

ETHNICITY, CLASS AND POLITICS IN SIKKIM

Thesis submitted to the University of North Bengal
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)



Submitted by

Sandhya Thapa

Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology

University of North Bengal

2002

Ref
323-1195497
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Acknowledgement

The completion of the present study made me obliged to number of persons, without whose liberal and generous assistance, the work would not have been complete. At the outset, I must acknowledge that no words of gratitude and appreciation would be adequate enough for the untiring endeavour and enthusiastic cooperation of my supervisor Dr. Sanjay Roy, Reader, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of North Bengal, whose initial impetus made me to undertake and venture at the present study. His valuable suggestions, constructive criticism and meticulous supervision have moulded the study to the present shape. I am also indebted to my revered teacher Prof. R.S. Mukhopadhyay, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology for his constant inspiration and encouragement.

I remember with gratitude the number of officials and persons in Sikkim, who inspired and helped me at different stages of the study. Among them Mr. Ugen Shipmo, Mr. Pradeep Yonzon, Mr. Karma Loday Lepcha, Mr. Yong Norbu Bhutia, Mr. Chewan Dhakal, Mr. A.K. Thapa, Mr. Anil Raj Rai, Mr. Ajay Rai, Mr. Durga Thulung, Mr. D.B. Chhetri, Mrs. Monika Chhetri, Miss. Manju Sharma, Mr. H.B. Chhetri and my brothers Anand Thapa, Bejoy Thapa and Sanjay Thapa deserve special mention. I must express my thankfulness and indebtedness to all of them.

The inhabitants of Lingmoo and Yangang villages treated me as their guest and extended their full cooperation. I will always carry with me the fond memories of their kindness with a feeling of deep gratitude. Mr. Bakpa Lepcha, Mr. Palden Bhutia deserve my special appreciation for helping me in the micro-

level studies on Lepchas and Bhutias. I owe a special thanks to Mr. G.N. Bhutia for writing the manuscripts meticulously.

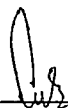
I warmly acknowledge my thanks to Ms. Mamta Bama for bearing all kinds of inconvenience during my stay in Women Research Scholars' Hostel, North Bengal University and standing beside me with her inspiration and moral support all the time. Didi Sandhya Basnet is lovingly remembered for her warmth and constant inspiration. Ms. Mitali Majumdar, Ms. Sushma Jamang, Ms. Rashmi Rai, Dr. Anand Kharka and my friends Dr. Radha Sharma and Mrs. Maitrideepa Roy – all deserve my appreciation for their inspiration and encouragement.

The cooperation of my parents and my sisters Meena Thapa and Mamta Thapa cannot be ignored. They always stood behind me with a helping hand to carry out the work against all odds.

My thanks are also due to Mr. Mridul Goswami, who typed my thesis ungrudgingly and bore with my terrible scrawl. Mrs. Goswami is also equally remembered for her warm hospitality.

Last, but not the least, I remember Mr. S.C. Khatri with a feeling of gratitude. Perhaps, without his unceasing inspiration and moral support, I would have left this Project long time back.

Dated: 25.02.2002.



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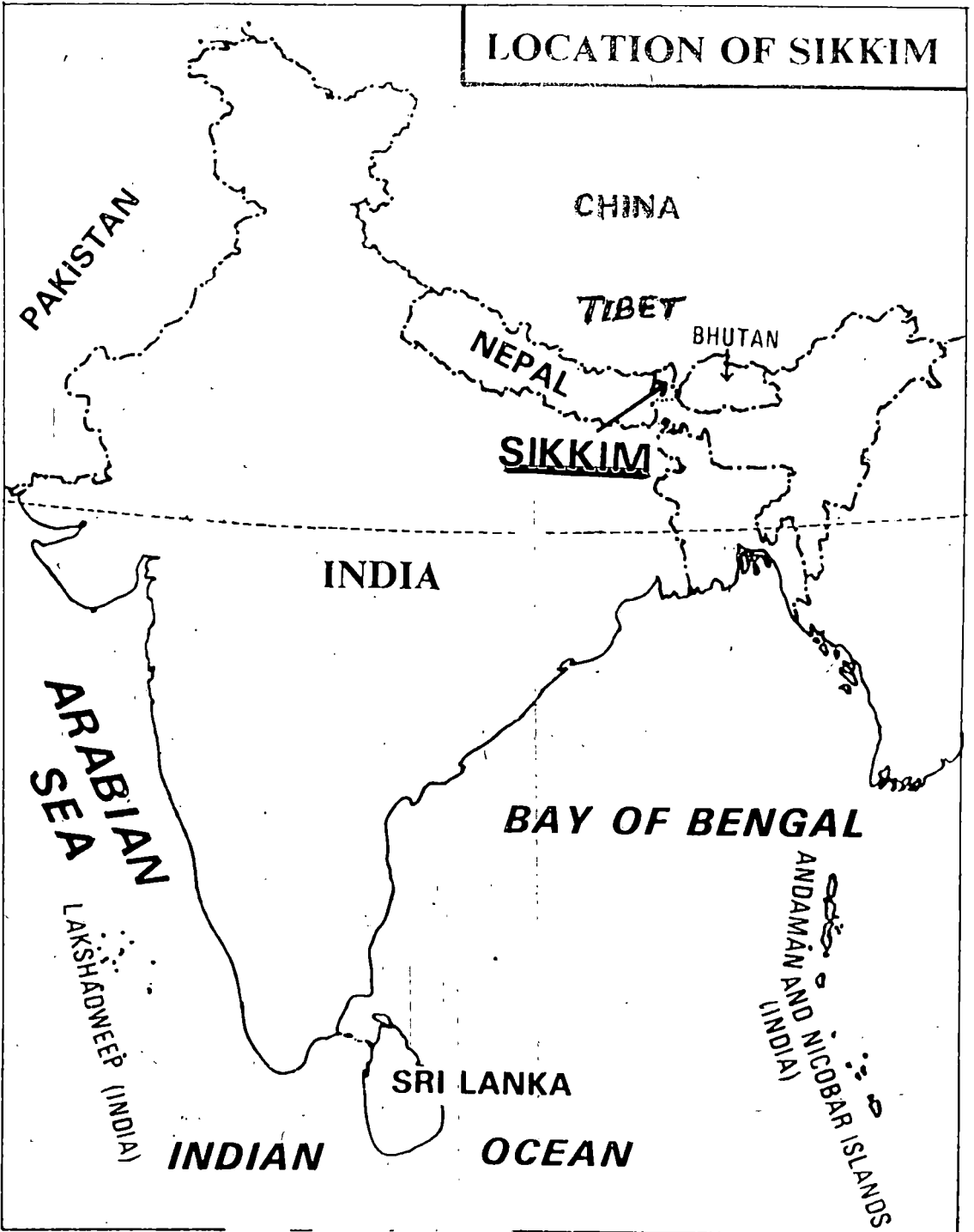
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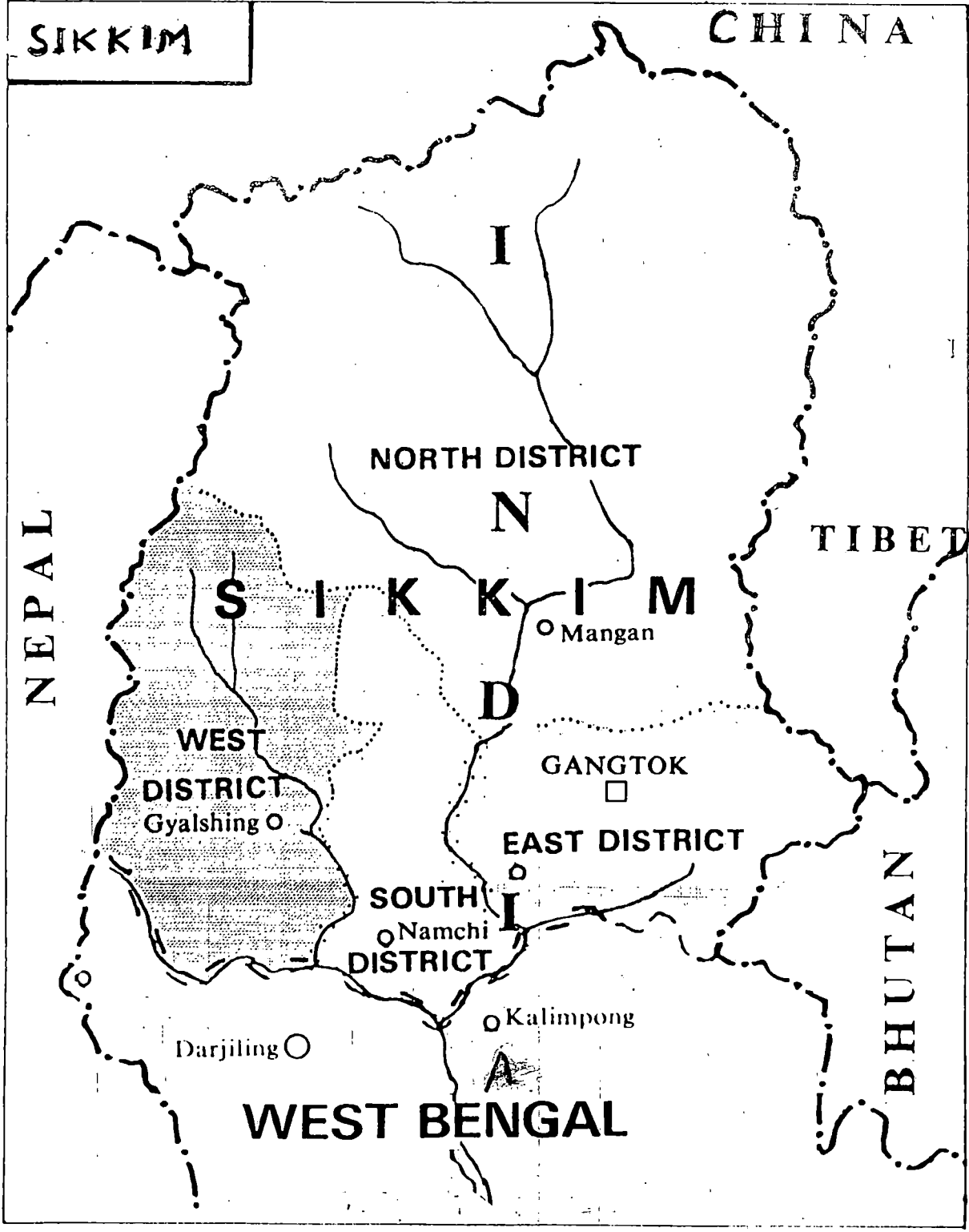
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ABBREVIATIONS

