Committee, accusing them of vitiating the communal harmony of the state and for being the branches of the State Congress unit. Chamling, added that the Committee had misled the Bhutia-Lepcha by fanning unfounded fears in a bid to move the Bhutia-Lepcha community against the government and Sikkim Democratic Front.⁷¹

In May 2000, the Apex Committee submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister, Shri Pawan Kumar Chamling, reiterating its earlier demands. The Committee also adopted a resolution in June 11, 2000 to urge all the 12 Bhutia-Lepcha MLAs in the Assembly for passing a resolution in the ensuing budget session. In spite of assurances of support, the Bhutia-Lepcha MLAs of both the ruling and opposition parties failed to come up with the resolution mainly due to the differences existing between Lepcha and Bhutia members of the Assembly and Apex Committee. The Lepcha Organization on the other hand contended that unless their own demands were fulfilled, they would not support the issues raised by the Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee.⁷² As stated earlier, the Lepcha organizations wanted 50% reservation both in terms of seats in the Assembly and in quota for higher education and employment beside legal prohibition in the sale of Lepcha land to others, including the Bhutias. Though the Apex Committee assured the Lepcha Association for taking up

⁷¹ Now Newspaper, Gangtok. (Vol. 3, No. 22) Tuesday, 20 April, 2004. P. 1.

⁷² Gurung, Op.cit, P. 369.

the issues after the demands of the Sikkim Lepcha Bhutia Apex Committee were resolved, the Lepchas, who had suffered immensely in the past, were doubtful at the assurance. After one month, seeing no favourable response from the Apex committed on their demand, the Youth wing of Lepcha Association withdrawn its members from the Apex Committee.⁷³

The government appointed an Advisory Committee under the Chairmanship of the Tourism Minister, Shri K.T. Gyaltsen, in July 2000 to look into the grievances or issues raised by the Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee. The Chief Minister also assured the members of the Committee that he would take full responsibility for protecting and preserving the rights and interests of the Bhutia and Lepchas of Sikkim. Shri Pawan Kumar Chamling told the members of the Committee that “people should understand that Limboos and Tamangs are not same as Bhutias and Lepchas and we have no intention of having it so”. In fact the Apex Committee was worried by the statement of the Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, Joel Oram, that “2001 census figure would be the base for delimitation and could cause a reduction in the seats reserved for the Bhutias-Lepchas in the States.”⁷⁴

On 28th September, 2003, a delegation of Bhutia-Lepchas from Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee converged for a rally at Jantar Mantar to demand a solution to their “long-standing grievances”. They also took out protest rally against the reopening of the Nathu-la trade route. With the reopening of the trade route, there will be a major demographic shift in population and create further influx into the state. Earlier, the committee had demanded the fulfillment of three demands- amendment to the Scheduled Tribe Order Act, 2003, Representation of the People Act, 1980, and

⁷³ Now Newspaper, Gangtok. (Vol. 1, No. 47) Wednesday, May 28-03 June. P. 3.

⁷⁴ Gurung, Op.cit, P. 370.

delimitation of the Assembly constituencies.⁷⁵ The Committee's action was criticized by the government and other tribal organizations of Sikkim. Pawan Kumar Chamling lashed out against the Committee and said the demonstrators had gone against national interest, playing into the hands of the opposition party in the state which had never accepted the merger of Sikkim to India. He even cautioned the centre to stop conspiracy.⁷⁶ The most scathing criticism against the Committee however came from its own constituent partner. The Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarzum (Sikkim Lepcha Association) stated "we have long withdrawn from the Apex Committee and they should delete the word 'L' (meaning Lepcha) from Apex Committee. The Lepcha community does not have any representatives in the Apex Committee. Thus the trade issue raised by the Apex Committee in New Delhi has no sanction of the Lepcha community of Sikkim.

The Apex Committee was also criticized by the Sikkim Sherpas association. The community after all was the main target of the Apex committee. In a letter written to the Prime Minister, the Sherpa Association clarified that the "Sherpa had been accepted as Bhutias as far back as 1891 when the first ever census was conducted in Sikkim. If any amendment is required to the Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1978 the Parliament must under article 342 (2) exclude the king (Chogyal), his kin and kith and the Kazis from the list of the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim". The letter further stated that as there could be no two classes of Scheduled Tribes, the newly recognized tribes (Limboos and Tamangs) should be allowed to contest from the 12 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha in the state. Regarding the Sangha seat, the Association said that it "was incorporated in 1975 to make Sikkim a theocratic, autocratic, feudal State and should be done away with". Referring to the issue of 'influx' and Bhutia-Lepcha becoming minority in Sikkim, the Sherpa Association contended, "Influx had taken place within Bhutia ranks. While Lepcha outnumbered Bhutia in 1891,

⁷⁵ The Telegraph, Op.cit, Monday, September 29, 2003.

