

## Chapter - IV

### Ethnicity, Class and Politics in Post-merger Sikkim

Ethnicity generally involves competition and conflict for political power, economic benefits, social status and resources. Ethnicity in Sikkim revolves around competition among three ethnic groups for equal rights and opportunities and access to political power. If the pre-merger Chogyal's era was impregnated with communalism and mutual suspicion characterised by the apprehensions of Nepalese and their demand for equal treatment and democratisation of administration, in the changed political scenario the Bhutia-Lepcha combine suffered from a feeling of deprivation and a fear of being outnumbered by the Nepalese and losing their old status and importance. The present chapter deals with the changing equations among the three ethnic communities in the changed political scenario that has brought certain socio-economic transformation and complexities in the state. A brief discussion on class and politics also follows.

#### **1975 – The Watershed**

The year 1975 was a landmark in the history of Sikkim. Ending the age-old monarchy, a new democratic Sikkim was born. However, the legacy of traditional political system continued to determine the main political issues and inter-ethnic relations in the post-merger period.

With the substitution of monarchy by democratically elected government, Buddhism ceased to be the state religion in Sikkim. Although the Bhutias-Lepchas continued to enjoy certain privileges by virtue of the special status accorded to Sikkim by the Indian Constitution after 1975, they no longer enjoy the kind of patronage, which they used to enjoy previously.

Sikkim was opened to the outsiders i.e. people from other parts of India and their migration en-masse changed the demographic profile,<sup>1</sup> leading to certain socio-economic transformation and complexities in the state. Communalism, a feature of Sikkimese politics, assumed an undesirable form. While distrust and feeling of

insecurity of becoming alien in their own land gripped the minds of a section of people, the flow of outsiders made others uneasy.<sup>2</sup>

Sikkim's own state based politics began to be affected by the political scenario at National level. The Congress Party of India began pressing Mr. Lendup Dorjee Kazi to merge Sikkim Congress with the Indian National Congress. With the merger of the two parties in December 1975 the Sikkim Congress became the state unit of the Indian National Congress.<sup>3</sup> With the joining of lone National Party representative in the assembly to the Congress, the house became a single party affair. Kazi Lendup Dorjee, the first Chief Minister of Sikkim and a Lepcha, was able to unite Nepalese and mobilized the Lepchas in 1974 election, who had so far been combined with the Bhutias. Thus, most of the pro-palace Bhutias were neutralized.<sup>4</sup>

### **Ethnic undertones in Intra Party Splits**

Very soon, the heterogenous Congress party began to be infected by inner party conflict, clash of interest and inter-ethnic conflict. The controversial land reform programmes, the issue of parity, and the issue of unregistered Nepali voters<sup>5</sup> began to affect the political alignments.

Kazi's second merger came shortly after 1979 Lok Sabha election, when his party joined the Janata Party that came to power in the Centre. Kazi was dubbed as the "man of merger."<sup>6</sup> Outmanoeuvred by the second merger of Sikkim Pradesh Congress with the Janata Party, Nar Bahadur Khatiwada, a Nepali, led the first split in 1977 with six of his Legislators resigning from Kazi's party and formed 'Congress for Democracy'. He criticised Kazi for his absolute dependence upon the 'imported bureaucrats.'<sup>7</sup> With the removal of the Chogyal from the political scene, the internal contradictions within the Sikkim Congress reached such a degree that ethnicity became a focal point of political alignment<sup>8</sup> in 1979 election.

### **1979 Election**

This was the first election to be held in Sikkim under the Indian Constitution. The term of the assembly that was elected in April 1974 was to be over only in 1980, but the President's rule was promulgated on August 18. The date of election was fixed for October 12, 1979.<sup>9</sup> In the meantime, an Ordinance, known as the 'Representation of

the People (amendment) Ordinance 1979,<sup>10</sup> was issued by the President of India, which laid down new formula for the distribution of seats in ethnic lines. It gave minority Bhutia-Lepcha the advantage of twelve reserved seats, one seat for 'Sangha', two for scheduled castes. The rest seventeen seats were considered as 'general'. It may be recalled that the Lepcha-Bhutias, that also included Chumbipa, Dophapa, Dukpa, Kagatey, Sherpa, Tibetan, Tromopo and Yolmo, were considered as Scheduled Tribes by Sikkim Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Order, 1978.

The circumstances leading to the presidential rule reflected the deepening political crisis. The split led by Mr. N.B. Khatiwada with six of his Legislators forming the Congress for Democracy and subsequently Sikkim Prajatantra Congress, appeared to be the result of a personality clash.<sup>11</sup> But the second split led by R.C. Poudyal had ethnic basis favouring the Nepalese. It also had economic overtones of discontent against Kazi's failure to implement the land reforms in favour of Nepali share-croppers.<sup>12</sup> However, the final break took place over government of India's decision to do away with the parity between the Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepalese and reallocation of seats on the basis of the ethnic citizenship register dating back to the Chogyal's days that formed the basis of the electorate in 1974 assembly elections. Poudyal claimed that over 30000 Nepalese Sikkimese have been overlooked.<sup>13</sup>

The criticism of the bill spearheaded by Poudyal and other Nepali leaders reflected the minority psyche of a majority community. The contention was, if the bill is passed it would reduce the majority community in the state to a minority in the assembly and elevate minority community into an effective majority.<sup>14</sup> They apprehended that the chance of bagging all the 'general seats' by the Nepalese was remote, since the business community from the plains also could contest the election. As the Bhutia-Lepcha had twelve seats reserved for them, the issue of plainsmen vs. the Nepalese Sikkimese<sup>15</sup> surfaced for the first time in the politics of Sikkim.

Closely related to this was the issue of declaring Lepcha-Bhutias as Scheduled Tribes.<sup>16</sup> The Lepchas perhaps claimed the status but according to the petition circulated by Shri R.C. Poudyal, Legislator, to the Members of Parliament dated July 31, 1979, conferring the Scheduled Tribe status to the Bhutias, echelons of whom had formed the royal aristocracy for centuries is unjustifiable.<sup>17</sup> It was also argued that the number of seats, if reservation was at all necessary, should have been in commensurate to their numerical strength (22%). Regarding the 'Sangha' seat, which was also for the Bhutia-Lepcha combine, R.C. Poudyal and others argued that the

reservation of seat on religious ground violates the spirit of the secular norms of the Constitution.<sup>18</sup> In the process, the Nepali support base and the Nepali component of Janata leadership was alienated from the party. The ethnic realignment found expression in the Nepali upsurge in Sikkim politics. An analysis of the party affiliations of the Legislators in 1974 assembly and September 1979 would make the point clear (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Party affiliation of the Legislators in 1974 and September 1979

<i>Party</i>	1974	1979
Sikkim Congress (renamed as Sikkim State Janata Party)	31	18
Sikkim National Party	01	-
Sikkim Prajatantra Congress	-	05
Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary)	-	05
Indian National Congress	-	02
Sikkim Kisan Sabha	-	01
Janata (Secular)	-	01
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>

Source : Urmila Phadnis, 'Ethnic dimensions of Sikkimese Politics : The 1979 elections' in *Asian Survey*, Vol. XX, No. 12, December 1980, pp. 1246.

### **Birth of Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) and its stand**

The dissension among the members of the Janata Legislator Party over the question of reservation of seats for the Bhutia-Lepchas and the deprivation of the Nepali community led to a split in the Party. The dissident group formed 'Sikkim Congress Revolutionary' and elected R.C. Poudyal as the President of the Party. It made Bill No. 79 (placed in the Parliament in May 1979) as their election issue and called it the 'Black Bill'.<sup>19</sup> The party demanded that all people living in Sikkim till 1970 be given citizenship and sought the Constitutional recognition of Nepali language. The party could muster the support of a sizeable number of Nepali youths.

### **Sikkim Janta Parisad**

Sikkim Janta Parisad was formed in March 1977 by Mr. N.B. Bhandari. The merger of Sikkim with Indian Union had always been a burning question in the minds of

many. A member of the ruling party even demanded repealing of the merger agreement.<sup>20</sup> Drawing support from all major ethnic groups the Sikkim Janta Parisad left no stone unturned to convince that the Kazi government functioned more tyrannically than that of the Chogyal. The leaders of the Janata party, Sikkim Prajatantra Congress and the Congress (Revolutionary) were branded as 'Des Bechuwas' (Persons who sold the country). 'We have not signed away the rights of the Sikkimese people to be plundered off'<sup>21</sup> were the appeal of the party. 'Sikkim for Sikkimese' was a common slogan. The over enthusiastic members even went to the extent of raising the slogan 'Sikkim Farkauchau' (shall get back Sikkim).<sup>22</sup> Apart from these, the new party promised to establish real democracy and to undertake all round development of the state and to curb corruption.

### **Pre-election scenario**

The major political parties in the fray in 1979 election were parties having direct linkages with one or other of the national parties. The Sikkim Kisan Sabha was an affiliate of the Communist Party of India (Marxists), the Sikkim Prajatantra Congress had entered into an electoral understanding with the Congress (I). There were other state parties such as the Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) and unregistered party like Sikkim Janta Parisad.

The period witnessed the rising wave of communalism. Anti-India feeling in the state was also rising.<sup>23</sup> Kazi Lendup Dorjee, who had been the undisputed leader in the post-merger period, lost his position considerably. Gradually Bhandari's Sikkim Janta Parisad began to draw support from all major ethnic groups.

In contrast to the Sikkim Janta Parisad, the Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) and the Sikkim Pradesh Congress had Nepalese as their major support base. This was particularly true of Poudyal's party that rose to the prominence by championing the Nepali cause. While Janata Party highlighted its contribution to Sikkim's development in its election campaign the other parties' campaign slogans were anti-Kazi, anti-1979 Ordinance, anti-merger and anti-plainman in nature. Socio economic issues were raised but political issues with strong communal overtones obviated them.<sup>24</sup>

During the preparatory stages of Sikkim assembly election, a demand for inclusion of all Nepalese, living in Sikkim since 1970 in the electoral rolls was raised. It was alleged that 50,000 such people had not been enumerated.<sup>25</sup> There were questions of delimitation of assembly constituencies. In the meantime, the question of reservation of seats for different communities created tension in the political atmosphere of Sikkim. A split in the Janata Party necessitated the dissolution of the assembly on 13th August 1979.<sup>26</sup> The election Commission fixed the date of election for 12th October, 1979.

### **The Rights of the Plains People and the Political Parties**

Almost all the major political parties except the Janata Party were critical about the rights given to the plains people. All of them tried their best to convince the people that in no time the Nepalese would be a minority in Sikkim. An apprehension that all seventeen general seats would be captured by the plains people had gripped peoples imagination. The deputationists, who came to serve the state also became the eye-shore of the political parties. The Kazi was held responsible for influx of plains people. Bhandari's Janata Parisad particularly took a stern attitude towards the question of the rights of the plains people.<sup>27</sup> The Chief Minister was also alleged to be a 'prisoner' of the 'deputationists', the ring of whom had turned into an iron curtain between him, the local bureaucrats and his people.<sup>28</sup> It was often alleged by all political parties that the plains people, who had come to Sikkim the other day, could find their names in the voter's list but thousands of Nepalese had been left out.<sup>29</sup>

### **Result of the Legislative Election 1979**

The election took place in 31 constituencies as the polling in Khamdong constituency was countermanded because of death of a candidate. An analysis of 1979 election result (Table 4.2) shows that the voters chose from among the candidates of the leading parties while rejecting the independent candidates. The only exception to this was the winner of the Sangha seat, who also joined the Sikkim Janata Parisad, which had obtained a majority in the election. Along with the independent candidates, the national parties such as Indian National Congress, CPI(M) also drew

blank. The Janata Party was not only routed totally but 21 of its 31 candidates lost their deposits (Table 4.2).