(i)	B.L.	=	Bhutia-Lepcha
(ii)	OBC	=	Other Backward Class
(iii)	SJP	=	Sikkim Sangram Parisad
(iv)	SCR	=	Sikkim Congress Revolutionary
(v)	SPC	=	Sikkim Pradesh Congress
(vi)	SSP	=	Sikkim Sangram Parisad
(vii)	SDF	=	Sikkim Democratic Front
(viii)	CPI (M)	=	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
(ix)	BJP	=	Bharatiya Janata Party
(x)	INC	=	Indian National Congress.
(xi)	SIBLAC	=	Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee
(xii)	RMRT	=	Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum

LOCATION OF SIKKIM





SIKKIM

CHINA

NEPAL

TIBET

BHUTAN

WEST BENGAL

NORTH DISTRICT

WEST DISTRICT
Gyalshing

EAST DISTRICT

SOUTH DISTRICT
Namchi

GANGTOK

Mangan

Kalimpong

Darjiling

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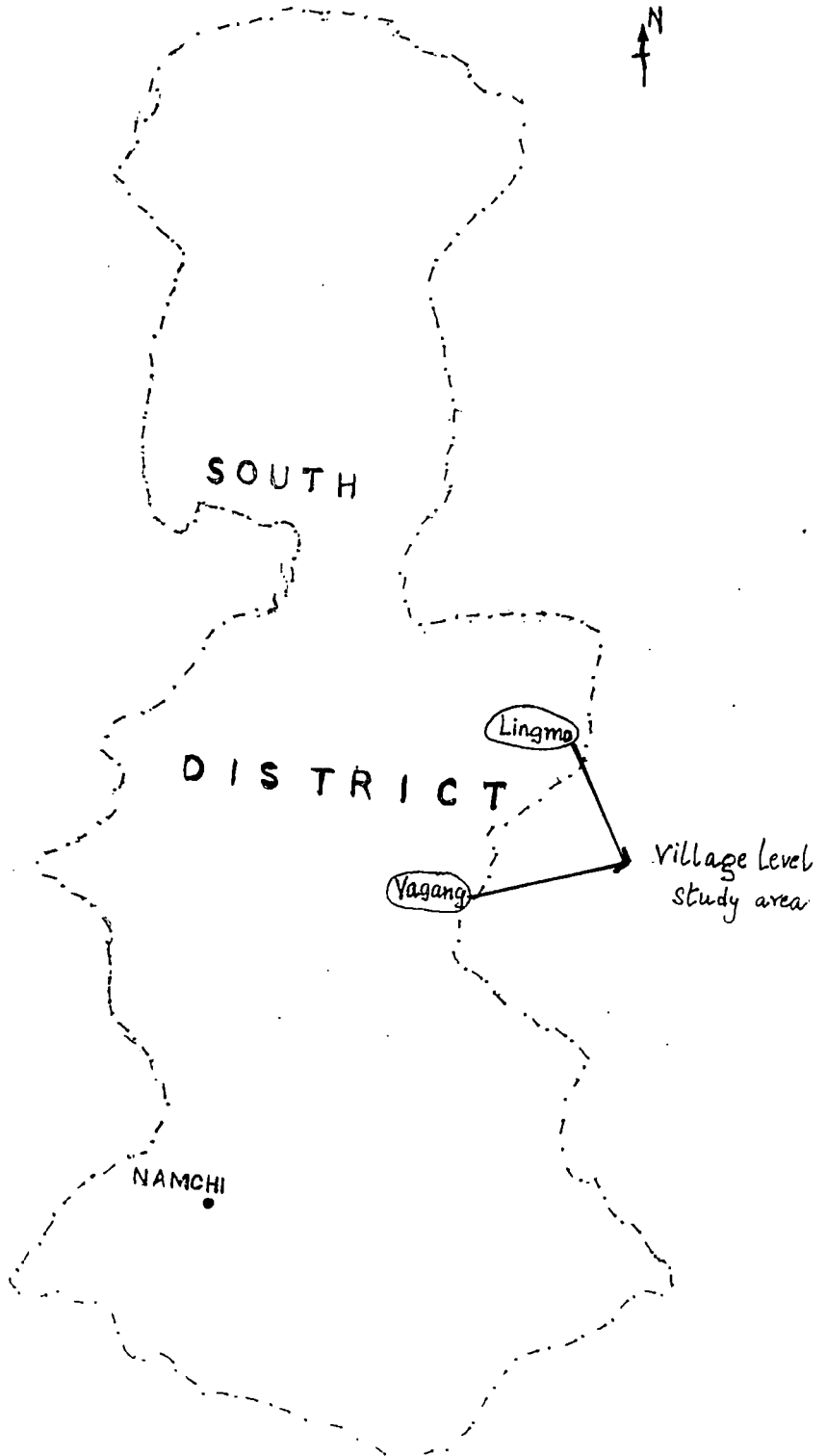
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SIKKIM

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SOUTH DISTRICT OF SIKKIM.