⁷⁶ SIBLAC official website. www.siblac.org. Chronicle, 2003. Accessed on 16/11/2014.

to say here are more Bhutias than Lepchas in Sikkim. The letter went on adding, “The SIBLAC representatives in Delhi constituted mostly of Tibetans and monks residing in Delhi who was made to wear Lepcha dresses and presented as Lepchas from Sikkim. We understand that there were no Lepchas representing the SIBLAC in the delegation and demonstration organized by the SIBLAC.”⁷⁷

The Lepcha organizations had always viewed the Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee as the Bhutia organization and severed the relationship. The activities of the Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee had given way to emergence of ethnic organization like Gorkha Apex Committee in 2003. The contradiction between the two over the issue of defacement of the statue of Bhanu Bhakta (Nepali Poet) and controversy over the construction of Mandir at Khecheopalri Lake had almost resulted in communal riot at Geyzing in West Sikkim. The circulation of pamphlet targeting particular community further deteriorated ethnic harmony in Sikkim. But, apparently, the Apex Committee in its long struggle had made impact in the State as well as has achieved certain success. The Apex Committee’s struggle for survival still goes on.

Impact and Achievement

- Awareness among the Sikkimese people to understand about their legitimate socio-politico-economic rights and its significance as enshrined in Article 371F of the Indian Constitution.
- Drawing of the national attention as regards the Sikkimese Bhutia Lepcha's socio-politico-economic issues and the constant threats being faced by them.
- Successive Indian governments are being apprised of the Sikkimese Bhutia Lepcha's demands regularly.

⁷⁷ Now, Newspaper, Gangtok. Wednesday, October, 20-04 November, 2003. P. 4.

- Indian National Congress recognized the issues of the Sikkimese Bhutia Lepcha, raised by the SIBLAC, vide its letter of support in 2004, signed by Shri Salman Khurshid, a very senior Congress leader.
- Provision has been accorded by the Information Ministry for the broadcasting of a daily news item in the Sikkimese Bhutia language through the All India Radio (Gangtok) after SIBLAC pursued the matter with and of the positive response of Hon'ble Information Minister Shri Priya Ranjan Das Munshi.
- Union Home Ministry's constant concern as regard demand for proportionate increase of the BL Seats in the event, the strength of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly is increased.
- National Scheduled Tribes Commission and National Minority Commission's recognition and prompt action in regard to SIBLAC's demands seeking amendments to the Sikkim Scheduled Tribe Order 1978 and the Representation of People (Amendment) Act 1980.
- Successful Satyagraha Dharna at New Delhi on September 27, 2003 by about four hundred SIBLAC supporters, including Monks and women, to pursue its demands, first ever to be so organized from Sikkim.
- Historic victory on the Khachoepalri Lake defilement case in the Supreme Court of India in 2007 (Acharya Tshering Lama and others vs. State of Sikkim and others, 2007).⁷⁸

Gorkha Apex committee (GAC)

The Gorkha Apex Committee was formed in May 2003 at Singtam under the leadership of Shri G.M. Rai, one of the founder members of the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) Party.⁷⁹ It was a

⁷⁸ SIBLAC, Official website. www.Siblac.org. Accessed on 20/1/2015.

⁷⁹ Gurung, Op.cit. P. 390.

non-political organization of the Sikkimese Nepalese (Gorkha) intended to work for the fulfillment of the following objectives:

- (a) To bring awareness among the different sections of the Gorkha community, emphasize on the need to live in peace and harmony, duly recognized the democratic values of equality- social, cultural, economic- to safeguard the sovereignty and integrity of India.
- (b) To safeguard the rights and liberties of the different sections of the Gorkha community and to move the appropriate forums for seeking redressal.
- (c) To initiate, assist and promote schemes and programmes for the upliftment of the different sections of the Gorkha community.