The reasons for the rout of the Janata Party were manifold. Although the developmental activities were undertaken during Kazi's regime, the wide-range corruption, nepotism at various levels affected the image of the government. The local bureaucracy also went against the government due to the influx of large number of officers from the centre. The party's merger with the Congress and subsequently with the Janata Party was proved disastrous and Kazi was dubbed as a "man of mergers".

Table 4.2: 1979 election results

<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Nominated</i>	<i>Retained</i>	<i>Defeated</i>	<i>Lost Security Deposits</i>
Janata Party	31	-	31	21
Indian National Congress	11	-	11	11
Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary)	27	11	16	11
Sikkim Prajatantra Congress	32	03	29	19
Sikkim Janta Parisad	31	16	15	03
Scheduled Caste League	02	-	02	01
CPI (Marxist)	03	-	03	02
Independents	110	01	109	91
Total	247	31	216	159

Source : Report on the election of Sikkim Legislative Assembly, 1979 and General Election to Lok Sabha, 1980, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Gangtok.

The utterances of the central Janata Party leaders regarding the inclusion of Nepalese in the eighth schedule of the Constitution and their stand on the citizenship issue were regarded as inimical to Nepalese interests. Above all, the very symbol of Janata party – a man wearing 'dhoti' with a plough reminded the electorate of the plainsman, who for them were '*dhotiwallas*'.<sup>30</sup> Many, among the electorate, had misgivings about the growing number of plainsmen. The anti-merger forces led by N.B. Bhandari drew the support of Bhutia-Lepchas and those who were disillusioned with Sikkim's economic and political ills. It was a unique case when the ruling party lost every single seat and an unregistered party, under Bhandari's leadership, emerged as new ruling group winning 16 seats.<sup>31</sup>

## Ethnic Polarisation

The contest was multi-cornered in all constituencies excepting the one reserved for the Sangha. The Ordinance on reservation led to ethnic compartmentalisation of Sikkim politics. Apart from 12 reserved seats, the Bhutia-Lepchas could contest any one of 17 open seats. Poudyal's party drew support from large number of Nepalese, while Sikkim Janta Parisad's support base was all three ethnic communities. A glance at party-wise distribution of the 12 reserved seats for Bhutia-Lepcha and the district-wise distribution of the seats won by various parties in 1979 election would reveal the fact.

Table 4.3: District-wise seats won by various political parties in 1979 election and bye election

District	Total Seats	Sikkim Janta Parisad			Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary)				Sikkim Pradesh Congress			
		Gen.	B.L	Total	Gen.	B.L	S.C.	Total	Gen.	B.L	S.C.	Total
West	09	05	02	07	02	-	-	02	-	-	-	-
South	07	01	-	01	02	01	01	04	02	-	-	02
East	12(a)	02	03	05	03	02	-	05	-	01	01	02
North	03	-	03	03	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Total	31	08	08	16	07	03	01	11	02	01	01	04

Source : (a) Report on the Election to Sikkim Legislative Assembly, 1979 and General Election to Lok Sabha, 1980.

(b) Urmila Phadnis, 1980, p. 1250.  
12(a) Seat No. 32 reserved for the Sangha.

One of the interesting features of 1979 election was participation of plainsmen. However, in the face of strong anti-plainsmen feeling among the dominant groups of the Sikkimese even the Janata Party, which had the support of most of the plainsmen, could not bless them with a party ticket. Hence, their representatives had to contest as independent candidates.

Table 4.3 shows that the Sikkim Janata Parishad won both the Bhutia-Lepcha seats in the West and three reserved seats in the North district. With six Bhutia-

Lepcha seats, five general seats and one seat reserved for Scheduled Caste, the East district was a mixed bag. Here the Sikkim Janta Parisad won three Bhutia-Lepcha seats, Sikkim Congress Revolutionary won two and the Sikkim Pradesh Congress retained one seat. In the South district, which is Nepali dominated and had one Bhutia-Lepcha seat, the Sikkim Janta Parisad fared the worst by winning only one general seat. The lion's share of the South district seats had gone in favour of the Sikkim Congress Revolutionary and Sikkim Pradesh Congress. Thus the major share of 12 reserved Bhutia-Lepcha seats had been won by Sikkim Janta Parisad (8 seats) followed by Sikkim Congress Revolutionary (3 seats) and Sikkim Pradesh Congress (1 seat). To the 16 seats won by the Sikkim Janta Parisad, two more were added, one that of the 'Sangha' representative and the other from the defection of a Sikkim Congress Revolutionary legislator, Mr. Chamla Tshering Bhutia, to the Sikkim Janta Parisad Camp,<sup>32</sup> on October 19, 1979.

Another significant feature was that all general seats were won by the Nepali candidates thus belying the apprehension of Nepali critics of 1979 Ordinance. None of the fourteen plainsmen contested as independent candidates had won. Gangtok, the most prestigious constituency, which had the largest share of the plainsmen also showed very little support for the plainsmen candidates. Commenting on the total rout of the Janata Party, an English Weekly from Delhi wrote, "while the majority group of population, Nepalese were alienated because of hostile attitude shown to their language and also because of non-reservation of seats in the new assembly for them, the original inhabitants the Lepchas-Bhutias tribals were swayed by the appeal of Sikkimese Nationalism as identified with the Chogyal".<sup>33</sup>

The Sikkim Janta Parisad with strong regional orientation and banking on the fundamental issues of Sikkimese identity, was often taken as having tacit support of the palace.<sup>34</sup> Its anti-merger election propaganda and promise of protection of the rights of Sikkimese people i.e. 'son of the soil' helped the Sikkim Janta Parisad in securing 66.7% of Bhutia-Lepcha seats. The Parisad was also able to mobilise the Limboo and the supporters of the Chogyal in its favour.<sup>35</sup> Nepali votes were divided and the Sikkim Janta Parisad profited more from Bhutia-Lepcha seats. The slogans like, 'Sikkim for Sikkimese' and 'Sikkim Faskauchau' (shall bring back Sikkim) also helped secure a good number of votes. The Sikkim Congress Revolutionary's inability to secure more than three Bhutia-Lepcha seats may be attributed to its pro-Nepalese propaganda.

The negative voting to the Janata Party may be attributed to the anti-Indian sentiment of the people. Mr. Kazi was projected as a man against rights and privileges of Nepalese and was widely held responsible for merger of Sikkim. He was made responsible for making 17 seats open to all communities including the plainsmen. In the process, he was alienated both from the Bhutia-Lepchas and Nepalese.

### **The Parliamentary election and the Assembly bye-Election**

The first Parliamentary election took place in Sikkim on the 3rd January, 1980. No national issues predominated the Lok Sabha election. Bill No. 79, rights of the Sikkimese people, merger of Sikkim, inclusion of Nepali language in VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution etc. were the issues. Although there were seven candidates in the fray, the contest was mainly triangular among the Sikkim Janta Parisad, Sikkim Congress Revolutionary and Sikkim Pradesh Congress candidates. The Janata Party supported an independent candidate in the Lok Sabha poll. The Sikkim Janta Parisad candidate won the seat with an overwhelming majority defeating the Sikkim Congress Revolutionary candidate by a margin of 20,118 votes as shown in the Table below :

Table 4.4: Result of Parliamentary Election in Sikkim, 1980

<i>Name of the Candidate</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>No. of votes secured</i>
Mr. Pahalman Subba	Sikkim Janta Parisad	31,750 (61.65%)
Mr. R.C. Poudyal	Sikkim Congress Revolutionary	11,632 (22.59%)
Mr. I.B. Rai	Sikkim Pradesh Congress	5,125 (9.95%)
Mr. R.P. Sharma	Independent	1,073 (2.1%)
Mr. K.N. Adhikari	Congress (U)	943 (1.7%)
Mr. A.K. Subba	Independent	801 (1.5%)
Mr. A.K. Pradhan	Independent	179 (0.3%)

Source : Report on the elections to Sikkim Legislative Assembly and General Election to Lok Sabha, 1979-80.

The victory of the Sikkim Janta Parisad in the Lok Sabha was the sequel of its victory in the Legislative Election. The Sikkim Janta Parisad secured 61.65% of the total valid votes polled while Sikkim Congress Revolutionary and Sikkim Pradesh Congress secured 22.59% and 9.95% respectively (Table 4.4). An ethnic analysis of Sikkim state politics reveals that Mr. Pahalman Subba is a Tsong who claims affinity with the Lepcha and Bhutia due to his Lhasa gotra. Being a representative of Sikkim Janta Parisad, he endeared himself with those against the merger of Sikkim in national mainstream. He could cash the support of plain voters, who were opposed to Sikkim Congress Revolutionary for its policy of general seats. Mr. Subba won because of his party's ruling position coupled with the advantage of having support from all major communities.<sup>36</sup>

The only National Party Congress (U) fared so poorly, which bears testimony to the fact that regionalism was on ascendancy. The state was sharply polarised between the Nepalese and plainfolk on the one hand and the Lepcha-Bhutia-Limbu political combine on the other.<sup>37</sup>

### **The New Ministry**

Although the parity system was abolished, the hegemony of minority Bhutias-Lepchas continued by means of 12 reserved seats. The new Chief Minister had a daunting task in satisfying Bhutia-Lepchas and the Nepalese alike.

In the new government, the principle of parity was brought back in the formation of cabinet in which four Bhutia-Lepcha group and four Nepalese were taken as ministers. Ethnic consideration also loomed large over the post of speakership. The Bhutia-Lepcha members of the Sikkim Janta Parisad felt that since the Chief Minister was a Nepali, the speaker's post should go to a member of some other community.<sup>38</sup>

### **Political Scenario in the post-Parliamentary Election, 1980**

After the Parliamentary election, 1980, which brought the Congress (I) back to power at the Centre, the political scenario in Gangtok assumed an interesting turn. The Sikkim Janta Parisad, in its effort to come closer to the Congress(I) had to shed its lofty separate identity.<sup>39</sup> A few months after the election, a number of Legislators

crossed the door and joined the ruling party in State Legislative Assembly. However, differences arose among the leaders of the Sikkim Janta Parisad over the question of merger with the Congress (I). Disappointed over the Congress (I)'s decision to recognise Sikkim Janta Parisad as an ally Mr. Kazi initiated a move to group his men under the flag of Sikkim Congress.

The citizenship issue led to political tension from time to time. The Sikkim Congress Revolutionary kept a constant pressure upon the ruling party to vindicate its stand on the issue. An All Party Citizenship Committee was established under the Chairmanship of Deputy Speaker, Mr. L.B. Basnet. This Committee recommended 1970 as the cut off year i.e. all those who were ordinarily residents of Sikkim till 1970 were to be conferred citizenship. According to Sikkim Subject Regulation, the cut off year was 1946. Since Nepali immigration is believed to have never stopped fixing of 1970 as the cut off year had significant implication for the ethnic balance in the State.