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Chapter – I

Introduction

The Problem of Study : An Outline

The present thesis, *Ethnicity, Class and Politics in Sikkim*, is about ethnic and class composition of the people of Sikkim and about the patterns of participation of different ethnic groups and emerging classes in Sikkim politics. In the thesis I have examined how the class and ethnic factors influence the political process in this tiny Indian State and how these identities of the Sikkimese are maintained and reproduced in the political and social life of the people. An effort has been made to assess the relative significance of these two factors in understanding the political processes in the State. We have also examined the interplay between the elements of civil society and polity and tried to see how the former help shape the political identities.

Broadly speaking, there are three identifiable ethnic groups in the State, the indigenous Lepchas and the Bhutias and Nepalese, who came and settled down in the State in different phases of history. These ethnic communities constitute three dominant and distinct cultural groups in the State. None of these ethnic groups now constitute a homogeneous class; each having internal class differentiation, though the intensity of such differentiation may vary from one group to another. With the merger of the State with India in 1975 a lot of development programmes have been introduced, which have widened the inner class differences within the groups and have prepared the ground for the emergence of some neo-classes. Though analytically, the terms 'ethnic groups' and 'class' are differentiated, in actuality they are overlapping categories. The research problem for this study stems from this conceptual position. How do the three leading ethnic groups formulate, cultivate and assert themselves in terms of social and political participation? How is the identity of each group formed and maintained? What is the outlook of each group towards the other groups and how does it shape its own approach towards state control, decision-making and planning? How does each group organize itself for a greater share of power? Another set of problem lies in the class heterogeneity of each of these groups. This relates the question, whether the whole ethnic group or only a fragment of it runs the show. This question is significant because it is possible that the ethnic movements do not always evolve naturally with an all-round spontaneous participation of the

members of the group. It may very well be the handiwork of a selected few of the group, who provide leadership and do everything in the name of the whole group, binding them with an 'ethnic-ideology'. Thus identification of the emerging classes and their role in the movement or their role in mobilizing respective ethnic groups, in the process of making into a political force, form one of the core areas of the present study. While the study proposes to unravel the contemporary scenario, a historical treatment of the problem would be absolutely necessary. Without an historical approach, we would not be able to comprehend properly the cultural background of ethnic group formation and its political participation.

The Problem in its Historical and Social Context

The early phase of Sikkim's history may be traced back to the 'blood treaty', signed between the Lepchas, who are considered to be the autochthons and the Bhutias, who overran this area in 17th Century. The treaty provided the basis for growth of multi-ethnic society, recognizing a Bhutia chieftain as the first Chogyal (spiritual and secular ruler) of Sikkim in 1642. With the consecration of the first ruler and propagation of new religion of Lamaist Buddhism, the Bhutias became influential and made a deep impression on the socio-economic life of the Lepchas. The communities in course of time developed close socio-cultural relationship, there were cases of inter-marriages and the acceptance of Lamaist Buddhism. However, the Lepchas and Bhutias have been able to retain their distinctive socio-cultural identities and maintained ethnic boundaries.

In spite of large degree of assimilation, the inter-ethnic relationship between the Lepchas and the Bhutias was not always cordial. The history is abound with the cases of internal feuds. There have been instances of the Lepchas opposing the domination of the Bhutias in the affairs of the kingdom. The ruler and his group went so far as to accomplish the assassination of a Lepcha minister. The resulting panic and insecurity saw hundred of Lepchas migrating to the Illam area of eastern Nepal in 1826.

The next phase of Sikkim's history began with the Nepalese encroachment in the beginning of the eighteenth Century. Nepal invaded and occupied the western region of Sikkim in 1774-75. This led to substantial settlement of Nepalese on her territory. However, the ethnic scenario began to change rapidly, when the British

foothold in Sikkim strengthened, with the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890, which recognized Sikkim as a protectorate of British India. The British encouraged large numbers of Nepalese immigrants to construct roads and extend agriculture. As a consequence of the British policy the ethnic composition of the State changed; the Nepalese soon outnumbered the local population. A closer scrutiny of the population trend over the last hundred years indicates a tremendous multiplication of population figures, which has tilted in favour of Nepalese. Now, the Nepalese have emerged as the largest social group, comprising 75 percent of the total population.

The Chogyal's regime turned out to be a kind of centralized aristocracy. A new class of Bhutia landlords (Kazis) and the Nepali 'Thikadars' gained prominence. They together became the power behind the throne and dominated the socio-economic scene. This resulted in the large-scale discontentment among the masses, thus opening a new conflict between the ruling elite and the masses. The period was also marked by the ethnic and economic imbalances among three communities. While the Bhutias retained the dominant position, owning best of lands, controlling business and urban property, the Lepchas remained in utter poverty with hardly any political and economic foothold. Barring a few, the average Nepalese were in the lower stratum with a second class political status.¹

In the modern period, particularly with the end of British rule, Sikkim could not remain immune to the heat and dust of the great political events that were taking place in India. The democratic process that began in India following its independence in 1947 aroused the democratic aspirations of Sikkimese people that gave vent to the formation of Sikkim State Congress. The party, with representations from all three ethnic groups, had a definite programme to abolish landlordism and to form a democratic government. To counter this, the loyalist Bhutias formed The National Party to preserve the theocratic feudalism of Sikkim's ruling pattern.

With the change in the pattern of Indo-Sikkimese relationship after 1947, ethnicity became a focal point of rapid political changes. The supremacy of the Bhutia-Lepcha combine was given weightage in the name of safeguarding minority communities. The intricate system of 'parity' equated the minority Bhutia-Lepcha combine with the majority Nepalese, for the distribution of seats in the State Council. Along with this, an intricate electoral system was introduced, which required a certain percentage of votes from the minority communities as obligatory. Apart from the election to State Council, the principle of parity adjustment was extended to the

appointment and award of scholarship to students.² All this gave birth to wide-range dissatisfaction among the Nepalese community. Thus, a race for access to political power, between the numerically minority Bhutia-Lepcha, who had a near complete political hegemony and the numerically dominant Nepalese, who were discriminated against in the socio-economic and political spheres. Such a guided social and political arrangement aroused the inner urge for freedom and democratic movements, which resulted into a general upheaval in 1973.

However, even after the establishment of the democratic set-up in the State and its subsequent merger with the India, the ethnic issues continued to dominate the political scene in Sikkim. The issue of reservation and distribution of seats along ethnic lines in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly had always been a matter of tension among three ethnic groups. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance 1979 replaced the earlier system of parity of communal representation and imposed a new formula of seat reservation. In the new arrangement the minority Bhutia-Lepcha communities have 12 seats reserved for them, with 1 more seat for Sangha and 2 for Scheduled Castes, while the remaining 17 seats are treated as general. While the Bhutia-Lepchas are afraid of being dominated by the Nepalese, the latter are apprehensive of losing control on State power. The apprehension of the Nepalese was so strong that it led to the split of the then Janata Party of Sikkim leading to formation of Sikkim Congress Revolutionary. Apart from the ethnic issues, the merger of Sikkim with India, became a focal political issue in 1979 election. The slogan of 'Sikkim for Sikkimese' and a promise for protecting the rights of the Sikkimese through 'son of the soil' policy credited the Sikkim Janata Parishad to win the election in 1979.