The Gorkha Apex Committee was the first organization in Sikkim to oppose Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee's demands publicly. It made its first official representation to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during his visit to Sikkim and has also submitted a memorandum to the Delimitation Commission.⁸⁰ The Committee said that the reservation of seats in the State Assembly should be decided solely on the basis of population. It contends that 13 seats (including the one Sangha seat) for the Bhutia-Lepchas constitute 40 % of the 32 member State Assembly for 20 % of the population which the Bhutia-Lepchas constitute is unconstitutional and skewed. The Committee also demanded that the seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas be reduced to 7 in proportion to their population in Sikkim and that the remaining 5 seats be adjusted against the Limboos and Tamangs. The Committee also alleged that reserving a seat on the basis of religion (Sangha) goes against the secular credential of the country.⁸¹

⁸⁰ The Telegraph, Op.cit. Monday, April 21, 2003. Title, (Gorkha Twist to seat debate).

⁸¹ Now, Newspaper, Gangtok. Wednesday, April 23-30, 2003. P. 5.

The Gorkha Apex Committee had narrowed its protests targeting mainly the Bhutia community. The Committee said that the Bhutias have cornered most of the benefits reserved for the collective Bhutia-Lepcha community in Sikkim. The Gorkha Apex Committee supported the All Sikkim Lepcha Joint Action Committee's demand for 50 % reservation in the 12 Bhutia-Lepcha reserved seats and amendment to Revenue Order No. 1 seeking to prohibit the Bhutias from buying Lepcha lands. Further, the Committee also demanded prohibition of alienation of the Nepalese land to the Bhutia-Lepcha. It also demanded for the reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in the State and increase in the seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes in the State.⁸²

The stand taken by the Gorkha Apex Committee obviously created ethnic tension in Sikkim. Considering the deteriorating condition of communal harmony, Shri G.m. Rai was expelled from the primary membership of the Sikkim Democratic Front party on 31 March, 2004.⁸³ A day before his expulsion he converted the organization into a political organization, called Sikkim Gorkha Democratic Party. Shri G.M. Rai contested the 7th Assembly Election as an independent candidate from the Central Pandam constituency but was defeated by the Sikkim Democratic front candidate Shri somnath Poudyal, the brother of Ram Chandra Poudyal.⁸⁴ In 2005 the party was renamed as Sikkim Gorkha Prajatantrik Party.

Sikkim/Denzong Sherpa association

The Denzong Sherpa Association registered in 1984 at Gangtok.⁸⁵ Its main objectives were to promote and protect their language and literature, socio-cultural interest and also to work in the field of economic and political development of the community. In 1978 the community was included in

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Hindustan Times, April 3, 2004. Title (Rai Expelled from SDF).

⁸⁴ Statistical Report on General Election, 2004, Legislative Assembly of Sikkim.

⁸⁵ Subha, J.R. (2008). *History, Cluture and Custom of Sikkim*. Gyan Publishing House, Sikkim. India. P. 176.

the Bhutia groups and declared Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim. The Sherpas who were legally eligible to contest election from the 12 reserved seats in the Assembly after the enactment of the Representation of people (Amendment) Act, 1980, were, however denied representation.

In 1994, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad floated two Sherpa candidates from the Bhutia-Lepcha reserved constituencies- Phurba Sherpa from Rinchenpong and Mingma Sherpa from the Rakdong Tintek Assembly constituencies. Though only one of the two Sherpa candidates, i.e., Mingma Sherpa, was elected, it created lot of resentment among the Bhutias.⁸⁶ Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC) condemned the policy of the Sikkim Sangram Parishad and demanded restoration of the original definition of the Bhutia as enshrined in the Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917. The organization urged that the 12 seats reserved in the State Assembly were exclusively meant for the priginal Bhutia-Lepcha community alone and the Sherpas, including eight other Bhutia sub-groups, were not eligible to contest elections from the above 12 reserved seats.

The Sikkim Sherpa Association on the other hand had been contending that the Sherpas of Sikkim had been traditionally recognized as the Bhutia of Sikkim. Quoting from Risley's Gazetteer of Sikkim, the Association contented that Sikkim's Sherpas were Buddhist and accepted as Sherpa Bhutia in Sikkim as far back as in the census of 1891. The Association was also critical of the "use and throw" treatment meted out to the community by various organizations, both political and otherwise. In the first press conference held on 5th February 2004, the President of the Association, Phurba Sherpa, clarified that the Sherpas was included in the definition of 'Bhutia' in 1978 because that suited the political requirement of the time to inflate the Bhutia population figures and not because there was any lobbying by the Sherpas for such recognition. He further stated, "Inclusion of Sherpas as Bhutias was obviously motivated with the intension to acquire more seats for the Bhutia-

⁸⁶ Statistical Report, Op.cit, 1994.

