

Chapter V

Conclusion

Sikkim is not covered by the operation of classical Colonialism. It is in the fringe and so the impact was marginal. The nature of colonial penetration and its operation in Sikkim was not the same compared to other classical colonial situations. In a classical colonial situation the colony is subordinated (politically, militarily, administratively, economically, socially and culturally) by overthrowing the ruler and ruling class of the colony. The Imperialist power completely dominates the political, administrative and economic resources of the colony to the needs and requirements of the imperialist power.¹ Sikkimi situation during the colonial period had a different picture. The ruler was never overthrown; rather he was urged to occupy the throne with nominal responsibilities under British supervision. Consequently, after 1918 when the next ruler Sir Tashi Namgyal was moulded under the British line of thinking, administrative power was restored to him. However, political, military and commercial powers were still rested in the hands of the British.² The British also did not exploit the economic resources to that extreme extent compared to other colonial situation. They targeted Tibetan trade and Sikkim was utilized as trade route to Tibet.

In a classic colony none of the indigenous upper class share state power in the colony, none of them are part of the ruling class. The metropolitan ruling class may share the social surplus in the colony with indigenous upper class but it does not share power with them. Not even princes, regents, and landlords have a share in colonial state power. In the case of Sikkim the colonizer allowed the indigenous upper class and the royal family to share power with the metropolitan class.³ Further a new class consisting of *Kazis* and *Newar Thikadars* were created and empowered to implement the British policies in the state. Thus, the Sikkim situation was different and consequently the impact was also marginal.

In a classic colony there are different stages of Colonialism *viz* (a) period of monopoly trade and direct appropriation (b) era of industrial capitalization and free trade and (c) era of foreign investment and

international competition for colonies.⁴ Sikkim did not experience all these stages of Colonialism. In fact the state had only one stage i.e. the colonial administrative controlling stage under which the local elite were incorporated in the British project of socio-economic transformation of the state. In view of the Sikkimi situation it can be said that the nature of colonial operation in the state was different and their objective at that point of time was more economic and cultural than mere political subjugation.

Colonialism penetrated into Sikkim in a new garb. The colonizer attempted to realize their objectives more particularly administrative, economic and cultural reducing the ruler to a mere puppet. His powers were reduced to such an extent that he was helpless to voice his grievances. In addition to this he was also kept out of power for few years till the obstacles of the British were removed. The British created a set of elite who could be easily moulded in the British line of thinking. They could be proved a class of people Sikkimese in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. With the help of these 'mimic' the British realized their objectives of cultural transformation in the state. They also became successful to de-Tibetanise the Sikkimese traditional administrative structure. J.C. White, the first Political Officer replaced the old and traditional structure of feudalism based on Tibetan theocracy with the creation of eight member council. Most of the members in the council were chosen who opposed Tibetan affiliation. With the help of these councilors White remodeled the political structure of the state. The ruler was kept outside of his routine work and the Political Officer acted as the de-facto ruler of the state. This arrangement continued till the year 1918. After this year administrative power was restored to the *Maharaja* under the British Political Officer's supervision.⁵

Nevertheless, for the purpose of administrative convenience the British intended to apply the British administrative, economic, judicial and educational policies. At the initial stage the British Political Officer felt the urgency to create a group of people who could be easily moulded to the British idea of 'Construction'. This was done so because the ruler could not be brought to the British line of ideas so easily. Therefore, to realize their objectives the British tried to de-Tibetanise the existing political structure. This work was not so easy. To make the process easy they had undertaken a number of reformative measures. Under these measures Sikkim was

converted into a proto-type British colony different from the classical colony.

The reformative measures of the British created an aristocratic class in hierarchical order with judicial and executive powers in the rural area. They were called the *Thikadars*, *Mukthiyas*, *Mandals*, and *Karbaris*. They exercised powers in favour of the British. They were political missionaries created by the British to achieve their socio-economic objectives. The British introduced a lessee system on contractual basis for specific period on a fixed annual rent. To realize the taxes timely the British entrusted the power for its collection to the middleman known as landlords (*Kazis* and *Thikadars*). The *Kazis* and *Thikadars* again empowered the *Mandals* to collect the revenues at any cost and send the same to the respective *Kazis* who lived in towns and enjoyed a life of luxury and very seldom visited their estates and helped the *Thikadars* whenever required.⁶