The population distribution in various regions of the state is such that the Lepchas are mostly concentrated in North Sikkim, the Bhutias are concentrated in North and North-East highlands, and the Nepalese have settled down mostly in the East-, South- and West Sikkim. Generally speaking, the Nepalese and the Bhutias constitute the educationally and economically better off segments of Sikkimese population.

The economy of Sikkim is primarily based on agriculture. The land-data shows that most of the favourable and fertile lands have gradually been taken over by the Bhutias and the Nepalese. The Marwaris and other traders from the plains mostly control the urban commercial establishments.

Since the merger of Sikkim with India in 1975, there have been large-scale developmental activities. The massive growth of economy, the modernization and expansion of administrative structure and social service have opened up new employment opportunities. Since access to occupations in other sectors depends upon the level of education of the job seekers, the Bhutias and the Nepalese who are educationally ahead of the Lepchas, appear to be enjoying the fruits of the developmental activities. Again, these are the two communities that are dominating the politics and higher level of state bureaucracy. Sengupta has pointed out that ‘ a network of commercial and small scale and medium scale industrial establishments have been developed in Sikkim, but the immediate tangible benefits of the massive development appeared to have accrued largely to the already affluent class.’³

Thus, the Nepalese and the Bhutias have very strong presence in the economic, social and political life of Sikkim. Since these two ethnic groups are strongly represented in the decision-making bodies, the average members of these two groups often receive patronage from the bureaucrats and politicians while the others, particularly the Lepchas, feel discriminated against. The feeling of unequal distribution of opportunities and benefits, the feeling of deprivations among the members of different ethnic groups, very often create a feeling of animosity among them. The feeling of deprivation is particularly strong among the weaker sections. The political parties in the state, in their effort to widen their sphere of control, often formulate strategies to provoke the ethnic sentiment. Once politicized, the ethnic issues take firm roots to strengthen the ethnic boundaries.

The early 1990s have witnessed the growing ethnic consciousness among the various Nepalese sub-cultural stocks, fragmented along caste and racial lines – the Aryan and the Mongoloids. The prejudice of the upper caste Nepalese against the Matwali community bursted out in the open when the Sikkim Sangram Parishad run government refused to implement the proposal of Mandal Commission for Other Backward Classes. However, the latent dissatisfaction of other backward classes found an outlet with the formation of Sikkim Democratic Front, when Mr. P.K. Chamling belonging to backward class category was ousted from the ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad ministry in 1992.

The growing ethnic consciousness among the different communities found expression in the formation of many caste and community organizations. The tribal organization like ‘Survival Sikkimese’ claims that Sikkim exists only for the Bhutias

and Lepchas and the rest are neo-colonizers. On the other hand, there is an organization called 'NE-BU-LA', which claims to represent all three Bhutias, Lepchas and the Nepalese communities, the main objectives being promotion of peace.

The inter-ethnic differences often came to the forefront in the recent past. A great inter-community resentment was noticed in May 1994, when the Parliament withheld the Finance Bill that proposed to exempt the Scheduled Tribes, which includes the Bhutias and the Lepchas, from payment of central income tax as the majority Nepalese too demanded similar exemption.

To arrest the inter-ethnic tension in the state, the state government has adopted some stopgap policies. Sikkim being a tiny state and the potential for expanding employment opportunities through industrial expansion and educational development being limited, the state government has been forced to be over-cautious in formulating legislation, in maintaining ethnic balance and providing various opportunities to the local Sikkimese only.

The Land Ceiling measures are yet to be implemented. With the preponderance of political power enjoyed by the landowning class of Kazis, who were mostly Bhutias, the state government did not favour any drastic change. In order to avoid future complications the state government has prohibited land alienation from the hands of Sikkimese Nepalese, Bhutias and Lepchas to the outsiders. The Land Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917, which is still in operation prohibits the alienation of Bhutia-Lepcha lands to the Nepalese and other communities. In 1989, when a High Court Judgement allowed Mr. L.D. Kazi – a Bhutia to 'gift' a piece of prime urban land to Mr. Khatiwada, a Nepali. This was a clear departure from the Royal Proclamation prohibiting such inter-community transfer. The judgement drew adverse reaction from the Bhutia-Lepcha communities who feared that it will open door for further alienation of their land in the guise of 'gifts.'

The nomination of students for higher studies in various academic and technical courses in other states of India is done purely for those having Sikkim subject certificate. The state government has adopted the preferential policy for 'son of the soil' in matters of distribution of employment and other resources. In 1991, when the teachers from other parts of India, working in Sikkim on contract basis for many years, filed a case demanding regularization of their job, a large-scale discontentment among a section of Sikkimese youth was reported. They felt that the

people from the plains would gradually oust them from the positions of importance, since the former had greater control over the human resources.

The post-merger Sikkim has witnessed the emergence of Sikkimese identity, which is now a socio-political identity. It is the synthesis of ethnic, cultural, social and political interest of the earliest settlers, belonging to Lepcha-Bhutia and the Nepalese communities. The legal recognition of 'Sikkimese' has been aimed to protect interest of earliest settlers and to check the influx of people from other states. Without this guarantee to the share of the ethnic communities to the state's limited resources, the inter-ethnic relations in the state would have aggravated.

The present study attempts to explore areas of inter-ethnic tensions in the state, the roots of ethnic tension, the nature of ramification and the mode of politicization of the ethnic issues. The diverse heritage of the major communities and their cultural differences prepare the ground for ethnic group formation. The politicization of the ethnic issues, the political mobilization in ethnic lines, formulation of policies for distribution of resources and opportunities along ethnic lines consolidate the ethnic boundaries. Once the ethnic categories are legitimized by the state for the purpose of administration and distribution of resources, the ethnic consciousness is reproduced and consolidated. The internal class differences in each of the communities may add new dimensions to the relationship between ethnicity and politics. Hence, the problem 'Ethnicity, Class and Politics' in Sikkim.

Ethnicity

In recent years, ethnicity has emerged as an important analytical tool in the social sciences. Etymologically, the term 'ethnicity' draws its origin from the term 'ethnic' that relates to community of physical and mental traits, possessed by the members of a group as a product of their common heredity and cultural tradition.⁵ However, ethnic group which denotes racial, linguistic and cultural ties of people attains significance only when its members share a sense of identity. A sense of shared identity creates a potential ethnic constituency.⁶ Hence, ethnicity may be understood as a human product, which manifests when a group makes use of such primordial bases as culture, race, religion and territory to secure the interests of its members.⁷

Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity, which has been defined by DeVos as consisting of the 'subjective, symbolic or emblematic use' by a group of people of any aspect of culture 'in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups'.⁸ In addition to subjective self consciousness, ethnicity also involves a claim to status and recognition, either as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups. Ethnicity is to ethnic category, what class-consciousness is to class.⁹

Ethnicity, as a social phenomenon, has wide range of sociological dimensions. When the ethnic aspirations of a dominant group clashes with those of the minority, ethnic conflict may erupt. Hence, the role of state and politics assume importance in understanding ethnicity.¹⁰ The relationship between the state and ethnicity has been analyzed by Professor Oomen in his paper 'Nation, State and Ethnicity'. According to him, while state is a political entity ethnicity emerges through the interaction between different peoples; it is a product of conquest, colonization and immigration.¹¹ About the association between the ethnicity and state, Rajni Kothari writes, "when each ethnic community or caste or religious group interprets its insecurity as a result of the privileges of a competing group gained through 'favours' and 'patronage' from the state, the resulting conflict and violence does not aim at fighting another community but rather fighting the state, which is presumed to be dominated by or be preferential to the other community. The other community is perceived as a surrogate state."¹² Hence, ethnicity, which is a matter of ascription is politicized into ethnic factor, when an ethnic group is in conflict with the political elite over such issues as the use of limited resources or the allocation of benefits – issues that are particularly intense in developing Third World Countries.¹³