Lepcha segment. They succeed and after having secure 12 seats, they want to evict us from the Bhutia bracket, after 26 years. This is sleazy move and very demeaning towards the Sherpas.⁸⁷

The Sherpa have been at the receiving end of demands for their removal from the Bhutia bracket for a long time and now they have their own demands. It demanded that the seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly be notified as reserved for Scheduled Tribes. It further contended that the Representation of People Act, 1980, makes it implicit that the 12 seats were reserved for the “minority Scheduled Tribes” and “wrongly termed” as reserved for Bhutia-Lepchas. This reflects that the seats have been reserved not on the basis of minority Scheduled Tribes, but on caste basis. Hence, in this context, the Association submitted its proposal that the reservation of 12 Assembly seats may be made on the basis of community such as in the case of Scheduled Castes in place of Bhutia-Lepcha reserved (which were reserved on caste basis) so as to avoid communal tension and disunity, misunderstanding among different ethnic tribal communities of Sikkim.⁸⁸

In the context of Sikkim, the identity of the Sherpa community is not clear. They have been included in the Bhutia group in 1978 which recognized as the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim but considering certain other legal-political provisions presently prevailing in Sikkim, the community is often subjected to denial of benefits. For instance, they cannot buy Bhutia-lepcha lands and do not have separate seat reserved in the State Legislature. Thus, with the gradual advancement in the field of education, they have become more assertive and more vocal about their rights and interests.

Sikkim Limboo-Tamang Joint Action Committee (SLTAC)

The Sikkim Limboo-Tamang Jiont Action Committee (SLTJAC) was formed in 2003 with an objective to work for the reservation of seats for the Limboo-Tamang tribal communities. It is to be

⁸⁷ Now, Newspaper, Gangtok. 11-17 February, 2004. P. 6.

⁸⁸ Now, Newspaper, Gangtok. 23-30 April, 2003. P. 9.

noted that, unlike the normal practice, the two communities were recognized as Scheduled Tribes in January 2003⁸⁹ though without specifying the number of seats to be reserved for them in the legislative Assembly of Sikkim.

According to the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 1950, as amended in 1980, 12 seats are reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha, 2 for the Scheduled Castes, 1 for the Sangha and remaining 17 as general seats in a 32 member State Assembly.⁹⁰ Thus, as of now, no seat is reserved for the Scheduled Tribes community in the State Assembly and so far section 7(1A) of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 1950 is not amended, the Limboo and Tamang tribal community cannot have seats in the Assembly. Due to this the communities were disillusioned and want seat reservation in the State Assembly.

The Sikkim Limboo Tamang Joint Action Committee (P.R Subba group) demanded reservation of seats for the two communities in the Assembly without restructuring the Assembly constituencies.⁹¹ In the memorandum to Delimitation Commission the Committee urged not to go ahead with the exercise till a census to update the population of Limboo and Tamang tribes was taken up, a prerequisite for granting them their share of reserved State Assembly seats. The basis for delimitation in the hill State as in other States are the 2001 census figures which do not include Limboos and Tamangs as Scheduled Tribes since they were accorded tribal status only in 2003. Ever since they were granted tribal status in January 2003, the two communities have been demanding their share of reserved Assembly seats in the State.⁹² The Committee demanded amendment to the Representation of People (Amendment) Act, 1950, as amended in 1980, and to take necessary step

⁸⁹ Sikkim State Archives. *Gazette No. 113. Notification No.17/Home/2003*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 21/11/2014.

⁹⁰ Sikkim State Archives. *Gazette No. 75. Representation of the People (Amendment), Ordinance, 1979*. Sikkimarchives.gov.in. Accessed on 21/11/2014.

⁹¹ Now, Newspaper, Gangtok. 09-15 April, 2003. P. 4.

⁹² Hindustan Times, September 8, 2005. Title (Limbu-Tamang forum seeks deferment of delimitation in Sikkim).

required for expediting the process for seat reservation before the commencement of the Assembly election scheduled in 2004. The State government also requested the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Bajpai, for conduction special census of the Limboos and Tamangs in order to fulfill the constitutional obligation mentioned under article 332 (1) and (3) of the Constitution of India.⁹³