In the meantime, the government started facing severe criticism and was leveled charges of corruption, nepotism and favouritism. Conflict of power, diverse ethnic interests, distribution of political and economic opportunities confronted the political parties in the State. The intra-party differences finally led to expulsion of Finance Minister, a Bhutia, in March 1983, which precipitated crisis in the State Congress(I).<sup>40</sup>

The internal condition of other parties was not much different. The conflict between R.C. Poudyal and B.B. Gurung groups culminated into disintegration of Sikkim Congress Revolutionary in May 1983. Sikkim Congress Revolutionary had to suffer another debacle, when the ex-minister Mr. Dorji Tshering Bhutia and Mr. S.K. Rai, along with their supporters, resigned from the party and established 'Himali Congress',<sup>41</sup> which demanded reservation of seat for the 'Tsong' community and the Nepalese.

The alignments and re-alignments and formation of new political parties had marked the period. On the eve of the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi's visit in the last week of July 1983, all the parties including the ruling Congress (I) strongly demanded reservation of seats for Nepalese, citizenship for left out Nepalese, constitutional recognition of Nepali language, and delimitation of constituencies. Keeping in view of the election that was to follow, the Prime Minister advised the party men to sink their differences and desired like-minded parties and individuals join the Congress (I). However, the interest of three ethnic groups were not always

compatible and it was very difficult to create a common platform for the Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepali leaders.<sup>42</sup>

### **Dissolution of Bhandari's Government**

The gap between the Bhandari's group and his opponents in the party grew so wide that in January 1984 a group of 13 ruling party Legislators, including four ministers, submitted a memorandum to the Governor, enumerating charges of corruption against Bhandari's government. However, the Chief Minister took a rigid stand on issues like reservation of seats and citizenship of stateless Nepalese. He took a drastic step by ousting three ministers, Mr. Atup Lepcha, Samten Tshering and Rimpoche from the cabinet on charge of anti-party activities.<sup>43</sup> This helped consolidation of the dissidents, who began to press for change in leadership. The Governor dismissed Mr. Bhandari from chief-ministership on 11th May 1984, in the exercise of his power under article 164 (I) of the Constitution of India.<sup>44</sup> Mr. B.B. Gurung, the then Finance Minister, was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Sikkim. However, Gurung's tenure was short-lived since on the 25th May 1983 President's Rule was imposed.<sup>45</sup>

### **Formation of Sikkim Sangram Parisad**

With the dismissal of his government Bhandari left Congress (I) along with the majority of Legislators, hoisted his red and white flag and formed a new regional party namely 'Sikkim Sangram Parisad'. The newly founded Sikkim Sangram Parishad contested December 1984 Lok Sabha Election and March 1985 Sikkim Assembly election with a new manifesto,<sup>46</sup> based on the following main issues:

- i. Restoration of the principle of seat reservation and the principle of parity for the Sikkimese Nepalese as was the case before merger.
- ii. Granting of citizenship to all people rendered stateless in Sikkim and to fix the cut off year at 1970.
- iii. 'Sons of the soil' safeguard to preserve local identity and to give all government jobs and trade licence for the Sikkimese people.
- iv. Constitutional recognition of Nepali language.
- v. To alter Centre-State relations for allocation of more financial and political freedom to the State.

## The State Legislative Assembly Election, 1985

In the second Legislative Assembly poll, held on March 1985, four national political parties namely, the Congress (I), Janata Party, CPI, CPI(M) and two regional parties viz. Sikkim Sangram Parishad and Sikkim Pradesh Congress, an unregistered political party in poll alliance with Himali Congress and the Gorkha League and a number of independent candidates contested the election. Altogether 195 candidates were in the fray. As many as 94 candidates contested as independent candidates. The Congress (I) and the Sikkim Sangram Parishad fielded candidates in all 32 constituencies.

The issue of restoration of seats for Nepalese came to the fore in 1985 election and Bhandari's Sikkim Sangram Parishad was quick to make its major election plank. The issue created so much wave that even a national party like the Congress (I) was compelled to lend support to this regional demand.

In the most prestigious Gangtok constituency 12 candidates were contesting. Besides three former chief ministers, 14 ex-ministers, an ex-IPS Officer, a Chairman of Gangtok Municipal Corporation, two ex-Secretaries of Government of Sikkim and 10 woman candidates were contesting from various constituencies.<sup>47</sup> The Sikkim Sangram Parishad, led by the former Chief Minister Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari, swept the poll bagging thirty out of thirty two seats. Table 4.5 gives the constituency-wise and party-wise break up of the election result.

The result shows that except in Kabi Tingda seat, which is reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas, all Bhutia-Lepcha seats including Sangha had been captured by the Sikkim Sangram Parishad. All the general seats except Gangtok were taken by the Sikkim Sangram Parishad. The result again shows that regionalism, 'sons of the soil' policy and separate identity of Sikkim were the issues dear to the people of the State in this election.

A noteworthy feature of the election of 1985 in Sikkim was the victory of plainsman Balchand Sarda from the prestigious Gangtok Constituency. It was the plainsman vote bank that backed him solidly to defeat Sikkim Sangram Parishad candidate Smt. D.K. Bhandari,<sup>48</sup> one of the strong architect of Bhandari's Sikkim Sangram Parishad. Another remarkable feature of this election was the winning of Kabi-Tingda (Bhutia-Lepcha) Constituency of North Sikkim by the Congress (I)

Table 4.5: Election Result of 1985 Assembly Election

Constituency	Political Parties			Total
	SSP	Congress (I)	Independent	
Reserved Bhutia-Lepcha Seats	11	01	-	12
Sangha	01	-	-	01
Scheduled Caste	02	-	-	02
General	16	-	01	17
Total	30	01	01	32

Source : Report on general election in Sikkim, 1985

candidate, although without any strong local political support. Bhandari's landslide sweeping reflected his party's wide base and representative character. Bhandari assumed office for the second time as the fourth chief minister of Sikkim with his 11 member-cabinet.

### **Bhandari's Government and its demand**

On his return to power Bhandari repeatedly stressed on suitability of old formula of parity as, he thought, it would be conducive to communal harmony. The formula of reservation that he suggested offers 13 seats each to the Bhutia-Lepchas and Nepalese, two to the Scheduled Castes, two to Tsongs and two to 'others', meaning the business community.<sup>49</sup>

In 1986, Bhandari gave one year's time to the Centre for fulfilling the demand and appointed a high level seven member committee in 1988 to look into the viability of the demand. The Committee members included highly placed officials like the Chief Secretary, Home Secretary and the Advocate General of the State. The Committee reported that the Nepalese from other parts of India, who were actually Indians of Nepalese origin were not same as Sikkimese Nepalese and sought amendment to the Representation of the Peoples' Act of 1980. The amendment was alleged to have abrogated the reservation for the Nepalese of Sikkimese origin, which was viewed as detrimental to the social, economic and political interest of Sikkim.<sup>50</sup>

The citizenship issue too cropped up quite often over the issue of immigrant Nepalese. The centre wanted to solve the issue on the basis of the Sikkim Subject Regulation of 1961, formulated on recommendation of the late Chogyal. The Chief Minister on the other hand argued that no addition was made in the list of resident citizens, when Sikkim was merged with the Indian Union in 1975. Consequently, several thousand people of Nepalese origin had become outsiders in the land of their birth.

After years of negotiation, the Sikkim citizenship issue was finally resolved in August 1990, when the government decided to grant citizenship to 75,000 stateless people living in Sikkim for several decades.<sup>51</sup> It was revealed that another 5,000 such people were under consideration of Home Ministry. However, the demand of the restoration of reserved seats for the Nepalese of Sikkim, the demand for citizenship to the stateless persons and recognition of Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, were aimed to serve the interest of the Nepalese community inhabiting the state for long.

### **Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election – 1989**

In the election to the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, held in 1989, 118 candidates representing the Indian National Congress, two regional parties, namely the Sikkim Sangram Parishad and the Rising Sun Party and many independent candidates contested. Bhandari's Sikkim Sangram Parishad secured all 32 seats in the State Legislative Assembly.

This time all political parties had more or less same programmes, based on the basic issues of Sikkim. Bhandari assumed office for the third time as the fifth Chief Minister of Sikkim. Although the Rising Sun Party, under the leadership of Poudyal, put up some sort of challenge to the Sikkim Sangram Parishad it failed to secure a single seat. The identity of Congress (I) was completely smashed and once again the people of Sikkim showed their preference for a regional party. The Sikkim Sangram Parishad's soaring victory in the 1989 Assembly Election further confirmed the charismatic leadership and statesmanship of Bhandari. It reposed faith on Bhandari's commitment to the principles to suit the 'sons of the soil'.

## Pro-Nepalese Policy and its repercussions

The late eighties began to witness a different course of politics in Sikkim. Even though Bhandari's Sikkim Sangram Parishad won all the seats and was overtly looking smooth internally there was sporadic turmoil and tension. With the increasing Nepalese tilt in Sikkim politics, the Bhutia-Lepchas were finding themselves alienated from the political mainstream mainly because they were outnumbered by Nepali migrants.

The fear of cultural extinction and nostalgia over lost political dominance brought the tribals closer to each other. Consequently, several organisations were formed with a view to campaign actively for tribal unity and give vent to their grievances regarding electoral system and the administration of the states. The age-old fraternity among three dominant and oldest hill tribes of Sikkim – the Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Limbus 'Lho-man-Tsong sum' against outsiders was revived by "The Sikkim Tribal Yargay Chogpa".<sup>52</sup> The organisation also demanded tribal status for Limbus like that of the Bhutia-Lepchas and reservation of six seats in the State Legislative Assembly and urged all tribals to fight for their rights.

The social distance between the Bhutia-Lepchas and the Nepalese was widening with the loss of political dominance of the Bhutias. The grievances and the feeling of deprivation had taken the form of discontent about the existing electoral system and the demographic composition of the constituencies, which made them dependent on the non-tribals. The Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association, in its memorandum submitted to the President of India, argued "The minority Bhutia-Lepcha who lost their kingdom in 1975, when Sikkim was merged with India are increasingly restive. Even though 12 out of 32 seats are reserved, in reality only three seats genuinely represent the community. So, the tribal representation although voted to Assembly cannot generally represent tribals. Owing to heavy influx after the merger and utter neglect of this community, the very survival of Bhutia-Lepcha in Sikkim is at stake"<sup>53</sup>

Mr. Kunzang Dorjee, the Chief General Secretary of the 'Denzong Tribal Yargay Chogpa' while commenting on the demands, such as recognition of Nepali language, reservation of seats for the Nepalese and granting of citizenship to stateless Nepalese, charged the Chief Minister for encouraging "his own people the Nepalese Bahun and Chhetris to settle in Sikkim. The demand if met would virtually eliminate

the Bhutia-Lepcha from Sikkim.”<sup>54</sup> The same feeling of insecurity experienced by the Bhutia-Lepcha was given vent to by Thukgchuk Lachungpa, the General Secretary of the Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association, in a press conference in November 1988, when he pointed out that under the existing system, the tribals have to depend on large Nepali vote banks to be elected.<sup>55</sup>

The demand for Autonomous regional Council had also come up from time to time. Nearly four thousand tribals had gathered on Republic day 1989, at Mangan North district head quarter, to highlight the demand including formation of an autonomous district council<sup>56</sup> under the auspices of Denzong Tribal Yargay Chogpa. In a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, they said “if the non-tribal majority population of Sikkim has a genuine apprehension of being completely outnumbered by the continued influx of the people from other parts of the country, our (tribals) apprehension is natural and authentic”.<sup>57</sup>

Another organisation supposedly representing the interest of the Bhutia-Lepchas ‘Denzong Lho Mon Chodrul’ was formed in August 1992,<sup>58</sup> the main demand being restoration of 15 reserved seats for the BLs. and the reservation of an additional seat for tribals other than the Bhutia-Lepchas.