Ethnicity is often seen as a viable means of obtaining highly valued goods.¹⁴ A comparison between the emergence of ethnicity in Europe and in the Third World shows that prospects of social mobility and economic advancement by political means encourages ethnicity.¹⁵ Ethnic groups that use ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for alternation in their status, in their economic well-being, in their civil rights or in their educational opportunities are engaged in a form of interest group politics.¹⁶ Thus, ethnicity is guarded by various ethnic groups either to defend the privileges or to overcome obstruction towards development.¹⁷ On the other way, to sustain itself, the government often legitimizes ethnicity by channelizing development or distributing rewards along ethnic lines.¹⁸

The process of ethnic group formation invariably involves competition and conflict for political power, for economic benefits and for social status between competing elite groups.¹⁹ The cultural forms, values and practices become symbols and referents for the identification of members of the group to create a political identity.²⁰ In the process, the relatively disadvantaged aspirant elite may mobilize its ethnic group to create a new sense of identity among its members. Hence, ethnicity is a form of interaction between cultural groups, which utilize their ascriptive identities to achieve their desired ends, within common social contexts.

Approaches to Ethnicity

The divergent perspectives and approaches to ethnicity may broadly be categorized into (a) primordialist, (b) cultural pluralist, (c) modernisation and development and (d) Marxist and neo-Marxist.

- (a) The primordialist approach focuses on culture as part of personality formation and development, which provides impetus for social and political mobilization. The primordialists tend to argue that 'attachments' derived from place of birth, kinship relationship, religion, language and social practices are 'natural' for every person. These provide a basis for an easy 'affinity' with other peoples from the same background,²¹ as these 'attachments' are 'rooted in the non-rational foundation of personality'. In other words, ethnic identities are not chosen, they are given i.e. they proceed from the cultural givens of the past. However, the primordialist sentiment fails to explain why inter-ethnic group relationship has been harmonious at one time but not at other times. It is also argued that the premise of primordial ties being 'particularistic' they are perceived as potential road blocks in the process of national cohesion.²²
- (b) Initially evolved by Furnival and modified subsequently by Smith and others, the cultural pluralists emphasize on the dominant-subordinate patterns of interaction among mutually incompatible ethnic groups. Such an interaction is characterized by domination, separation, instability and impregnated with conflict. However, this model does not take note of the intra-ethnic group cleavages and doesn't explain why inter-ethnic group conflict has often been led by the culturally similar segments of people.²³

(c) The development and communication theories have perceived ethnic affinities as residual phenomena and postulate that with the differentiation of the division of labour and extension of the capitalist market, ethnic attachments would be undermined. But, it is to be noted that whatever be the level of development of the state, ethnic conflicts is an ongoing process.²⁴

Another noteworthy approach of politicization of ethnicity has been that of 'Relative Deprivation'. The theory stresses on the importance of inequality in the distribution of available resources, social benefits and opportunities between distinct ethnic groups. It contends that nationalism arises in response to objective exploitation of an indigenous group by an alien group, or of one social class by another.²⁵ In other way, a feeling of frustration or relative deprivation precipitates nationalism. Ted Gur refers to relative deprivation as a gap between the expectations and perceived capabilities of a person vis-à-vis his economic situation, political power and social status in relation to others.²⁶ However, the concept provides an explanatory framework of conflict only partially.

(d) The Marxist- and neo-Marxist approaches view ethnic conflict as emerging: (a) at a general level in which, ethnicity is viewed as a device detracting from the 'consciousness of class interests' and manipulated by political leadership and vested interests; (b) in a situation, where there has been a 'cultural division of labour', when members of an ethnic group are placed in a subordinate position within a given state (internal colonialism) or in the global context (international division of labour).²⁷ However, the internal colonial model too has a limited implication.

Ethnicity may be defined in another way in terms of objective attributes, with reference to subjective feelings and in relation to behaviour.²⁸ The objectivists claim that cultural markers like race, language and descent are clearly connected with ethnic identity. However, more emphasis on ethnic groups as culture bearing units reflect a narrow view, which stresses social continuity rather than social adaptation.²⁹ While maintaining the cultural markers, the subjectivists stress on the self as well as group related feeling of identity distinctiveness and recognition by others. Here too, they failed to say how and when does a group arrives at subjective self-consciousness.³⁰

Behavioural definitions suggest that there are cultural differences but the critical distinctions reveal themselves only in interaction with other groups.³¹

All these various approaches and interpretations though serve only a partial understanding, provides a valuable insight for understanding ethnic conflict. Taking cues from the above discussion, the problem of ethnicity can be approached from three major angles. Firstly, it refers to primordialists interpretation of strengthening and preserving culture, which are natural and primordial 'given communities'. Secondly, it relates to instrumentalists perspective that emphasises the uses of cultural symbols of elites seeking instrumental advantage i.e. they are creations of interested leaders of elite group or of the political system in which they are included.³² Thirdly, it centres around the questions of control of state power. Thus, though racial, linguistic, religious or cultural factors prepare the ground for ethnic group formation, the whole process invariably revolves around politics.

Ethnicity in the Context of Present Study

Ethnicity in Sikkim has deep historical roots. The widespread use of ethnic factor for securing rights over resources, through political mobilization shows the new potential of ethnicity even in the new democratic set-up. In the present study, both the subjective and objective criteria of ethnicity have been given equal weightage. It attempts to view ethnicity from the instrumentalist perspective and assumes the process of ethnic identity formation in the dynamics of elite competition, in the context of broader social, political and economic realities. It is based on the assumption that a sense of relative deprivation and competition for limited resources and benefits precipitate ethnicity. It also assumes that ethnicity is not only 'given' but a social and political construction of elite, who uses the primordial attributes to gain political and economic advantage for their group.

Class

In stratified societies, people are often grouped together with those having similar economic standing, power and prestige. Hence, class is considered to be one of the most important factor in studying modern societies. Social classes as defined by Lenin are "large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation to the means of

production, by their role in the social organization of labour and consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.”³³

The exact state of social formation of the Sikkimese society is debatable. In the theocratic Sikkim, the elements of feudal social formation were strongly present and access to state power was hereditary. Broadly, the traditional political structure consisted three distinct segments: (a) the clergy consisting of monks drawn from high born Bhutias and Lepchas; (b) the nobles and aristocrats consisting mostly of Kazis and few Newars and (c) the commoners. The economy of the state has traditionally been agriculture based, but with no capitalist farming and the industrial sector was insignificant. The trade sector had a long history and was developed too. Besides, a section of population in the state had been in the service sector.

After the merger with India there have been some significant changes in all spheres of state economy. The democratic participation and large-scale developmental activities, is breeding inequality within an ethnic group. All sections of population are, class-wise, now much more fragmented. New classes of people with economic interests, with profit motive are new crystallizing to emerge as a pressure group, to influence state politics and get things done to suit their interest. With the spread of education, with the expansion of bureaucracy, with the increase of trade and industry, a neo-rich middle class has emerged from within the three major communities of Sikkim.

Most recent sociological work on the theory of class is based on a distinction between Marxian and Weberian approach. Class in Marxian sense is a group of people occupying similar position in the production relations with a sense of homogeneity and some commonness in purpose and who are politically organized in the process of struggle for power. On the other hand, Max Weber presented ‘a comprehensive alternative’³⁴ to the Marxist theory and argued stratification on the basis of occupation, prestige, consumption and the style of life in capitalist societies.