On 3 May, 2005, Sikkim Limboo Tamang Jooint Action Committee submitted memorandum to the Governor of State, V. Rama Rao, demanding his intervention on several issues pertaining to the political rights of the Limboo and Tamnag community, which includes holding of census before the delimitation process starts, reservation of seats for the community in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly as well as in the ensuing Panchayat and Municipality elections. They said that despite their inclusion on the Scheduled Tribe category, Limboo-Tamang were the only community in the country who had been deprived of their political rights. They further accused the State Government of not being sincere in according the community its political rights and instead limiting the seat reservation issue only within the parameter of political propaganda stating it as unconstitutional and illegal. The Committee added that the depriving the political rights to the Limboo and Tamangs was a violation of Article 332 of the constitution, which deals with the seat reservation for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. They urged the Governor to apprise the Central Government of this issue and further use his special powers to give proper instruction to the concerned authorities in the State in this regard.⁹⁴

In response to the demands of Committee, the Chief Minister, Pawan Kumar Chamling said that his party had won tribal status for Limboos and Tamangs, and assured that it was only the

⁹³ Article 332(1) says seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, in the Legislative Assembly of every States, except the autonomous district of Assam, and clause (3) says the number of seats reserved for the Schedule Castes of the Tribes in the Assembly of any state under clause (1) shall bear, as nearly as may be, same proportionate to the total number of seats in the Assembly as the population of Scheduled Castes or Tribes in the State or part of the state, in respect of which seats are so reserved.

⁹⁴ Now, Newspaper, Gangtok. 4th May, 2005. P. 4.

Sikkim Democratic Front which was serious about and capable of getting Limboo and Tamangs seats reserved in the State Assembly.⁹⁵ On 4th December, 2005, Chief Minister, Chamling, accompanied by all cabinet members and legislators of the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front, requested Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh to look into the demands. Reservation of seats for the Limboos and Tamangs community of the state topped the demand chart. Chamling said a census of Limboo and Tamang people should be conducted soon to allocate seat in the Legislative Assembly as envisaged under Article 332 of Indian Constitution. According to him, the state government's request to raise the number of seats from the present 32 to 40 in order to accommodate the Limboos and Tamangs, he also reiterated that the 12 seats reserved for the Bhutias and Lepchas and the one for Sangha be left untouched.

For the last many years the issue of reservation of seats for the Limboo and Tamangs tribal communities remained undecided. The Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee apprehended domination of the Nepalese in the Assembly if seats were raised to 40 in order to accommodate seats for Limboo-Tamang tribal communities. Hence, they also demanded for corresponding enhancement of the Bhutia-Lepcha seats should the Assembly seats were raised to 40. This opposition from the rival organization has been setback in the fulfillment of the demands. However, the Chief Minister Chamling has been very optimistic on this issue and has also asked the State census department to enumerate Limboo and Tamang tribal communities separately in the 2011 census for which the process has been begun since April 1, 2010.

⁹⁵ Now, Newspaper, Gangtok. 04-10 February, 2003. P. 5.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic cultural politics as a social phenomenon involves the issues of a particular variant of group consciousness and group identity in which members of a group irrespective of their social positions are viewed as a cohesive formation without any class barriers. In any given society social exchanges and communication are based on and within a cultural framework. This social phenomenon is simply reflected in politics. Political, articulation, communication as well as decision-making occur under the shadow of ethnic consideration. Mostly ethnicity is perceived as a political resource employed by groups, classes, elites and others. From this view point ethnic politics involves manipulation of cultural sentiments to achieve certain tangible goals. Competition for resources between distinct ethnic groups actually gives birth to ethnic political mobilization. The deprived group often resort to cultural sentiments and mobilize people to gain a share of resources, contrarily, the privileged also may fall back upon culture for the protection of their status and resources. It is also seen that often the elites of a community or the middle classes belonging to a particular ethnicity manipulate ethnic sentiment to realize their own objectives.

In such analyses, however, political structures and institutions are presented as passive recipient of pressures emanating from socio-economic structures and formation. The role of the state, political parties and other political organizations in containing ethnic consciousness is seldom recognized. In the history of Sikkim, however, it is apparent that ethnic division among various communities actually was a consequence of specific laws and state policies which discriminated against particular communities, and therefore ultimately produced separateness and mistrust in the minds of members of different communities.