The newly created landlords were also empowered to exercise judicial powers in addition to their executive powers. A judicial court in the British model was set up in 1916 under an independent and legally qualified judge. The lower courts of the landlords came under the supervision of the new court, called the chief court. This was a landmark in the administrative history of Sikkim. After 1918 a three tier judicial system was established. The whole state had been divided into *Ilakhas*, which were either leased out to various leases or placed under managers or Monasteries. Every lease holder, who was called *Thikadar* was invested with some class of judicial powers both civil and criminal. The judicial measures of the British weakened the traditional Sikkimese institutions. These measures helped the British to channelise the Sikkim judicial system in the British line. This also helped for the growth of a judicial class and this class being influenced by the western ideas in course of time interfered in the debate and reformed the old structure. The monopoly of the *Kazis* and *Thikadars* was challenged by these new judicial courts.⁷

Educational reforms of the British administration played a significant role in educating the future elite of the state in the British line. One of the basic objectives of the British administration in Sikkim during the colonial period was to create a section of people who could be converted as informer to suit British interest in the state. Therefore, the British established English medium schools in the state. The British targeted three main categories *viz* the royal princes, the *Kazis* and the *Newar Thikadars* to be educated under

English education in the beginning. The sons of leading *Kazis/ Lamas* and *Newar Thikadars* were exposed for English education. A number of feudal youths were sent abroad for western education. Similarly other feudal youths were also given the English education inside the state. The products of these schools helped the British to implement their policy of socio-economic transformation in the state. Very few commoners could avail the benefits of western education because of their poverty. In most of the cases the beneficiaries were the *Kazis, Lamas* and the *Newar Thikadars*.

The Scottish mission and the Scandinavian alliance mission also played a very important role to educate rural mass in the state. They opened a number of schools in the rural area. The missions had two objectives in view. One was to educate the rural masses through English education and the other was to attract the poor and helpless people towards Christianity. In spite of the objections raised by the *Maharaja* for conversion a small section of the Sikkimese more particularly the Lepchas were converted to Christianity. The Government of Sikkim also contributed a sizeable amount to these missions for the spread of English education. Apart from educating the children of the rural people the missions were also involved in other social activities such as organizing health camp and other humanitarian activities to help the poor and needy. The mission contended that they preferred to civilize the untamed and wild natives, more particularly the Lepchas by establishing schools, hospitals, dispensaries and industrial schools. Similarly some Nepalese were also converted to Christianity. However, the Political Officer's administration did not directly involve in the process but indirectly helped the mission activity in the state. The converts began to receive English education and other economic benefits and this section of people in due course came in the limelight and influenced in the administrative process of the Government. These converts tried to identify as a distinct group among the Sikkimese people. Though their role in the administration was insignificant still they contributed to the socio-cultural transformation policy of the British. The other important feature of the missionary activities was the spread of female education in Sikkim. With the establishment of Girls' School in Gangtok in 1923 female education took a new turn. During 40s and 50s of the 20th century even females were drawn towards westernization.⁸

Because of the British reformative scheme more particularly in education a distinct society, ready to accept the western model was emerged

in Sikkim. Though the degree of imitation was not to the extreme extent alike other colonial situations still they tried to mould themselves in the British line of thinking. This process presumably leads to some cultural hybridization. The society that emerged out of the western influence can better be termed as 'mimic' society. It was caused by the subversion of the authenticity of traditional culture. With the help of this group the British tried to construct the 'other' and the 'we' as binary opposite to each other. It is very interesting to know the question why was the British Political Officer so interested to give English education to the princes and the landlords in Sikkim? Why did they take initiative to send them to England and elsewhere for future studies? The answer definitely is that it was one of the policies of the colonizer to conquer the mind of the colonised to transform them into a 'subject'. They wanted to metamorphose some Sikkimese as 'native informers'. In this context it can be said that Sidkeong Tulku and his *Kazi* friends whom the Political Officer had chosen for English studies in the initial stage were sent to Oxford for western education. They remained in close association with the Europeans, which helped them to imitate western culture. The *Kumar* was fully influenced by western culture. His mind was so changed that after his return he encouraged for the establishment of English schools both for boys and girls. Though the influence of the western ideas on *Kumar* was not so much extreme alike the 'mimic' in other colonial countries still English culture and its influence changed the mindset of the prince. The *Kumar* did not totally reject the traditional culture. His associations with the Europeans could produce a hybrid culture and as a result he decided to implant it in Sikkim. He initiated a number of social reforms. Under British education and its influence he realized that the traditional set of culture was ought to be updated in the British model. He thought that the traditional system such as salutation by prostration before the *Lamas* and the *Kazis* and polyandry were unusual and accordingly he ordered through the council for its eradication. He concentrated much to eradicate social evils in the society. Therefore, his efforts were the product of the hybridization culture.