Apart from the property ownership, which is the basic criteria of class membership, Weber conceives of more than two opposed classes. His concept of ‘Class’ refers to any group of people that is found in the same ‘Class Situation’,³⁵ such as common life chances representing economic interests in terms of possession of goods and opportunities for income and under the conditions of commodity or labour

markets. Weber's definition of social class hence conceives of the centrality of occupations and occupational mobility.³⁶

Taking the footsteps of Weber, Mills also regarded occupation rather than property as the basis of class stratification.³⁷ Following the Weberian model, Lockwood also defines class in terms of three situations : Market situation 'consisting of source and size of income, degree of job security, and opportunity for upward occupational mobility', work situation, or 'the set of social relationships in which the individual is involved at work by virtue of his position in the division of labour', and status situation, or the position in the hierarchy of prestige.³⁸

The New Class

The concept of new class is of very recent origin. Djilas in his book 'The New Class' defines 'as those who have special privileges and economic preferences because of the administrative monopoly they hold'.³⁹ He calls them a class because they have 'control of the national income and national goods'.⁴⁰

Writing about the emergence of the new class, John Kenneth Galbraith in his book 'Affluent Society', writes that 'the leisure class has been replaced by another and much larger class to which work has none of the older connotation of pain, fatigue, or mental or physical discomfort and for the new class, pay is a prime index of prestige'.⁴¹ He further asserts that for the new class 'overwhelmingly the qualification is education' and included within it the college professors, school teachers, surgeons, most of those who pay income surtax rates and the politicians.⁴² Dahrendorf's concept of service class also gives a hint of new class. He included bureaucrats in the service class, whose main function is the administration of laws.⁴³ Hence in the post-industrial system, technical skill and education are the basis for access to position, power and authority and thereby to the new class.

The present study attempts to view the concept of class in the Weberian approach. However it is very difficult to determine the class position of the people in strict sense. Hence, the new class in Sikkim cannot be called as a class in pure sense, as it lacks class-consciousness. However, it influences the politics more like an interest group. Therefore, the present study does not study in detail the class character of Sikkimese population, rather it takes into account only the economic and occupational background of the people, who are taking off the leadership of the ethnic

movements in the state. An understanding of the class background of its population would enable us to have a clearer understanding of the nature and purpose of the ethnic movement of the state.

Conceptually, I strongly feel that ethnicity, class and politics are amongst the most important dimensions of man in modern days. These dimensions are highly inter-linked and they inseparably form part of man's consciousness. Though they remain side-by-side in human consciousness, it is only in occasions, depending on the objective conditions, that one amongst these three takes a prominent place. Thus the inter play of these three important factors forms the key questions to be pondered in the present study.

A Brief Review of Literature

Sikkim, despite being a tiny state, has drawn attention of the administrators, academicians and travellers. Hence, the existing published literatures on Sikkim are indeed numerous. The literatures basically are the studies on ethnography, political history, historical literature and some are travel notes on Sikkim. As it is irrelevant and impossible to cover all the publications, a brief review of some important works has been attempted in this section.

V.H. Coelho in *Sikkim and Bhutan* (1970), while portraying the evolution of administrative and political structure of Sikkim has pinpointed how the Sikkimese people have a strong sense of belongingness to their land, who are always ready to protect from any political misadventure from across the border. B.S.K. Grover's *Sikkim and India* (1974) is a portrayal of all the significant aspects of political and constitutional developments in Sikkim and its institutions, focusing on Sikkim's special relations with India in between 1947 to 1974. He regarded 1973 revolution as a major break from age-old feudalism to a constitutional framework.

L.B. Basnet's book *Sikkim – A Short Political History* (1974) is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the period antecedent to 1947. The second part deals with the interplay of political parties, the ruling house and the government of India on the political stage of Sikkim, in post 1947 period up to the end of May 1973. S.N. Shukla's book *Sikkim – The Story of Integration* (1976) is a text highlighting the political and constitutional development in Sikkim over the years. The book covers the early history, the popular upsurge, and the downfall of monarchy leading to the

merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union. Justifying the merger the author mentions that the role of Indian government has been hailed everywhere in the world.

Sikkim - The Story of Integration (1978) by P.R. Roa, highlights the struggle of the people of Sikkim and awakening of political consciousness for democratization of their administration and closer political association with India. He also highlights the international intrigue on making Sikkim as an associate state of India. The book entitled *The Himalaya as a Frontier* (1978) by Rahul Ram deals with the frontier countries of Bhutan, Tibet, Sikkim and Nepal. It deals with the relations maintained among these countries and with China and India. It also focuses on the role of religion in the history and politics of these countries. P.N. Chopra's book *Sikkim* (1979) gives a comprehensive view of Sikkim and its people. Describing the physical features of the state, the book relates to history and discusses the social, cultural and religious life of the people. A separate chapter on the monasteries of Sikkim has been added.

The Sikkim Saga (1983) written by B.S Das, who was the chief administrator of Sikkim from 1973 to 1974, gives a firsthand report of political turmoil in Sikkim between 1973 and 1975, the year of merger. Justifying Sikkim's merger with India, the author maintains that Sikkim could never hope to have an independent status. *The Himalayan Gateway* (1983) by George Kotturan, narrates the history and culture of Sikkimese people. It also highlights the political, administrative and economic set-up of the post-merger Sikkim. Sunanda K. Datta Ray in the book *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim* (1984) has openly condemned the issue of merger and considers Sikkim's take over by India in the 'smash and grab' style. Describing the events leading to the 'annexation' of Sikkim on the basis of documentary evidences, interviews, eye-witnesses, anecdotes and unpublished letters, Datta Ray argues that India's action in Sikkim was motivated by the desire of annexing it.

Sikkim - Government and Politics (1984) by S.K. Jha and S.N. Mishra traces the absorbing story of how Sikkim rose from the status of a protectorate to a full-fledged constituent of the democratic India, with all the infra-structure of an Indian state, having its own legislature, executive and full-fledged judiciary. It also brings into light the political dimensions of ethnically complex state. *Aspect of Cultural History of Sikkim* (1984) by P.K. Bhattacharya is basically a study of Sikkim's coinage. His study is connected with the socio-economic and political history of small kingdom Sikkim and its relation with the British India. His information is generally

based on documents collected from the last Chogyal, important families of Sikkim and Darjeeling and National Archives of India, New Delhi.

State Government and Politics- Sikkim (1985) by N. Sengupta traces the political development that led to the merger of Sikkim in the perspective of its political history, and the cross-currents of ethnic, social and religious factors. It also studies the nature and changing trends of political dynamics, the political framework and governmental process. The author traces the system prevalent upto 1973 and the changes that came over since 1974, in order to facilitate a comparative study over time.

Strategic Sikkim (1985) by O.P Singh is the full length and detailed study about various aspects of the state particularly from the defense point of view. Although he portrays the system of administration, industries, means of communication, education and welfare of the people, the crux of the study is the strategic aspects like locational defense problems, defense potentialities and the defense awareness of the state.

Sikkim – A Himalayan Tragedy (1987) by Nari Rustomji contains a series of correspondence between the Chogyal, his family members and the author from 1943-1982. The book is more of a biography of the last Chogyal of Sikkim P.T. Namgyal, rather than a history of Sikkim. The author, being a close associate of Chogyal, also reveals that he never approved of India's annexation of Sikkim. *Inside Sikkim – Against the Tide* (1993) by Jigme N. Kazi, though is a journalist record of a heroic attempt to keep the freedom of press in any developing democracy, the struggle of the Sikkimese people to preserve the unique and distinct identity of Sikkim has been well-articulated in the book.