The attempt of the state to exclude certain groups from the process of governance and from resources on the basis of ethnic criteria can create a political system founded upon ethnic consideration. Sometimes State may glorify or promote a particular culture of language, generally that of a dominant group, as national culture or national language. Thus, the ethnic relationship in a multicultural society expresses in terms of apprehension over such step of State and show inability to cope with the idea of cultural or linguistic uniformity. It intensifies demands for official status and activities for protection and promotion become significant. This exactly happened in Sikkim under the Bhutia monarchy and the process continued partly even under parliamentary form of government after merger of Sikkim with India. Similarly, political parties and other political organizations also like the state have determinate relation with increase or decrease of ethnic consciousness. The political parties may try to promote a secular consciousness. On the other hand, parties may pick up ethnic cultural differences as a natural choice for political mobilization by falling back upon social bonds, traditional social structures and community sentiments. Through ethnic identity political parties may try to appeal to electorate in ethnic terms. In case of Sikkim also it is evident that the activities of political parties and other social organizations often have aggravated ethnic tensions as a result of articulation of exclusive community demands and slogan.

An examination of the government policies and decisions during the pre-merger period in Sikkim reflect ample indications that they were designed to favour politically dominant ethnic community in all conceivable fields. For instance, the Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917 prohibited Nepalis from buying Bhutia-Lepcha land while the same rule favours the Bhutia to have an access over the Lepcha land. Two separate rate of revenue for the Bhutia-Lepchas and Nepalese for the same amount and quality of land. Further, Nepalese were discriminated during Chogyal time, they were treated very harshly. There was practiced of slavery and forced labour in the kingdom. Kazis and elites used to exploit them in all

possible ways. In the business field as well Nepalese were given limited access in terms of carrying out their business.

More sinister for democratic forces and the majority Nepali community was the introduction of the evil of notorious 'parity formula', equating the minority Bhutia-Lepcha with the majority Nepalese. This formula also denied separate representation to the Lepchas. Needless to add that this formula was further extended to all walks of life in Sikkimese administration causing strong resentment among the sufferers. In fact, parity formula was not actually parity in terms of democracy. There was no equity in the distribution of seats to the communities. Giving equal representation of seats for both minority and majority was seen as undemocratic. Introduction of parity system was the curse of communalism into the very constitutional framework. In real sense parity formula was designed to check the domination of the Nepalese in the affairs of the State. Similarly, the communal pattern of electoral process, voting procedure, counting system and even election tribunals were skewed in such a way that the Nepalese in general and democratic forces in particular was at disadvantage. Denying adequate representation to the Nepalese in the legislative and executive organs of the government are instances of differential treatment meted out to the Nepalese during the pre-merger period. Such governmental policies discriminating against the Nepalese based on race or cultural identity naturally created a sense of alienation among the latter.

The Chogyal government justified differential treatment on the ground that the Nepalese were migrants and it was legitimate to protect and promote the cause and interest of the Bhutias-Lepchas who were considered indigenous populations of Sikkim, though many tribes which pass by the name Nepali today were present in Sikkim long before the establishment of the Bhutia rule in Sikkim. Thus, what occurred in Sikkim was a state sponsored rewriting of history which transformed some indigenous inhabitants into migrants. Apart from this, by highlighting politically intended concept like 'blood

brotherhood' or 'Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum' either by including or excluding communities arbitrarily in the official discourses further strengthened the feeling of alienation or separateness among those who have been sometimes excluded or included in the official concept of indigenous people.

More importantly, the monarchy in Sikkim and Bhutia elites of royal court defined the Sikkimese nation in terms of Bhutia-Lepcha culture and Buddhism which effectively excluded the Hindu Nepalese. In this context it may be stated that the ethnic segregation may also take place in response to the way state involves in the process of constructing a particular culture as a national culture or national identity. The establishment of the Namgyal dynasty in 1642 has facilitated construction of a distinct Sikkimese identity based on the cultural aspirations of the ruling community. The religion of the ruling community, i.e. Tibetan Buddhism, became the State religion and monasteries and other ritualistic activities as symbols of Sikkimese identity. This happened despite the fact that Sikkim was multi-cultural and multi-religious society. Interestingly, entry to some of these monasteries was forbidden to other Sikkimese, including the Lepchas. During the pre-merger period the Lepchas and Nepalese found difficulties in adapting to the Tibetan version of national culture. In the post-merger period attempts to unify cultural aspirations of three ethnic communities of Sikkim have been made, though symbols of Bhutia culture, however, remained dominant as in the earlier days, including representation in the political institution.