We may recall here that prior to the assembly election of 1979 the Bhutia-Lepchas were given equal number of seats with the Nepalese i.e. 15 seats to the Bhutia-Lepcha and 15 to Nepalese. But the Presidential Ordinance of 1979 had reduced the Bhutia-Lepcha quota to 12, which created a sense of insecurity in the minds of tribals. The reduction of the reserved seats from 15 to 12 in their opinion was a violation of the terms of the merger.

The Constitutional recognition of Nepali language in August 1992 under the leadership of Mr. N.B. Bhandari had projected him more as a Nepali leader. Meanwhile, the Chief Minister had rejected the implementation of Mandal Commission proposal describing it ‘discriminatory’ and urged the Centre to take immediate steps to recognise the whole Nepalese of Sikkimese origin as a backward community.<sup>59</sup> Hence, although Bhandari had been trying to emerge as a role leader of the Nepalese of India by leading language movement, at the same time, he antagonised many Nepalese ethnic sub-groups by refusing to implement the Mandal Commission recommendation.

Politics as defined by ethnic animosities became more conspicuous with the proposal of Mandal Commission, which introduced a poison of casteism and splitted

Nepalese into higher caste Nepalese and Other Backward Classes. The Backward Caste Nepalese began to see caste in a different angle in the lure of job reservation and other economic opportunities. Mr. Bhandari, himself a higher caste Nepali, who opposed the Mandal card initially was quick enough to change his strategy and demand to include the entire Nepalese into Other Backward Classes.

It was observed that Other Backward Classes-Tribal combination was gathering political momentum with the active functioning of organisations like 'Denzong Peoples Chogpa', a tribal dominated political entity, The Sikkim Kirat Limbu Chumlung and The Mandal Coordination Committee representing Rais, Limbus and others expressing similar sentiments.<sup>60</sup>

In the meantime, what really detonated the powder was the verdict of the Supreme Court on February 10, 1993,<sup>61</sup> on petition filed by R.C. Poudyal and his brother Somnath Poudyal in the seat reservation case, which had been pending for fourteen years. The Supreme Court in a landmark judgement upheld reservation of 12 reserved seats of Bhutia-Lepcha and one Sangha seat in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. The judgement leveled the Sikkimese of Nepalese origin as immigrant.

### **Chamling's Ouster and Formation of Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)**

On June 1992 Mr. Pawan Kumar Chamling, the Minister in charge of Information and Public Relations in Bhandari's Cabinet belonging to Rai Community (enlisted as Other Backward Classes), was sacked on charge of spreading ethnic tension. He was later expelled from the ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad on July 20, 1992, because of his alleged involvement of communal politics.<sup>62</sup>

Mr. Chamling's ouster from the ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad was a turning point in the politics of Sikkim. With the Congress (I) organisation in the state still in infancy and the Rising Sun Party leaders and supporters joining the Sikkim Sangram Parishad all eyes were on Mr. Chamling, as an alternative to Bhandari for the highest seat of power. The political climate changed dramatically. A new party was born on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1993 which was christened as 'Sikkim Democratic Front'. Expelled from the ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad, Mr. Chamling's obvious triumph card was his campaign for implementation of Mandal Commission proposals. Hailed from the Rai community, which is dominant in South district, his support base was mainly South-West in the beginning, where Rais and Limbus are predominant.

With the formation of 'Sikkim Democratic Front', corruption in high places became one of the major issues. The Sikkim Democratic Front had first public meeting in Jorethang on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1993,<sup>63</sup> where public response was very encouraging. Ever since its second public meeting in Ravangla in South Sikkim on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1993, the party emerged as a viable force pulling along supporters from the Bhutia-Lepchas and higher caste Nepalese, which was seen as a great blow to the ruling party, which used to draw its support mainly from these two communities.<sup>64</sup>

An open confrontation between 'Sikkim Democratic Front' supporters and the ruling party youths took place in Namchi on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1993, which led to the complete destruction of Sikkim Sangram Parishad youth camp.<sup>65</sup> Flushed with the Namchi victory, the 'Sikkim Democratic Front' mustered enough courage to invade the state capital on 21<sup>st</sup> June, where nearly 1500 supporters marched along the National High Way. On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1993, about 2000 crowd staged an open revolt against the government's decision not to allow them to march to the Palzor Stadium to hold a public meeting of the party.<sup>66</sup> Police lathi charged, used tear gas against the demonstrators in order to disperse them. Although it appeared like factional clash and anti-Bhandari protest, there was an ethnic undertone in the incidence. The provocative posters, used during the agitation, targeted the higher caste Nepalese and Bhutia-Lepchas alike. Here goes the text of one such poster:

“Bahun lai kashi (Bahun to be sent to Kashi)

Chhetri lai fashi (Chhetri to be hanged)

Bhote-Lapche Jata tatai tashi” (Bhutia-Lepcha can stick anywhere).<sup>67</sup>

The pro-democracy and anti-Bhandari movement led by the Sikkim Democratic Front and the impressive show of strength and solidarity convinced many that Chamling's new political outfit is “a loose platform of all those opposed to the Chief Minister”.<sup>68</sup>

The Sikkim Democratic Front's successful encounters with the ruling party and the authorities expedited the process of consolidation of the anti-Bhandari forces. A Joint Action Committee, namely, 'United Front',<sup>69</sup> was formed under Kazi's leadership for joint action of all opposition parties against Bhandari's rule in Sikkim.

## **A Coup in Sikkim – A New Development on 4th May 1994**

A dramatic development took place on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1994, that resulted in the overthrow of 15 years old Bhandari regime. The incident changed the entire course of state politics.

The controversy sparked of a simple question whether the indigenous inhabitants of state enjoy economic parity with the majority Nepalese. The revolt against Bhandari by his partyman, mostly Bhutias and Lepchas, came in the wake of centre's decision to withdraw a provision in the Finance Bill on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1994, that provided income tax exemption for Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim. The provision was withdrawn when Sikkim Sangram Parishad Member of Parliament Mrs. Dil Kumari Bhandari, sought similar exemption for all sections of Nepalese in Sikkim.<sup>70</sup> Consequently 18 out of 31 Sikkim Sangram Parishad Legislators comprising all the Bhutia-Lepcha Legislator's announced their lack of confidence in Bhandari and sought D.K. Bhandari's resignation for "trying to obstruct the Bill" and installed the new Chief Minister Mr. Sanchaman Limbu under the banner of Sikkim Sangram Parishad (S) within a fortnight.

The crisis brewed an utter discontent among different ethnic groups like Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepalese. It may be recalled that ethnic tension had its root in the pre-merger days of Chogyal, which was a direct consequence of the effort to maintain a balance of power between three ethnic groups. However, since 1979, it was under the charismatic leadership of Bhandari who, despite being a Nepali, enjoyed not only the confidence of the Nepalese but also of a powerful section of the Bhutias and Lepchas. Politically, the Bhutia-Lepchas with 25% of population constitute an important force as they had 12 out of 32 seats in the State Assembly reserved for them. The viability of their political force could be evidenced from the fact that with the support of just three Nepali Legislators the Bhutia-Lepchas could stage such a landmark rebellion. The withdrawal of Finance Bill was a great blow to the Sikkimese tribals and it created a sense of insecurity and suspicion towards the Nepali Chief Minister and his Parliamentarian wife and accused them of always championing the cause of their community Nepalese only.

One could easily fathom the depth of ethnic discontent in the post-rebellion days. The tribals protested against the withdrawal of the Bill by organising rallies in the state by way of postering and slogans. Tribal organisations took to the streets and

launched 'cease work'. The Bhutia-Lepchas, even from the outside Gangtok participated in the protest rallies, most of whom were clad in their traditional attire on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1994. This indicates that the ethnic discontent was widespread and the movement was well organised. There had been even provocative slogans like "Nepali Chor Sikkim Chhor" (Nepali thief leave Sikkim) or "D.K. Bhandari go back to Darjeeling" (D.K. Bhandari originally hailed from Darjeeling), which had hurt the sentiment of the Nepalese. The whole state was drowned in tension.

### **Formation of Sikkim Peoples' Forum**

In order to counter the demonstrations of the tribals some of the Nepali stalwarts, comprising some of former and senior bureaucrats and Sikkim Sangram Parishad supporters, formed the 'Sikkim Peoples' Forum', an independent non-political organisation. The newly formed organisation demanded tax exemption also for the Nepalese as well. On 9<sup>th</sup> May 1994, one of the biggest procession was organised, when thousands of Nepalese thronged in the streets of Gangtok. There had been demonstrations and counter-demonstrations by tribals and non-tribals in the state capital Gangtok. Following the tribals' (Bhutia-Lepcha) demonstration on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1994, the government employees and the students belonging to multi-ethnic Nepalese community abstained from work in support of demand of Income Tax exemption. Ajay, a 22 years old college student then, recalls how mutual suspicion and animosity between the Nepalese and Tribal students had created tensions among students at that time. He recalls how a close Bhutia friend of him distanced himself and spoke among themselves in Bhutia language only. Sanjay, another college going student, narrated how they were called at meetings and were inspired to participate in the demonstration organised by Sikkim Peoples' Forum on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1999. A student leader even told them "if some tribals come in the way we won't spare." Hence, the simple economic issue of tax exemption took an ethnic turn as the whole Sikkimese society was on the brink of disintegration along ethnic lines.

In a letter addressed to the Union Finance Minister Mr. Manmohan Singh, Mrs. D.K. Bhandari, the lone Member of Parliament from the state, welcomed the tax exemption for the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim. She, however, pleaded for similar exemption for the Nepalese as well. She referred to The 8th May Agreement which envisaged protection of the legitimate rights and interests of Sikkimese of Lepcha-

Bhutia and Nepalese origin including Tsong and the Scheduled Caste, ensuring that no single section of the population acquires a dominating position due mainly to ethnic origin. This spirit was guaranteed in Clause (g) of Article 371 (F), which was inserted in the Constitution on Sikkim's merger with the Indian Union.<sup>71</sup>

### **Ethnic Polarisation**

Sikkim politics, after the May 4, 1994 rebellion, was in a baffled state. With the next Assembly Election very near, all the political parties had hectic political schedule ahead. There had been clear-cut ethnic polarisation. The dissident faction Sikkim Sangram Parishad (S), comprising 12 of tribal Legislators and a few Nepali Legislators aligned with the Congress (I) at Centre with the expectation that the party would protect their interest better. The leaflets full of pledges to protect and further the interest of the respective communities were in circulation, where the grudge towards other communities had clearly been expressed. To cite an example, an article was published in a Nepali weekly *Prajatantra*, where the Nepalese of Mongolian stock and Bhutia-Lepchas were asked to unite to end the rule of Mr. Bhandari, who was allegedly favouring only higher caste Nepalese.<sup>72</sup> Many Sikkim Democratic Front supporters were infuriated over Mr. Chamling's meeting with Mr. Limboo, the new Chief Minister as they considered him "a lackey of tribals,"<sup>73</sup> for his close association with the Bhutia-Lepcha Legislators.