Among the few anthropo-sociological studies in Sikkim, *The Himalayan Village* (1938/1967) by Gorer and *Living with the Lepchas* by John Morris (1938) deserve special mention. These two most detailed and the richest ethnographic literature on the Lepchas were the result of their intensive fieldwork undertaken for three months in the Lepcha 'reserve' of Dzongu, North Sikkim in 1937. Chie Nakane based on her fieldwork in three hamlets of North Sikkim in late 50's did another piece of anthropological work. The lengthy article entitled, 'A Plural Society in Sikkim' (1966) published in Furer Haimendorf edited book, deals with the inter-relationship among the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese and explains relative backwardness of the Lepchas and Bhutias in terms of religious factor. Mention must be made of Halfdan Siiger's monumental work entitled *The Lepchas: Culture and Religion of A*

Himalayan Community (1967). The work is primarily based on the fieldwork done in a village called Tingvoong in North Sikkim. C. De Beavoir Stock's *Folklore and Customs of the Lap-chas of Sikkim* (1975) is a comprehensive study of Lepcha folklores of Sikkim. It also includes few songs in the native language.

A.C. Sinha's book *Politics of Sikkim* (1975), based on his doctoral thesis, is a sociological study on political elite of Sikkim. The book is divided into three parts: Part I deals with the historical evolution and explores the social forces leading to transition from monarchy to democracy. Part II analyses the socio-economic status, political affiliation and perception of elite in Sikkim. Part III evaluates the political development in the post-1947 period in terms of institutional accomplishment. Veena Bhasin's *Ecology, Culture and Change: Tribals of Sikkim Himalayas* (1989) is based on the two tribes of North Sikkim, the Lepchas and the Bhutias. The book shows how the eco-system and socio-cultural system are inter-connected.

Sikkim Since Independence (1991) by Amal Datta, which is based on his doctoral dissertation, offers an empirical analysis of the role of education in the emergence of new class. The author has taken education as an index to understand the process of modernisation in Sikkim since 1975.

Sikkim (1993) edited by K.S. Singh is the first ever ethnographic survey of Sikkim of all communities undertaken by Anthropological Survey of India under the 'People of India' project. The comprehensive work offers a bio-cultural and linguistic profile that covers the different aspects of Sikkim's life and culture of all 25 communities. Roshina Gowloog's *Lingthem Revisited* (1995) which is based on her doctoral work is a re-study of Lingthem, a Lepcha village in Dzongu, North Sikkim, that was earlier studied by two British anthropologists – Geoffrey Gorer and John Morris in early 1937. She uses these works as the benchmark to study social change. The book intensively covers the economy, social organization and religion and provides a comprehensive picture of continuity and change.

Among the edited books containing article on Sikkim, mention must be made of *The Himalaya: Aspects of Change* (1981) edited by J.S. Lall, *The Himalayas : Profiles of Modernisation and Adaptation* (1985) edited by S.K. Chaube, *Eastern Himalayas: Environment and Economy* (1986) by R.L. Sarkar and Mahendra P. Lama, *The Himalayan Heritage* (1987) edited by M.K. Raha and *Religion and Society in the Himalayas* (1991) edited by T.B. Subba and Karubaki Datta. These books contain a good number of articles touching various aspects of Sikkim. The book



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Sikkim (1994) edited by Mahendra P. Lama is a collection of articles on society, polity, economy and environment of Sikkim.

Apart from these, mention must be made up of the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of R.R. Dhamala on *A Study of Local Self Government and Democratic Decentralisation in Sikkim* (1985). The study outlines the evolution of Panchayati Raj System and attempts to identify the shortcomings of the system and recommend measures to streamline administration and elected bodies to suit the demands of the panchayati raj institution. Nilotpal Sharma's doctoral work 'Plainsman in the Hills' (1991) is a sociological study in Sikkim. It deals with the migrational history, the internal and occupational structure and socio-cultural matrix of plainsman in Sikkim. He has pointed out number of factors like primordial differences, administrative policies and rapid modernization responsible for low socio-cultural adaptation of plainsmen in Sikkim.

Among the numerous articles published in the edited books and various journals related to ethnicity and politics, the followings deserve special mention.

'Ethnic Dimension of Sikkimese Politics: The 1979 election' (1980) by Urmila Phadnis, published in *Asian Survey*, highlights the ethnic forces that have interplayed in various alignment pattern in the electoral and political scene during the first ever election, after merger in 1979. The author has also pointed out the significant implication of emerging elite and their ethnic antecedents in the process of readjusting power relations. A.C. Sinha's article 'Resource Distribution and Multiple Ethnic Identity in Sikkim' (1981) published in *Asian Highlands Societies*, attempts to understand the complex inter-ethnic relations in Sikkim, in the light of resource distribution vis-à-vis ethnic identity in the Sikkimese social milieu.

S.K. Chaube in his article 'Ethnicity and Politics in Sikkim' (1989) in *The Himalayan Heritage*, seeks to explore various ethnic and social forces that have affected the politics of Sikkim since India's independence. He has also pointed out that factions take upper hand over ethnic alignments in the new democratic set-up. T.B. Subba in his article 'Migration and Ethnic Relations in Darjeeling and Sikkim' (1988) published in *Social Science and Social Concern*, traces the migrational history of various communities and shows how it has given rise to the competition for or ethnic conflict over the dwindling resources in Darjeeling and Sikkim. 'Ethnicity and Politics in Sikkim' (1993-1994) by Karubaki Datta published in *The Himalayan Miscellany*, tries to explore the ethnic character of the state politics. It also highlights

how the demand for proportionate representation of the Nepalese in the State Assembly has dominated the political issues in Sikkim and how it has brought the Lepchas and the Bhutias together in their effort of survival.

Amal Datta's article 'Ethnicity and Resource Management in Sikkim' (1994) published in *Sikkim*, presents an analysis of how the particular ethnic affiliation vis-à-vis common origin has been important in determining the resource management in Sikkim. He has pointed out that ethnic identity has an important dimension in exploiting the privileges, managing the resources and acquiring the power in the state. The article by K.R. Chakravarti 'Government and Politics in Sikkim' (1994) published in the book *Sikkim*, highlights the constitutional status of the agreement of merger and discusses the nature of electoral politics in Sikkim from the Assembly Election of 1979 to the election of 1989. D.S. Bhattacharjee's article 'Society in Sikkim – The Changing Scenario' (1995) published in *North-East and the Indian States – Paradoxes of a Periphery*, highlights how alignment and re-alignments have taken the line of communal-casteist-racial axis in Sikkim, with the division of Nepalese community into the Aryans and the Mongoloids.

Karubaki Datta's 'Inter-Ethnic Relations in Sikkim in Historical Perspective' published in *Occasional paper (No.11)* of Centre for Himalayan Studies of North Bengal University tries to explore how the inter-ethnic relations among three dominant communities have evolved over a long period of time. It also attempts to identify the major phases and issues that have moulded the inter-ethnic relationships.

Apart from these, there are numerous articles covering various aspects of Sikkimese society, economy and polity, published in journals and edited books. However, I abstain from reviewing all these, as it would make the survey unnecessarily voluminous.

A brief review of literature on Sikkim makes it amply clear that no comprehensive and full length study has been undertaken so far on 'Ethnicity, Class and Politics' in Sikkim. The attempts made so far by the scholars cover only part dimension of the problem chosen for the present study. The uniqueness of the present study lies in its effort to explore the social, economic and political spaces of the state in order to come out with a comprehensive understanding of how the seeds of ethnicity are spread and how ethnicity is reproduced in social and political practices. The interplay of ethnicity and class factors in the sphere of power relations also constitutes one of the core areas of the study.