The merger of Sikkim with India in 1975 and introduction of parliamentary democracy generated expectation that ethnic or communal discrimination and politics based on ethnic identity would gradually make way for equitable society and secular political mobilization. But, unlike the expectation the government of India decided to continue with the provisions which existed in Sikkim before the merger. In other words, the State rules which discriminated the Nepalese on racial/cultural/religious grounds such as Revenue Order No. 1, communal voting and parity formula etc. were provided

constitutional sanctions (Article 371F) under the parliamentary democratic and secular constitution of India. Thus, when political mobilization took place, ethnic demands continue to dominate political scenes in Sikkim and the governing rules and policies of the Indian government continue to reflect ethnic-cultural identity as a basis for political-administrative arrangement and distribution of resources. The constitutional arrangement of 1975, which was expected to lessen ethnic differences, was also directly or indirectly responsible for sustaining ethnic differences and, in some cases aggravating it further.

The ethnic consciousness among the communities is also seen in terms of Scheduled Tribe status. Initially, of all the other communities only Bhutias-Lepchas were given the Scheduled Tribe status, this policy of the State government denying Scheduled Tribe status to some deserving communities in favour of certain other communities naturally created a feeling of alienation and discrimination among the communities who were denied Scheduled Tribe status. Thus, as the demand for scheduled tribe status grew along community line level of apprehension among various communities also increased. In 1978, the Bhutia resented to the idea of inclusion of eight other communities in the Bhutia fold and again in 2006 inclusion of Limboos and Tamangs in the Scheduled Tribe list has evoked bitter opposition from Lepchas and Bhutias who resented the dilution of their indigenous and are not prepared to share their entitlement with other groups. On the other hand, the Limboos and Tamangs resented to the government policy which denied them any claim to seats reserved for tribal in the State Legislative Assembly, and are demanding political reservation similar to what is provisioned for the Lepchas and the Bhutias in the Constitution.

Political parties and other organizations like the state are also important factors of ethnic political mobilizations. In the context of Sikkim it is found that the parties and organizations can be classified into three categories. First, parties with a general name and secular goal but use ethnic terminology,

attachments and demands for electoral and other political purposes. The Sikkim National Party and Sikkim State Congress under the monarchy fall into this category. Sikkim Sangram Parishad and Sikkim Democratic Front may also be included in this category. Secondly, parties with distinct ethnic regional bias but maintain some degree of restraint like the Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary). In the third category fall aggressive parties and organizations which often indulge in hate campaigns. These are small groups but electorally are not very successful. Such parties and groups, therefore, function more or less like a pressure group. The Sikkim National Party during the pre-merger period openly advocated in favour of the monarchy and interests of the Bhutia-Lepcha category, particularly the Bhutias. The campaigns of the National Party definitely created a gulf between the Nepalese in the one hand and Bhutia-Lepchas in the other.

The election campaign of Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) favouring the interests of the concerned community also contributed towards the escalation of ethnic tensions in recent times. On the other hand Sikkim Sangram Parishad's call for Sikkimese identity, Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha identity definitely helped in reducing ethnic tension among various communities though for short period of time. In comparison, the present ruling Sikkim Democratic Front party, though had clear ethnic bias in the beginning, has been, to a large extent, successful appeasing ethnic tension through careful policies of all-inclusive and economic opportunities. This also shows the fact that campaigns by political parties may generate a particular type of consciousness which may either contain or accentuate ethnic tensions.

All the state policies, activities of political parties and social organizations and ideas propagated by rulers and political leaders have contributed to the development of a particular type of community perception about itself and about other communities. It is necessary to throw light on perception of respective communities in this context. The Bhutias believed that the signing of blood brotherhood pact with the Lepchas and establishment of their rule in Sikkim was historically destined and prophesized

according to their intricate lamaist tradition. By virtue of the pact the Bhutia became the legitimate ruler of Sikkim and protection of the Lepchas was considered their solemn pledge. The use of hybrid term 'Bhutia-Lepcha' or simply 'BL' stands for this relationship. But, in the real sense Bhutias wanted to gain the support of Lepchas to build their rule and to dominate the state politics.

But, the contemporary educated Lepchas do not consider Bhutias as one of them or believe in combined 'Bhutia-Lepcha' identity. They view it as symbol of dependant-dominant relationship prevailing arbitrarily between the two ever since the foundation of the Bhutia rule in Sikkim. Past events show that the Lepchas did very often deny that the Bhutia ruler was their king or Sikkim as their kingdom. At present, majority of educated Lepchas feel that the Bhutias have denied them distinct position in the society and cornered the benefits meant for them as scheduled tribes. They want protection of their land from the Bhutia and equal representation with that of the Bhutias in all respect. The Lepchas are separate community and want to be identified as Lepchas and certainly not as Bhutia-Lepcha.