The rage of the Nepalese against tribals could well be judged from their anger towards Mr. M.B. Dahal, a Higher caste Nepali Legislator, who aligned with the tribal faction. It was a common talk among the Nepalese that 'Mr. Dahal should wear a Bokkhu (Bhutia dress) and take beef (a taboo for higher caste Nepalese). We will not forgive him for betraying our community. His life is in the edge of Khukuri (a dagger used by Nepalese).'

As far as ethnic polarisation is concerned, most of the tribals were staying away from Bhandari's party and regarded Congress (I) representing their hope and aspirations. Mr. Bhandari directly thundered at upper class Bhutias and Kazis but quickly admitted his sympathy for the tribals belonging to economically weaker class. However, Bhandari in a very crafty manner set his political propaganda, so as to manoeuvre Lepchas to whom he declared fifty percent seats out of twelve reserved

seats for tribals and sought to distribute the rest fifty percent among the Bhutias and Sherpas.

In view of rising trend of communal politics, Sikkim Democratic Front very cautiously tried to maintain the loyalty of different ethnic groups. 'Chop off my head, before you harm a single tribal', the Sikkim Democratic Front leader warned. Mr. Chamling, who was keen to implement the Mandal Commission proposals, was trying to woo even the higher caste Nepalese by demanding inclusion of entire Nepali speaking population into the Other Backward Classes.

Ethnic polarisation had become more conspicuous in the post-Bhandari era. With the election very near, the politics in Sikkim stood at the cross-roads of ethnic discontent. If the Bhandari's group talked of Nepalese versus the rest, the migrant versus natives, the anti-Bhandari group talked in terms of backwardness, the common link between the downtrodden Nepalese and poor tribals and wave the carrot of Mandal Commission.<sup>74</sup>

### **The Legislative Assembly Election, 1994**

The State Assembly election in Sikkim on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1994 was marked with hectic campaigning by different political parties. Three national parties – the Congress (I), BJP and the CPI(M) - were in the battle field, along with six other regional parties. The real battle, however, was a triangular one, between Bhandari's Sikkim Sangram Parishad, Chamling's Sikkim Democratic Front and the ruling Congress (I). The dissident group of Sikkim Sangram Parishad later merged with Congress (I).

The Mandal issue occupied the centre-stage of election propaganda this time. The traditional bifurcation of Nepalese into 'matwali' and 'tagadhari' was revived with the Mandal issue. Mr. Bhandari feared a split in the Nepali community and took his own time in taking a decision on the issue. In contrast, Chamling's stand was clear, 'You support those who have been mentioned in the Mandal report and fight for those who have been left out.' In a way, both wanted to avoid any division among the multi-caste Nepalese. Ironically, their divergent views sent wrong signals to the people. The Mongoloid Nepalese looked to Chamling as their saviour, while the higher caste Nepalese moved closer to Bhandari.<sup>75</sup>

To safeguard 'sons of the soil' policy, restoration of reserved seats for Nepalese and Limbus, inclusion of the 'left out' in the list of Other Backward Classes

found berth in agendas of all political parties. Besides, the Sikkim Democratic Front talked about promoting the dialects of Nepali sub-cultural stocks as state languages and demanded for Constitutional recognition of Bhutia-Lepcha and Limbu languages.<sup>76</sup>

As the reservation of seats for different ethnic groups in the State Legislative Assembly was the main agenda of almost all political parties, a look into ethnicity of the candidates and composition of electorate would help us to see how much ethnicity has influenced politics.

The Sikkim Sangram Parishad of Mr. Bhandari fielded two Sherpas, six Lepchas and five Bhutia candidates in 13 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas and the Sangha seat. Granting only 5 seats to the Bhutias may have been guided by the fact that Mr. Bhandari held tribal leaders, especially the Bhutias, responsible for his ouster in May 1994. Fielding of two Sherpa candidates was considered by the Bhutias as Mr. Bhandari's conspiracy to put down the Bhutias. Mr. Bhandari's attempt was generally interpreted as an attempt to divide the tribals with the hope of wooing Lepchas to Sikkim Sangram Parishad and to ignore the powerful Bhutia community. The Sikkim Democratic Front had fielded one Sherpa, three Lepchas and nine Bhutia candidates whereas the Congress (I) had fielded ten Bhutias and three Lepchas for 13 reserved seats. It may be recalled that all those who rebelled against Mr. Bhandari in May 1994 had later joined the Congress (I).

A glance at the selection of candidates for the general seats would also bring to light the ethnic considerations of the political parties. The Sikkim Sangram Parishad President Mr. Bhandari had contested from his home constituency of Soreng. Speculations were high that he might opt for a much safer seat like Temi Tarku and Lossing Pacheykhani, where the Bahun, Chhetri voters are in majority. A closer scrutiny of the community-wise electorate and ethnic background of the candidates suggests that ethnicity had much to say in selection of the candidate. The South districts mostly had candidates belonging to the Rais, the Limbus dominated the West and the Bahun, Chhetri candidates had a sway over the East district.

The campaigning was done in the form of public meeting, shouting of slogans, poster, door-to-door campaign and pamphlet distribution. If Mr. Bhandari played Nepali card, Mr. Chamling played Other Backward Classes card. Even the Prime

Minister Mr.P.V.Narasima Rao tried a similar line and said, 'Newar, Bahun and Chhetri could have been made Other Backward Classes a long time ago, had it come to my notice.'<sup>77</sup>

During a public meeting of Sikkim Sangram Parishad in Khamdong Constituency a member of Gram Panchayat, Mr. M.M. Chhetri – a higher caste Nepali but a staunch supporter of Sikkim Democratic Front was approached by his relatives supporting the Sikkim Sangram Parishad, 'time has come to see not the party, but jati'. People generally regarded the Sikkim ~~Democratic Front~~ as a 'Matwali' party and the Congress (I) as the plainmen's party and the Congressmen as 'Dhotiwala'. Some local Congressmen even suggested that the Prime Minister Mr. Rao should not wear a *dhoti* during his election tour of Sikkim.<sup>78</sup> The Nepalese, in general, regarded Congress (I) as the saviour of the Bhutia-Lepchas, who might, at any time, conspire for the ouster of Nepalese from the State in the way they have been ousted from other north-eastern states and Bhutan.

The division within the Nepali community was growing along the caste line following the Mandal issue. The Sikkim Democratic Front, which was regarded as party of Other Backward Classes, had to suffer a severe set-back on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1994, when the high caste Nepalese and tribal leaders resigned en-masse. Notable among them were the publicity chief Mr. Nandu Thapa, Mr. Jagat Bandhu Pradhan and Mr. Madan Chhetri. The Vice-President Mr. M.M. Rasaily, along with four other Bhutia-Lepcha leaders, also quit the party. In a joint statement, the leaders accused Mr. Chamling of favouring the Nepalese of Mongoloid stock and of failing to give proper representation to Nepali Bahun, Chhetri and Bhutia-Lepchas.<sup>79</sup> It further added that while high caste Nepalese feel threatened by Mongoloid Nepalese, the Bhutia-Lepchas sense a conspiracy to deprive them of their rights. Resenting nomination of Sherpa candidates for the traditional Bhutia-Lepcha seats by Sikkim Sangram Parishad and Sikkim Democratic Front, Mr. S.T. Bhutia alleged that 'Mr. Chamling has fielded a Sherpa in one constituency, where there are just 12 Sherpa voters'. The business community from the plains expressed dissatisfaction over the nomination, as no party gave them a single seat to contest election. Three of them contested as independent candidates.

The pre-election days were marked by sporadic factional violence. The distribution of cash and materials to lure the voters was not uncommon. Mr. D.B.

Chhetri of Dzongu constituency recalls how the cash and material distribution has changed the voting behaviour overnight, leading to defeat of Sikkim Sangram Parishad candidate Mr. Sonam Dorjee Lepcha to Congress (I) candidate Mr. Sonam Choda Lepcha by a margin of 47 votes only. Palden Bhutia, a government employee, was also witness to how Mr. Thugchuk Lachungpa, a Congress (I) candidate, had distributed cash and materials to lure the voters.

The Sikkim Democratic Front got a clear majority winning 19 out of 32 seats in the Legislative Assembly poll (Table 4.6). The Sikkim Sangram Parishad, with 10 seats, became a strong opposition, whereas Congress (I) could win only two seats. Mr. Ashok Subba, the leader of United Liberation Front, who contested as an independent candidate, won one seat. The humiliating defeat of Congress (I), BJP and CPI(M) once again exposed failure of national parties to get a foothold in the Himalayan state even after twenty years of its merger with India.

Table 4.6: Result of Legislative Assembly Election, 1994

District	SDF				SSP			INC (I)			IND.		
	B.L	Gen.	S.C.	Total	B.L	Gen.	Total.	B.L	Sangha	Total	Gen.	Total	Total
West	1	5	-	6	1	1	2	-	-	-	1	1	9
South	1	5	1	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
North	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	3
East	-	3	1	4	6	2	8	-	1	1	-	-	13
Total	4	13	2	19	7	3	10	1	1	2	1	1	32

Source : *Himalayan Guardian*, Gangtok, 14 December, 1994.

The result reveals that the voting pattern had taken an ethnic turn. The Congress (I) had fared poorly in Nepalese dominated areas, mainly because of its pro-tribal policy. It could win only Dzongu reserved seat. The other seat it won was the monastic seat 'Sangha'. The projection of Sikkim Democratic Front as a party of Other Backward Classes and downtrodden paid rich dividends and Mr. Chamling's Sikkim Democratic Front won all the seats in South district and six seats in West district, which are dominated by the Nepalese of Mongoloid stock like Rais and Limbus. The two districts have sixteen seats in the thirty two member Assembly.

The Table 4.6 shows that the Sikkim Sangram Parishad's performance was good in East district, which is dominated by upper caste Nepalese, as it had won eight out of twelve seats. Although tribals were generally regarded as anti- Sikkim Sangram Parishad, this time the party managed to win six of the reserved seats meant for tribals. The result suggests that Sikkim Sangram Parishad could garner the support of upper caste Nepalese, who constitute the majority of the electorate of this constituency. The poll result in Sikkim underlined two factors: first, that the upper caste Nepalese got polarised against the Other Backward Classes, and secondly, it was once again proved that the regional parties have a distinct hegemony over the electorate. Mr. Chamling, acknowledging the ethnic pattern of voting, thought of readjusting his stand on the issue of inclusion of all Nepalese into Other Backward Classes list. During a Press Conference, he said 'next time, East will vote for us'.<sup>80</sup> Hence it is clear that the Other Backward Classes, who constitute more than 70% of the Nepalese, had emerged as the most potent force, which was responsible for Mr. Chamling's electoral success.