Similarly because of English education the mind set of the local elite also changed. The British also did not lack behind to convert the local elite into native 'informers'. They conquered the mind of the colonized. The consequences of the colonial overtures in Sikkim had many facets in the

form of a 'mimic' society apparently rational and western in outlook and been foisted on a traditional society. Sikkim was conceptually treated as a British colony for they tried to transform it into a proto-type British colony. Wilful construction of the British created a society in Sikkim with 'Black skin White mask' known as 'mimic' society. This society was instrumental to execute British interest in the state. The local elite *viz* the *Kazis* and *Thikadars* mind set was equally changed because of western influence, which led to the birth of a hybrid culture. This hybrid mindset forced the 'mimic' to conceive the view that the metropolitan culture was modern and the traditional culture as primitive and backward. The fact is that the 'mimic' conception of modernization was highly influenced by the western ideas. At different levels the 'mimic' was forced upon the traditional society. Because of the British reformative measures 'mimics' life style changed. They attempted to change their livelihood. They began to imitate British style of living. They also imitated British dress and food habits.

The culture, which the 'mimic' had imitated from the British, was not a carbon copy of the west but it was a mixture of the west and the east *i.e.* a hybrid culture. This culture could influence a very small section of the Sikkimi people more particularly those who had educated themselves under English education. The rest of the society remained completely untouched with the British culture. Therefore, the claim that the 'mimic' culture is authentic may not be appropriate. The traditional culture originating from three ethnic groups *viz* the Bhutias, the Lepchas, and the Nepalese can be termed as complete culture of the state which could be termed as the authentic culture in the real sense of the term. However, it can not be denied that the western influence had not affected Sikkimi society. It certainly affected in the process. As a result, ethnically classified society led to the emergence of an economically stratified society.

It was because of the western education and western cultural contact a new social structuration process with new social strata and new terms of social interaction came into existence. The reformative measures of the new administration created a number of groups in the social structure of Sikkim in addition to the old structure. A number of new faces appeared. In most of the cases the feudal elements were recruited for administrative services. The descendents of the *Kazis* were still absorbed in most of the cases. It was because of the British economic and industrial policy another

class of elite known as *Newar Thikadars* were also created. Thus, the *Kazis* and the *Newar Thikadars* were mostly given the opportunity under the new administrative structure. The *Kazis* and the *Newars* enjoyed nearly half of the administrative posts.⁹

In course of time the *Kazis* began to appoint *Mandals* or village headmen for their convenience on behalf of the ruler in the rural area. In most cases the beneficiaries were the *Thikadars* and the *Mandals*. The *Mandals* could rent out the arable land to the individual families or cultivators. There was an elaborate system of unpaid labour offered by the cultivators to the *Mandals*, the aristocracy, bureaucracy, clergyman and the ruling house. The revenue administration was entrusted in the hands of the local aristocracy, whose omission and commission were hardly scrutinized. In the urban area a network of commercial and industrial establishment developed under the new structure. During 40s of the 20th century, about a dozen families of commoners emerged as the proprietors of the urban establishments in Gangtok. Their inclination was more towards the *Durbar*. They were engaged in trans-Himalayan trade and projected themselves as the only able contractors in the development works. Among such neo-rich mention may be made of Martan Tobden, Netuk Lama, Sonam Tshering, Harka Bahadur Basnett, Prem Bahadur Khati, Ashok Tshering etc.¹⁰ This newly emerged economic class with their sound economy could contract lease of land from the administration, thus earning in course of time the title of '*Thikadars*' for themselves.

As a result of the British administrative reforms such as economic, judicial, administrative, social and educational the pre-British Sikkimi society based on ethnicity resulted in the emergence and growth of a middle class purely on economic basis. The emergence of the middle class led to the stratification with three-tiers *viz.* (a) upper class consisting of the *Kazis*, the *Thikadaurs* and the *Lamas*; (b) middle class consisting of all three ethnic communities and (c) lower class consisting of peasants and other weaker sections of all communities. The three-tier classification was based on the individual's socio-economic status and the prestige he commanded. However it is difficult to draw a clear dividing line between the classes in all the cases. In such a confused condition prestige, income and style of life may be considered helpful.