Nepalese have been subject to discrimination of various kinds during the theocratic monarchical regime of the Namgyal dynasty. When the political development began in the late 1940s it was natural for the majority Nepalese to demand for democratic government as a means for eliminating discrimination and making them accessible to decision making organs of the state and resources of other kinds. The reservation of seats in the political institution and recognition of certain old laws of Sikkim after the merger are viewed as a distinct political identity of the people of Sikkim. But the denial of this political identity for the Nepalese i.e. abolition of Nepali seats in 1979 and continuation of the old Sikkimese laws which discriminated the Nepalese in the past, in fact, constitute major cause of concern and apprehension for the Sikkimese Nepalese. Nepalese are also apprehensive to the way government policies have been formulated, by and large, undermining the interest of the Sikkimese

Nepalese. For instance, seats are reserved for the minority Bhutia-Lepcha (actually dominated by the Bhutias) population whereas the seats reserved for the Nepalese in the State Assembly earlier was abolished, denial of tribal status to various tribes of the Nepali community and the denial of seats in the State Assembly for the tribes (Limboos and Tamangs) of the Nepali community. This along with the influx from other parts of India has further aroused the level of concern for the Nepalese in Sikkim.

The perception of different communities about others also created divergent views about Sikkimese identity and the place of the community in Sikkimese society. Because of divergent perception, different ethnic groups approached the issue of Sikkimese identity from different angles. In this context, political parties and ethnic organizations also have presented the concept of Sikkimese national identity in different ways. For instance, for Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari former Chief Minister of Sikkim, the Sikkimese identity has been associated with the issue of de-merger of Sikkim. Similarly, many others viewed Sikkimese identity with reference to the continuation of the institution of the Chogyal should Sikkim was denied free access to run the affairs of the state. On the other hand, for the ethnic organization like Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC), the Sikkimese identity was very much related with the concept of exclusion of the Nepalese and other Bhutias. For the Sikkim Democratic Front Sikkimese identity is inclusive in the sense that it not only represents political or cultural elements of the major communities but also include aspirations of cultural variants found within the larger Nepali or Bhutia communities.

In this context, Sikkimese identity has been referred in terms of specific community or cultural identity of a particular community or communities. Such notion of identity along with its agenda of exclusion or inclusion has produced a chain reaction in form of emergence of several other ethnic organizations emphasizing community interests and identity. Thus the exclusionist view of the Sikkim identity and feeling of being excluded may have given way for the creation of ethnic identity and

consciousness and emergence of ethnic organizations demanding community identity. For instance, the Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Ong Seyzum (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association) demands for separate identity for the Lepcha community outside the common reference of 'Bhutia-Lepcha' and protection of their interest from the Bhutias. The Limboo and Tamang organization, called Sikkim Limboo-Tamang Joint Action Committee (SLTAC), also claims that Limboos are not Nepalese and demands seats reservation for Limboos and Tamangs in the State Assembly; the Bhutia organizations like Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee demand for exclusion of 'other Bhutias' from the present definition of the Bhutias; the Sikkim Sherpa Association demands for exclusion of kith and kin of royal family and the Kazis from the status of the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim etc. Similarly, various groups within the Nepali community demand for self identity different from general term as Nepali. Sometimes, the identity question involves 'Sikkimese' as against the 'Plainsmen'.

Therefore, Sikkimese identity is not always clear and often re-demarcated. It is because of this flexibility, the Sikkimese identity often gets interwoven with the community identity. In brief, it gives an opportunity for mistreatment of ethnic identity issues at the political level. Therefore, the political parties operating in Sikkim are also seemed to have fallen upon such ethnic demands and generally rely on ethnic demands and alignment for electoral success. The political parties are also often referred to with the community or group name, though they deny for being so. For example, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad party was known as Upper caste party and the Sikkim Democratic Front party is associated with the Other Backward Caste or community. With reference to Sikkim, ethnic issues often overshadow political issues or in certain cases ethnic issues are even presented as general political issues.

It seems attitude of members of government, state policies, activities of political parties; ethnic organizations etc. significantly contributed to the development and consolidation of ethnic

consciousness and politics. State and political parties create an atmosphere in which ethnic segregation and alienation occur. Such alienation tends to develop a particular perception about other communities and about identity itself. Such developments strengthen ethnic cultural politics. It appears that ethnic consciousness and mobilization in Sikkim has evolved in close relations with state policies and party politics. In this sense ethnic consciousness is uncertain and can be contained through political actions.

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