A closer scrutiny of poll result indicates that the tribals, who constitute twenty percent of the electorate, were divided in their loyalties. According to an analyst, 'Sikkim Sangram Parishad captured atleast 25% of Lepcha votes, which the Congress (I) had been heavily banking on. The Congress (I)'s rout can be attributed to the hills-plain dichotomy, which make local people treat plainsmen's party with contempt as 'dhoti party.'<sup>81</sup> Another reason for its humiliating defeat is its a pro-tribal stand. Mr. Sahcnaham Limbu, the Chief Minister, had to face a humiliating defeat in his home constituency at the hands of his rival Mr. Ashok Subba.

### **Post-Poll Scenerio**

The final result shows that Mr. Chamling's Sikkim Democratic Front was left with only four tribal Legislators. Then the question arose over maintaining the parity in the cabinet, which Mr. Bhandari had carefully nurtured over the years. Hence three of them were promptly given cabinet portfolios. The lone Lepcha representative was made the Deputy Chief Minister.<sup>82</sup> The appointment of Lepcha Deputy Chief Minister was widely seen as an attempt to strike a balance between the majority Nepalese and the tribals. Explaining P.T. Luxom's induction as his Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Chamling said, "we have done so as to give proper representation to the tribals".<sup>83</sup>

The result of the polls have once again indicated that despite their small numbers, the tribals hold a vital position for the survival of both ruling and opposition parties. The Sikkim Democratic Front would have lost its majority had the four tribal Legislators withdrawn their support. So in view of growing ethnic polarisation, the maintenance of communal harmony was a daunting task for new Sikkim Democratic Front government. The relationship between the Nepalese and the tribals had soared already during Bhandari's regime. Hence, Mr. Chamling had to deal very cautiously the triangular relations between the different ethnic groups i.e. Other Backward Classes, Non Backward Classes and the Bhutia-Lepchas.

### **The Sikkim Democratic Front Government and its Performance – A Profile**

Apart from various developmental activities, socio-economic and administrative reforms, the new government also undertook various programmes addressed to ethnic aspirations. The implementation of Mandal Commission report in respect of job reservation for the backward class has been one of the great achievement of Sikkim Democratic Front government. The preferential policy for locals has also remained a main thrust of the new government. For granting of hotel licence the locals were to be given preference,<sup>84</sup> and the preference for admission in government schools was to be given to those (a) holding Sikkim subject; (b) domicile holders; (c) wards of central and state government employees; (d) regular trade licence holders; (e) wards of Sukhumbasis, whose name are already in the government records.<sup>85</sup> The state government has decided to issue ration cards only to Sikkim subject holders and regular government employees.<sup>86</sup> The Sikkim Official Languages (Amendment) Act 1995 has recognised Newari, Rai, Gurung, Magar, Sherpa and Tamang as the official languages of the State.<sup>87</sup>

In order to strengthen his political base, the Chief Minister made efforts to shed his image as the champion of Other Backward Class and sought the recognition of Bahun, Chhetri, Newar, Sannyasi, Jogi as Other Backward Class. He also tried to keep the Bhutia-Lepchas in good humour by demanding protection of their rights and Constitutional recognition of their languages. Other demand with ethnic touch included recognition of various ethnic groups like the Limbus, Tamangs, Gurungs, Magars and the Sunwars as Scheduled Tribes and inclusion of the Limbu language in

the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution and setting of a Sanskrit centre in the State. For the majority Nepalese he revived the decade old demand for reservation of seats for the Nepalese in the Assembly.<sup>88</sup>

### **Protest by The Renjong Mutanchi Rong Ong Shejum (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association)**

The first and open protest of ethnic nature was made when the Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association gave 15 days ultimatum to the government in September 1996, as the number of Lepcha students nominated for higher studies has dwindled. The Lepchas, despite being the only indigenous inhabitants of Sikkim, were marginalised in all socio-economic and political fronts over the years. The Lepchas of younger generation felt that for them it was time to march ahead in restoring the rights of the community, as solicited by the Indian Constitution. The President of the Association, while talking to a weekly journal, argued 'how can we not feel insecure, when Lepchas are in the lowest ebb, in terms of economic standard, competitive education, political representation and other discrepancies generated by the ignored 50% tribal benefits Constitutionally entitled to the Lepchas.'<sup>89</sup> Their grievances were aired through posters, when several Lepcha Youths were arrested. The Association declared a three days relay hunger strike of sixty members at Mangan Bazar on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1996.<sup>90</sup> According to the 1978 Tribal Order, the Lepchas were identified with other tribal communities for their socio-economic upliftment. The Lepcha Youth President felt that after twenty years of initiation of Tribal Order, the economic standard of the Lepchas worsened. This is the reason why they wanted special status as the 'only indigeneous people of Sikkim'.<sup>91</sup>

### **Development Prior to Sixth Assembly Election in 1999**

As the majority Nepali community was heading for a division on caste line between the backward- and the non-backward classes, the role of tribals was viewed as important in the outcome of the assembly poll that was to be held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1999.

The most crucial question was; how would the political parties select candidates for the twelve seats reserved for the Bhutias -Lepchas? Would the fielding

of a Sherpa candidate be repeated as was done by the Sikkim Sangram Parishad in the previous election? What would be the stand of the parties regarding Sherpa candidates? It is worth mentioning here that the Sherpas, who are Buddhists by religion, were clubbed with the majority Nepalese community. But the Sikkim Scheduled Tribe Order of 1978 had given a new identity to the Sherpas by placing them in the Bhutia category. By virtue of this new identity the Sherpas claimed that they qualify to contest any of the assembly seats, reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha.

The Denzong Sherpa Action Committee, in a letter to the President of India dated 7.7. 1995, demanded that the Sikkim Scheduled Tribe Order 1978 and People's Representation (Amendment) Act 1980 be upheld and attack on the rights of Sherpa community by some tribal organisations of Sikkim must be stopped. There were demand from other tribal organisations to exclude the Sherpas and other eight tribal communities from the Bhutia category. The simmering discontent among the Sherpas stirred the hornet's nest, when the Association submitted a memorandum in May, 1999 to the President of India, demanding three of the twelve reserved seats of Bhutia-Lepcha communities, contending that they were educationally, socially, politically and economically backward.<sup>92</sup>

The reservation of seats in Sikkim Legislative Assembly had always been a very contentious political issue. The indigeneous Lepchas had already been demanding to set aside 50% of the reserved seats for tribals. The Bhutia-Lepchas in turn believe that Article 371(F) of the Indian Constitution provides exclusive safeguard to the indigeneous Bhutia-Lepchas of Sikkim and claim that seats provided in the assembly are not the tribal seats but Bhutia-Lepchas seats.

The demand of Sherpas thus evoked mixed reaction particularly from Bhutia-Lepchas, who were against further dilution of their distinct identity and political rights. They felt that 1978 order had diluted the definition of 'Bhutia' by including within it eight other communities. Hence, the ethnicity of the candidates for twelve reserved seats had become one of the very crucial issue to be sorted out by each political party. The community background of the candidates fielded in Bhutia-Lepchas reserved seats, Sangha seat and others by different political parties is as follows :

Table 4.7: Community-wise fielding of candidates in 1999 Assembly Election

Community		SDF	SSP	INC(I)
Lepcha	Reserved Seats	4	2	5
Bhutia		8	10	8
Sherpa		1	1	-
Nepalese including Scheduled Castes		17+2	17+2	17+2
Total		32	32	32

Source : *Weekend Review*, September, 17-23, 1999.

In the controversial Bhutia-Lepchas reserved seats, the Sikkim Democratic Front and Sikkim Sangram Parishad had fielded one Sherpa candidate each. However, the Bhutias figured the most in the list of all three parties. The Sikkim Sangram Parishad, which had set a precedent by fielding Lepchas in 50% of the seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas in 1994 election had fielded only two Lepcha candidates this time, whereas the Sikkim Democratic Front and Indian National Congress (I) had four and five Lepcha candidates respectively (table 4.7).

Based on the contentious issue of seat allotment among the Bhutia-Lepcha and Sherpas, an organisation called Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC) was formed on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1999. It was formed as an umbrella organisation of all twelve registered social organisations of the Bhutia-Lepchas with an objective to work collectively for restoration of their rights and interests.<sup>93</sup> In an emergency meeting on 12 September, 1999 in Bhutia-Lepcha house in Gangtok, which was attended by over 2000 people including employees from all over Sikkim, the Apex Committee adopted a resolution to boycott the polls in protest against the gradual dilution of their political rights in the assembly. The Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee staged an impressive rally on 12 September 1999. Dressed in their traditional attire, the Bhutia-Lepchas including Lamas, women, children and the government employees and professionals, took part in the rally.<sup>94</sup> The organisations which participated in the rally calling for poll boycott in protest against the fielding of Sherpa candidates were Lho-Men-Chodrul, Sikkimese Unity Joint Action Committee, Sikkim Tribal Women Welfare Association, Sikkim Tribal Youth Association, Sikkim Lepcha Association, Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association, etc.

Responding to the appeal (of poll boycott) by Renzong Mutachi Rong Tarjum (Sikkim Lepcha Association) and Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee, Mr. Tseten Lepcha, the nominated Congress candidate had withdrawn his nomination. The Renzong Mutachi Rong Tarjum (RMRT) in a press release dated 9/9/ 1999 had expressed deep anguish over the Sikkim Sangram Parishad's design to overlook the demand of the Lepchas that 50% of the reserved seats should be allotted to Lepcha candidates. Mr. Lepcha's decision to withdraw from the race was also due to call of poll boycott by Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee. In a press release dated 17 September, 1999 it was pointed out that the 'Lepchas are prepared to make supreme sacrifice to fight for their cause' and felt necessary to withdraw in order 'to express deep anguish'. Four members of the Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee, including the Convenor Nima Lepcha and Vice-Convenor Tenzing Namgyal, the former minister Mr.K.C.Pradhan and Mr. Jigme N. Kazi representing newly formed 'Nepali Apex Committee' and the 'Organisation of Sikkimese Unity' respectively, took part in a day long hunger strike on 2<sup>nd</sup> October at Bhutia-Lepcha house, which symbolically ushered a new phase in the fight for restoration of reserved seats for bonafide Sikkimese.

Framing of local protection act, safeguarding Article 371 (F), inclusion of the left outs in Other Backward Class and Scheduled Tribe lists, safeguarding 'Sons of the Soil' policy, exemption from central income tax and reservation of Nepalese and Tsong seats in the legislative assembly continued to be the favourite issues for all political parties. If the Sikkim Democratic Front talked of protection of Revenue Order No. 1, the reservation of seats for Sherpas, the special programme for permanent plainsmen's community, the manifestos of Indian National Congress(I) and the Sikkim Sangram Parishad focussed on changing the definition of Bhutia-Lepchas and appointment of Sikkimese in Indian Administrative Service and in Supreme Court and High Court. Thus, local issues were predominant in the programmes of all the major political parties.<sup>95</sup>

### **The Sixth Legislative Assembly Election**

The sixth Legislative Assembly Election was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1999. There were 121 candidates in the fray with 2.5 lakhs voters. The district-wise tally of poll result is furnished in the following Table.