The institution of the *Kazi* was remodeled and reshaped under modern terms with bigger power. More new *Thikadars* were created to suit

the British interest. Next to this category there emerged another new class due to the British policy in the state. This was the neo-rich plebeian. They originated from the modest background. They had risen to eminent position within a span of very short time. Some of them were manual labourers and the rest originated from the peasant background. All ethnic people are included in this category. Because of their support from the ethnic political alignment in Sikkim, they proved to be successful after the abolition of the *Thikadars* system in the state. Their constant effort in their activities prompted them to avail of the gains of political offices like that of Executive Councilors etc. Besides holding the positions in the administration and in political organization they worked as contractors of various construction works. This led to a rapid rise in their fortune.

With the newly acquired affluence, they could purchase new agriculture plots, construct mansions in Gangtok and make investments in the commercial and industrial enterprises of the state. Later with the affluence in their rise, they could play increasingly significant roles in the ethnic politics of Sikkim. They preferred to support the status quo and opposed the anti-democratic views of the *Kazis* and the *Thikadars*. In the post-British structure, the neo-rich plebeians commanded position in economic life and enhanced their influence to political and administrative power. They also realized the importance of modern education and took much care to educate their children.

Next to these neo-rich plebeians, there emerged another category under middle class. They held their origin exclusively from the commoners of the old structure. This category comprised persons with a claim to eminence by virtue of their hold on their respective status in the anti-*Thikadari* movements. Almost all of them belonged to the Nepalese stock and none was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. They were all associated with political activities. Most of them hailed from the rural area. They were financially unsound. They were anti-feudal and were against the idea of limited scope of political participation. Since, they uphold popular causes, they were respected by the masses and disfavoured by the patricians (*Kazis*) and the neo-rich plebeians.¹¹

Therefore, this development caused some new type of social tension in Sikkim in a divide between the urban and rural society and within the rural society itself. The middle class which emerged from the rural background

demanded universal suffrage, constitutional monarchy, responsible government, clean administration and the like causes. But these demands were not popular with the urban-based elite. Perhaps this was the reason why they were never decorated but were watched with hostility and suspicion by the establishment. Since this category belonged to the peasantry, the feudal structure of Sikkim did not give much respect to their social origin. However, their achievement as persons engaged in white colour jobs gave them the status of the educated among the aristocracy. In spite of popular support, this category had to face major constraints in the form of their limited material resources and the opposition of the existing political structure.

The non-political *Lamaist* patricians with their limited activities served as the conservative stocks that wanted to preserve *Lamaist* traditionalism in Sikkim. The neo-rich plebeians, as the champions of the political system and its most significant beneficiaries, wished to preserve the character of tribalism in the Sikkimi Social Structure. These two sects of the elite together may conveniently be termed as the men of the establishment in the post colonial period. The third category of elite wanted to re-orient the entire gamut of the political structure. This category, however, could play increasingly significant role in the body politics of Sikkim in the post British period. Hence, after the withdrawal of Colonial domination the pre-British Sikkimi Society based on ethnic ground seems to have stratified into three economic classes *viz.* (a) Partician *Kazis* (b) neo-rich plebeians/neo Nepalese middle class and (c) the Commoners. Tensions among the three classes gradually developed. Among the British 'constructed' middle class, the neo-rich plebeians were inclined more towards the British policy and the *Durbar* but remained anti-feudals whereas the neo-Nepalese were anti-establishment, anti-feudals and pro-democratic.

In view of the tensions among the three economic classes the interesting feature of the period is that inspite of all the three stages of colonial overtures *viz.* 'mimicry', 'hybridity' and 'subversiveness' the impact was marginal. Though Sikkim appeared to have three distinct cultures apparently, it also has the potentialities to claim one single identity namely 'Sikkimi'. As has already been discussed that inspite of imitating westernisation Sikkimese society never submitted to the Western culture in the real sense. It had not reached the stage of culturally being totally

subverted. Even the British constructed elite attempted to revive their traditional composite culture. All three broad ethnic Sikkimese never fought to claim their individual identity. Therefore, the composite culture consisting of the Bhutias, Lepchas and the Nepalese in traditionally modernized shape can be claimed as the authentic culture of the State.

Notes and References

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