Table 4.8: Result of Legislative Assembly Election, 1999

District	SDF				SSP		
	B.L.	Gen.	S.C.	Total	B.L.	Gen.	Total
West	2	7	-	9	-	-	-
South	1	5	1	7	-	-	-
East	5	1	1	7	2	4	6
North	2	-	-	2	1	-	1
Total	10	13	2	25	3	4	7

Source : *Weekend Review*, October 8 – 14, 1999

Table 4.8 shows that Sikkim's 2.5 lakhs voters gave a massive mandate to the Sikkim Democratic Front. It won 25 out of 32 seats in the Sixth Assembly election. The Sikkim Democratic Front captured all seats in South and West districts, which are Other Backward Castes dominated areas. Even in the East district, the Sikkim Democratic Front made its presence felt winning 7 out of 13 seats, which is considered to be the vote bank of the Sikkim Sangram Parishad with predominant Bahun and Chhetri populations.

The Sikkim Democratic Front repeated its good showing in the tribal dominated North district, where it won 2 of the 3 seats; Dzongu seat was bagged by the Sikkim Sangram Parishad. The Sikkim Democratic Front's improved tally in the house may be attributed to the support of the Other Backward castes and the tribals. Despite the poll boycott call given by Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee, 81% of the electorate participated in the polls. The Bhutia-Lepcha dominated North district recorded a turn out of 86%, the highest in the state.<sup>96</sup> The Sikkim Sangram Parishad, led by the former Chief Minister Mr. N.B. Bhandari, was completely routed in South and West districts. The party retained its six seats in the East and one in the North. The Congress (I) which had contested 31 seats failed to win even a single seat. The former Chief Minister Mr. Sanchaman Limbu faced his second successive defeat in his home constituency of Yaksum in West district. Another stunning defeat was that of former minister and Congress (I) leader Thugchuk Lachungpa.

One controversial constituency for the Bhutia-Lepchas., where the Sikkim Sangram Parishad had fielded a Sherpa candidate, was Rakdong Tintek constituency. Although a Bhutia-Lepcha reserved constituency, it has a high concentration of higher caste Nepalese with only 986 Lepcha, 939 Bhutia and 25 Sherpa voters. The communal pattern of voting is revealed by the fact that an independent Bhutia candidate, Mr. Sonam Tshering Bhutia, secured 987 votes. A Bhutia government employee commented that due to the boycott call of the Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee, the Bhutia electorate voted for independent candidate, as both Sikkim Democratic Front and Sikkim Sangram Parishad had fielded Sherpa candidates.

The CPI (M) candidates in reserved Bhutia-Lepcha seat of Rakdong Tintek and general constituency of Gangtok were defeated. However, the biggest victory for the Sikkim Democratic Front was defeat of Mr. Bhandari in Soreng constituency. He, however, continued to remain an Legislator as he had won from Renock constituency.

### **Class and Politics**

Modernisation and industrialisation in multi-ethnic societies tend to proceed unevenly and often benefit some ethnic groups more than the others. The ethnic communities are created and transformed by the emerging elite in modernising societies, which are undergoing dramatic social change, and where one can find competition and conflict for political power, economic benefit and social status.<sup>97</sup>

In Sikkim, the uneven educational opportunities among different sections of the society has led to the formation of an educated elite, who because of affluence and greater access to human resources grab the opportunities and emerge as a distinct class.<sup>98</sup> It may be conceived as a class as it comprises the 'comprehensive and separate collectivities of individual',<sup>99</sup> with a common approach to life, society and polity.

The sub-section does not aim to study the class character of Sikkimese society in detail. Rather it aims to take into account the ethnic, economic and educational background of the changing political leadership in the changing scenario, so as to highlight the role of emerging class in politics. It is going to be a very difficult task to identify the class character of Sikkim politics, which has already been ethnicised and where the parties harping on class-line mobilization are no-where in sight. In the absence of industrialization, the industrial proletariat is also by and large absent and

wherever they exist they have not organized themselves along the class line. The ethnic identity based on primordial loyalties, is strong enough to obstruct any move to class formation.

With the modernization process set to motion, spread of education, white collar jobs and business, the political leadership too has changed from the king-aristocrats-clergy combine to the modern educated class. This significant and noticeable trend with the passage of time is evidenced in the gradual but steady increase in the educated Legislators. A comparative analysis of the level of education of the Legislators in the post-merger era with the member of the State Council in pre-merger days would reveal the fact.

Table 4.9: Educational Background of Members of the State Council in 1953-1970

Educational Level	1953 Number and %	1970 Number and %
Below Matriculation	10 (82.32)	16 (88.88)
Matriculation	01 (08.34)	02 (11.12)
Graduation	01 (08.34)	-
Total	12 (100.00)	18 (100.00)

Source : A.C. Sinha, *Politics of Sikkim*, p.131.

Table 4.9 shows that a significant majority of 82.32% had educational level below matriculation in 1953 and 88.88% in 1970. The percentage of matriculates had slightly gone up to 11.12% in 1970 from 8.34% in 1953. There was one graduate legislator in 1953 but there was none in 1970.

The level of education of the Legislators significantly increased in the post-merger days. The Table 4.10 would give a clearer view of the situation. The Table shows that 12.5% of the Legislators in 1974 Assembly were illiterate. However, there were no illiterate in the subsequent assemblies. The number of Legislators with primary and middle school education also decreased over the years. Their number upto matriculates, who formed the dominant category in the pre-merger days comprising more than 80% (Table 4.9) has significantly came down to 15.62% in the 1989 assembly. The number of graduates, who constituted 50% of the members in the 1989 Assembly, had shown significant increase. There was no graduate in the 1970 State Council, and there was only one graduate in 1953. All these are indicative of the

Table 4.10: Educational level of the Legislators in State Legislative Assembly

Educational Level	No. and Percentage of			1989
	1974	1979	1985	
Illiterate	4 (12.5)	-	-	
Primary	4 (12.5)	3 (9.37)	-	-
Middle School	7 (21.8)	7 (21.8)	02 (6.25)	02 (6.25)
Matriculation	4 (12.5)	6 (18.75)	8 (25.00)	5 (15.62)
Higher Secondary/Pre-University Course	1 (3.12)	-	5 (15.62)	7 (21.8)
Graduates	9 (28.12)	14 (43.75)	15 (46.9)	16 (50.00)
Post-Graduates	-	1 (3.12)	2 (6.25)	2 (6.25)
Religious	3 (9.37)	1 (3.12)	-	-
Total	32 (100.00)	32 (100.00)	32 (100.00)	32 (100.00)

- I) R.R. Dhamala, "Emerging Pattern of Political Leadership in Sikkim", *Occasional Paper No. 2*, Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University, October, 1986, p. 21.
- II) *Who's Who* – February, 1987, pp. 13-57.
- III) *Who's Who* – July, 1993, pp. 1-44, Sikkimese Legislative Assembly Secretariat, Gangtok.

fact that the new generation, the new educated group, has been taking keen interest in the political leadership. The percentage of postgraduate Legislators in the assembly has also increased in the post-merger period, an increase from 3.12% in 1979 to 6.25% in 1989 Assembly (Table 4.10)

A unique feature of Sikkim politics is reservation of seat for the Buddhist monk called 'Sangha' in the Legislative Assembly. Even for this seat, now the people without religious education are being preferred. Earlier, there were three Legislators with religious education in 1974 Assembly, thus comprising 9.37% in total. The percentage tumbled down to 3.12% in 1979 Assembly, with only the 'Sangha' representatives. In the Assemblies of 1985 and 1989, however, even the 'Sangha' representative was a graduate (Table 4.10). This highlights the trend towards secularisation of politics over the years.

The participation of educated individuals in larger number articulates the fact that Sikkim politics is out to have its leadership from the neo-elite, the educated middle class that represents the advanced sections of the respective ethnic communities. The advantage enjoyed by this class is that they know the fundamentals of democratic polity better than any other sections. They know the art of mobilizing the mass support and the method to nurse the support base carefully. Besides, this

neo-class can analyse the situation better and can pick up the handy issues for generating interest in the masses. Most importantly, the neo-class is motivated enough to make a career out of politics. The significant increase in the number of graduates and post-graduates Legislators has turned State politics into a domain of higher aspirants thus making higher education as a criteria of community leadership.

In the process of rapid social change in the new democratic set-up, politics has no longer remained the monopolistic domain of the clergy, agriculturists, the feudal lords and the business classes only. An analysis of the economic background of the Legislators would reveal that representation of all these categories in the State Assembly is decreasing over the years (Tables: 4.11 and 4.12).

Table 4.11 indicates that the landlords and peasants had the largest representation in 1953 State Council. In 1970 the peasants and neo-rich peasants had replaced the old patricians of feudal origin. The Council of 1970 saw the entry of ex soldiers and contractors in politics. The government service, as represented by teachers was lowest with 5.5% in 1970 Council.

Table 4.11: Occupational affiliation of members of the State Council  
1953-1970

Categories	1953 <i>Number and Percentage of Seat</i>	1970 <i>Number and Percentage of Seat</i>
<b>Landlordism</b>	5 (41.7)	1 (5.5)
Peasantry	4 (33.3)	5 (27.8)
Ex-soldiers and Politicians	1 (8.3)	3 (16.7)
Trade – Commerce	1 (8.3)	1 (5.5)
Retd. Civil Servants	1 (8.3)	-
Neo-rich Peasantry cum contractors	-	5 (27.8)
Contractors	-	2 (11.1)
Teachers	-	1 (5.5)
<b>Total</b>	<b>12 (100.00)</b>	<b>18 (100.00)</b>

Source : A.C. Sinha *Politics of Sikkim*, p. 129.

Table 4.12: Occupational Background of Legislators in Sikkim Legislative Assembly

Occupation	Number and Percentage of			
	1974	1979	1985	1989
Agriculture	13 (40.62)	10 (31.25)	08 (25.00)	06 (18.7)
Business	04 (12.5)	08 (25.00)	07 (21.87)	03 (9.4)
Government Service	08 (25.00)	07 (21.87)	16 (50.00)	19 (59.4)
Politics cum Agriculture	06 (18.75)	06 (18.75)	01 (3.32)	04 (12.5)
Lamaist/Priesthood	01 (3.12)	01 (3.12)	-	-
Total	32 100.00	32 100.00	32 100.00	32 100.00

Source : I) R.R. Dhamala, 'Emerging Pattern of Political Leadership in Sikkim', p. 25.  
 II) Who's Who, February, 1987, pp. 13-57.  
 III) Who's Who, July, 1993, pp. 1-44.

A contradictory trend, as a mark of social change, can be noticed in the post-merger new democratic set-up. Table 4.12 shows that occupationally, the representation of the Legislators with agricultural background has sharply declined over the years. They dominated the State Council in pre-merger days and even in 1974 Assembly, they constituted the highest percentage (40.62%) of the Legislators. In 1989 Assembly, however, they constituted only 18.7%. The interest of the business category too has declined gradually.

A very remarkable feature of the politics in Sikkim is the considerable rise in the number and percentage of Legislators having background in government service. The percentage of this category has shot up from 5.5% in 1970 to 25% in 1974 and then again to 59.4% in 1989 Assembly. Hence the government service outweighed agriculture as an occupational background of the Legislators. Another very significant information in Table 4.12 is in relation to occupation of Lamaism or Priesthood. The clergy or the priest's role in politics appeared to be over. Since 1985 Assembly, even the representative for 'Sangha' was a government servant with formal education. This again shows the trend towards secularisation of politics. A large number of government servants switched over to politics is directly related to the changing educational and occupational background of the people of Sikkim. Hence, the analysis

affirms the increasing control of the representatives of the new class over the power structure in the State.

Table 4.13: Occupational Break-up of Legislators with Government Service Background in 1989 Assembly

Occupation	Number and Percentage
Teaching	07 (36.8)
Police/Intelligence Officer	04 (21.05)
Accounts Officer	01 (5.2)
Officers (Forest Department)	02 (10.5)
Inspector	01 (5.2)
Private Secretary	01 (5.2)
Official in Power Department	01 (5.2)
Judiciary	01 (5.2)
Co-operative Management	01 (5.2)
Total	19 (100.00)

Source : *Who's Who* , Sikkim Legislative Assembly Secretariat, June, 1993.

The Table 4:13 shows the representation from diverse occupational groups like the professionals, officials and other white collar employees. Teachers are being drawn to politics in greater number, as they constitute 36.8% of the 19 candidates; with the background of government service. Their number remained the same as that in 1985 Assembly election. The number of white collar employees turned politicians in the cabinet ministry and in the important government positions is fast growing. Apart from the ministerial positions, the Legislators are allotted Chairmanship of various departments of the State Government. Apart from the neo-class taking control of state politics, the newly emerged bureaucracy is also playing its significant role in the state politics as a strong pressure group.

### **Ethnic Representation in Politics**

The representation of different ethnic groups in the state Legislative Assembly is the core of Sikkim's politics. In retrospect, the Royal Proclamation of 1952 and 1953 on the formation of State Council sought a system of election on communal representation, which equated the minority Lepcha-Bhutia community with the majority Nepalese. This system was known as 'parity' system.

Although the 1973 agitation, led by democratic forces, was a germination of seed of dissatisfaction among majority community and demanded the abolition of the said system, 1974 election was fought on the same basis. The strength of the house was however enlarged to 32 with 15 seats reserved for Lepcha-Bhutia and 15 for

Nepalese, 1 for Sangha and one for Scheduled Castes. However, the 'Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance, 1979',<sup>100</sup> ensured 12 seats to be reserved for Sikkimese of Bhutia-Lepcha origin, 2 for Scheduled Castes and 1 for Sangha. Hence, although the 'parity' formula has been abolished, the ethnic politics in Sikkim however continued in the name of reservation of seats for Bhutia-Lepchas. The

Table 4.14: Ethnic Composition of the Legislators

Ethnic Group		1974	1979	1985	1989	1994	1999
Lepcha	Sched- uled Tribes	09 (28.1)	04 (12.5)	03 (9.4)	04 (12.5)	05 (15.6)	04 (12.5)
Bhutia		07 (21.9)	09 (28.1)	10 (31.2)	09 (28.1)	07 (21.9)	08 (25.00)
Sherpa		-	-	-	-	01 (3.1)	01 (3.1)
Nepalese including Scheduled Castes		16 (50.00)	17+2 (59.4)	16+2 (56.2)	17+2 (59.4)	17+2 (59.4)	17+2 (59.4)
Plainsman		-	-	01 (3.1)	-	-	-
Total		32 (100)	32 (100)	32 (100)	32 (100)	32 (100)	32 (100)

- Source :
- I. R.R. Dhamala 'Emerging Pattern of Political Leadership in Sikkim', p. 24.
  - II. Report on the Elections to Sikkim Legislative Assembly General Election, 1979-80, 1984-85, 1989, 1994.
  - III. Sikkim Observer, October 13-15, 1999.

above Table (4.14) would reveal the representation of three ethnic communities in the state legislature in the post-merger era. A separate Table (Table 4.15) on the pattern of representation in 1970 Executive Council would be relevant for comparative analysis.

Table 4.15 : Ethnic Representation in the Executive Council of Sikkim, 1970

Ethnic Group	No. of Representatives	Percentage
Nepalese	12	50.00
Bhutias	07	29.17
Lepchas	05	20.83
Total	24	100.00

Source : A.C. Sinha, *Politics of Sikkim*, p. 132.

Table 4.14 gives the ethnic composition of the Legislators. A close Sikkim scrutiny of Table 4.15 shows that the Nepalese constituted only 50% of the members of the Executive Council in 1970, a percentage disproportionate to their population ratio. The Lepchas occupied 20.83% of the seats and 29.17% of the Legislators were

the Bhutias. The benefit of enlarged State Council went primarily to the Bhutias as their percentage share of the Legislators was much higher than their population share.

The trend is not much different in the post-merger period. The 'parity' system has been abolished, but the ethnic minority still represents the substantive share in the Legislative Assembly by means of mechanism like reservation for the Bhutia-Lepcha. Hence, even in the changed scenario, the hegemony of the ethnic minority is still ensured in the name of safeguarding rights and privileges of the minority. Table 4:14 shows that the Nepalese constitute 59.4% representation except in 1985 Assembly, when its share came down to 56.2%, a percentage less than their population share. The Lepcha-Bhutia combined along with the Sherpas, as Scheduled Tribes, have a share of 40.6% of the Legislators, nearly twice their population share of 22.36% as per 1991 Census.

Again, a close scrutiny of ethnic composition of representation of the Scheduled Tribe category, shows a disproportionate representation of the Lepchas as compared to Bhutias. Except in 1974 Assembly, which was based on the principle of 'parity', the representation of the Lepchas is comparatively low; their share going down to 9.4% in 1985 Assembly. On the other hand, the Bhutias always had representation more than their population share in the state. Their percentage varies with the lowest of 21.9% in 1974 and 1994 to the highest of 31.2% in 1985. The Sherpas represented 3.1% in 1994 and 1999 Assembly. Hence, as in other institutions such as education, service and administration, the lions share of the benefits of reservation, in the name of safeguarding rights and privileges of ethnic minority, has been cornered by the Bhutias. The Lepchas, on the other hand, are lagging behind in all walks of life. The tribal groups in the state thus do not present a homogeneous, unclassified category united into a community with a distinct political self.

### **Ethnic Composition of Cabinet Ministry**

Ethnic consideration is sought not only in Legislative Assembly through seat reservation for minorities, but it also loomed large in the formation of Council of Ministers.

Table 4.16 : Ethnic Composition of Council of Ministers including Speaker and Deputy Speaker

Community	Years, Numbers and Percentage of Legislators				
	1979	1985	1989	1994	1999
Lepcha	2 (20.00)	3(23.1)	3(20.00)	1(6.3)	3 (16.6)
Bhutia	3 (30.00)	3 (23.1)	4 (26.7)	3 (18.7)	5 (27.8)
Nepalese :					
Bahun	1	1	2	1	-
Chhetri	2	2	2	-	1
Rai	-	1	1	3	3
Limbu	1	1	1	2	3
Gurung	1 50%	2 53.8%	2 53.3%	2 66.6%	1 55.6%
Newar	-	-	-	1	-
Magar	-	-	-	1	-
Tamang	-	-	-	1	1
Scheduled Caste	-	-	-	1	1
Total	10 (100.00)	13 (100.00)	15 (100.00)	16 (100.00)	18 (100.00)

- Source : I. *Hundred Days of Parisad Administration* – Department of Information and Public Relations, Gangtok, 1980  
 II *Who's Who*, Sikkim Legislative Secretariat, 1993.  
 III List of Ministers and Legislators, Sikkim Legislative Secretariat, 1995.  
 IV Sikkim Observer – October 13-15, 1999

Table 4.16 would tell us how the principle of 'parity' has been followed in the formation of the Cabinet as well. In the Ministry, the representation of the Lepcha-Bhutia combine was 50% in 1979, which remained more or less static with slight variation. However, the lowest representation of 24.9% of Lepcha-Bhutia combine was noticed in 1994 ministry. The reason being the poor performance of the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front in the Bhutia-Lepcha reserved seats; the combine captured only 4 seats. All the Bhutia-Lepcha Legislators elected on Sikkim Democratic Front tickets were instantly absorbed in the Ministry. However, the representation of the Bhutia-Lepchas in the Cabinet was later increased, when six out seven Bhutia-Lepcha Legislators from the opposition Sikkim Sangram Parishad and one of two INC(I) Legislators defected to the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front. Table 4.17 would tell us the ethnic background of the Cabinet ministers after the defection.

Table 4.17: Ethnic Representation in the Ministry of Fifth Legislative Assembly After Defection.

Ethnic Groups	Number and Percentage
Lepcha	1 (5.6)
Bhutia	5 (27.8)
Nepalese	12 (66.6)
Total	18 (100.00)

Source : List of Ministers, Sikkim Legislative Assembly Secretariat, 1998

A break-up of Bhutia-Lepcha ministers (Table 4.16) shows slightly higher representation of Bhutias, although the variation is relatively less here. In the Fifth Cabinet formed after 1994 election, the Lepchas had a share of 6.3%. Even in the expanded Ministry after the defection, the number of Lepcha ministers remained static. The Bhutias, on the other hand gained from the expansion in the ministry; their number increased to 5. The highest share of the Nepalese has been noticed in the Ministry formed after 1994 election, when their share increased to 66.6%. In deciding about the ministry the Nepalese were not treated as a homogeneous category. Adequate care was taken to give proper representation to the higher castes and Other Backward Castes among the Nepalese. In both 1994 and 1999 ministries, all the major castes from among the Nepalese found berth, thanks to politicisation of Mandal Commission recommendations. The induction of ministers from so many ethnic groups in the Ministry might be viewed as an attempt of the Backward Caste Chief Minister to appease the people of diverse Nepali sub-cultural groups.

Thus, to put it in a generalised way, ethnicity has been the rallying point of the political forces operating in democratic Sikkim. It has been a predominant form of political mobilisation of the people. The political forces have mastered the art of presenting the issues in terms of an ethnic language for which they find ready takers in most of the Sikkim citizens. Strong attachment to primordial ties and strong commitment to religious faiths may have prepared the ground for what can be termed as an 'ethnicity-based political culture' that is now practised in the state. Such kind of politics, which prevents class-line mobilisation, is not free of wear and tears. It is generally observed that the indigeneous Lepchas do not find proper representation in

politics and in other institutions, whereas the Bhutias form the creamy layer in all sectors and the Nepalese, by virtue of numerical strength, dominate the scene. The unequal distribution of opportunities and resources among three ethnic groups, coupled with their social and cultural differences have provided enough ground for ethnic group formation. With the emergence of the new educated class, with new occupational background in the political domain, the mass mobilisation and politicisation of issues in ethnic line has strengthened its hold, which has a deep impact on the formulation of policies and resource distribution on ethnic lines in Sikkim, hence consolidating the ethnic boundaries.

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