Objectives of the Study

The present study is designed to look into the patterns of participation of the different ethnic groups and emergent class in Sikkim politics. The basic queries of research may broadly be outlined as follows:

1. To examine if the various socio-economic and political factors that led to the abolition of monarchy and subsequent merger of Sikkim with India had any ethnic undertones
2. To examine the nature of inter-ethnic relationship both at the socio-cultural, economic and political levels and both at the macro and micro situations and to trace out the areas of conflict between three dominant communities of Sikkim in the past as well as at present. The study aims to look into the process of reproduction and cultivation of ethnic boundaries or ethnic consciousness in the everyday life interaction and social participation of the members of the ethnic communities.
3. To identify the role of the state and the political parties in the ethnic mobilization and to assess the pattern of participation of different ethnic groups in the Sikkim politics. The present study aims to explore the role of the institutions and organizations in defining the politics in ethnic terms.
4. To examine the nature of ethnic dimension of resource distribution and to find out if the sense of relative deprivation in terms of developmental activities in the post-merger Sikkim has led to ethnic group formation.
5. To assess the socio-economic background of neo-class and their perceptions of the major ethnic issues and to see their participation in the state politics. It would be one of the major objectives of the present study to explore how with the introduction of new areas of development, new class forces are emerging and whether these forces are assuming new identities in social, economic and cultural terms. It would also be interesting to examine whether these neo-classes are playing their autonomous part in the politics of the state or whether they are subsumed within the broad ethnic categories.

Methodology

The present study has given me an opportunity to use historical materials and data both from primary and secondary sources. There was also enough scope for using qualitative- as well as quantitative data, both for micro and macro level information. As the present study focuses on the State of Sikkim as a whole, the first part of data collection was done through consulting the historical documents and the already available studies. The historical approach helped me in accumulating data on the process of ethnic group formation in the state. The collection of macro level statistical information on demographic profile, the occupational patterns, literacy rates and educational achievements, linguistic composition, the developmental profile, the representation of three communities in the bureaucracy, politics and employment, patterns of community-wise ownership of land-holdings and industries was possible through consultation of Census reports, government office records, reports, documents, published materials and the manuscripts.

The field survey involved two stages. The first phase was devoted to conduct a study at micro level. For my village level study, I had chosen two villages – Lingmoo and Yangang in South Sikkim, situated at a distance of 12 kilometers. While the Nepalese and the Lepchas were studied in Lingmoo, the detailed study on Bhutias was done in Yangang, where this community is predominant. At first, a house to house survey with socio-economic schedule was conducted to cover the social, economic, demographic and educational factors. After that, the heads of the households and other prominent members were interviewed to elicit details on marriage, kinship network, genealogical relations and nature of ethnic boundary maintenance. Besides these, observation of their day-to-day activities and informal conversation were held to study their mutual interactions. Hence, the village level study helped me a lot to comprehend the nature of inter-community relationships, comparative socio-economic status, their social organization, and educational achievement at micro level.

With the background information from the official sources, regarding the representation of three ethnic groups in the state bureaucracy and various government employment, the second phase of fieldwork was undertaken to elicit information on the neo-class, which included officials, both gazetted and non-gazetted. Care was taken to give due representation to officers from all three ethnic communities and

those from Sikkim only. The collection of the firsthand information, covering the socio-economic background, their attitudes towards other communities and their perceptions on major ethnic issues and politics in Sikkim was administered through a detailed questionnaire, addressed to the officers individually. The questionnaire was structured in such a way as to elicit detail information required. Besides, informal interviews, collection of case studies and the opinion of respondents were also undertaken.

The interviews were mostly conducted at the respondent's residence and few were conducted in public offices. In few cases, the questionnaires were sent to the respondents through the officers, who helped me to identify them. Although, the informants were generally responsive and cordial, I had to face several cases of denial and encounter from some section of bureaucrats. In the beginning, it was indeed a tough job for me to bring the respondents into confidence, especially, regarding their perceptions about other communities and politics. On top of that, my identity as a local Nepali proved to be a barrier in few cases, when the officers from other communities were not at ease to express their opinion openly. However, being a local also proved to be a blessing, as the initial hesitations of the respondents subsided gradually, when they were convinced about my research problem. Hence, the refusal of few officers to cooperate and exclusion of non-Sikkimese officers from the interview, have resulted in sample being small. It may be pointed out that only a few female respondents were included.

Apart from that, in view of the low representation of the Lepchas in all sectors of economy and polity, detailed interviews of important office-bearers of 'Renjong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum' (Sikkim Lepcha Association) and Lepcha leaders were also undertaken, in order to know their views on their overall backwardness. Besides, detailed investigative reports on significant cases of inter-ethnic tensions linked with the politics were also prepared.

Limitations

The present study, although focuses on the State of Sikkim as a whole, seeks to limit itself to only three predominant communities of Sikkim viz., the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese. The plainsmen's community, which also constitutes a significant part of the total population of the state and is represented in various sectors of

economy has been kept outside the scope of the study. Although an effort has been made to know the ethnic dimension of all forms of resource distribution, the unavailability of community-wise break up of information and reluctance on the part of some officials to cooperate made me rely heavily on the limited data available. I feel that the village level study of the three communities should have been done in greater depth in order to have sufficient information about the processes of ethnic boundary maintenance and the process of reproduction of ethnic consciousness in the social and cultural spheres. This is one area I would look forward to take up in my future studies.

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Chapter - II

Ethnic Groups of Sikkim in History

Location

“Located within 28° 07' 48" and 27° 4' 44" north latitude and 88° 00' 58" and 88° 55' 25" east longitude¹, Sikkim is the twenty second state of India. A tiny mountainous state, bounded by Tibet on the north, Bhutan on the east, Darjeeling district of West Bengal on the south and Nepal on the west, it holds a place of immense strategic importance for the Indian union. Comprising an area of 2,818 sq. miles² it is not only a northern gateway to Indian sub-continent but also constitute a vital zone in India's defense system.

The People

Society in Sikkim is characterized by multiple ethnicity and possesses attributes of a plural society. The present population of Sikkim is composed of different races and ethnic groups, viz., the Lepchas, the Bhutias, the Nepalese and the plainsmen, who came and settled in different phases of history. In absence of an authentic history of Sikkim, it is difficult to say, who were the original inhabitants, who officially acknowledged, were the Lepchas. The so called autochthonous Lepchas, as pointed out by Gorer, have no reliable history of migration and “place the home of the ancestors – the people of Mayel – in one of the inaccessible Valley of Kanchenjunga.”³ However, going by the folk-tales, it is generally believed that they have migrated from Assam and upper Burma into this mountainous state. Next came the ‘Khampas’ from the Tibetan Province of ‘Kham’ in the mid-17th Century, who are now commonly known as Bhutias. The immigration of the Nepalese started in the 19th Century.

In the *Gazetteer of Sikkim* H.H. Risley has mentioned about following three main ethnic stocks in Sikkim⁴

- a) Rong – the aboriginal of Sikkim or the Lepchas as the Nepalese call them;
- b) Khampa or Khamba, the immigrants from the Tibetan Province of Kham, commonly called as Bhutias;
- c) The Limbu of ‘Lhasa gotra’ are believed to have migrated to Sikkim from Shigatsi, Panam, Norpu, Khyongtse, Somdubling and Gyantse – all places in the Tibetan province of Tsang, South of Tsapo.

Risley left out the fourth stock i.e. the Nepalese from his classification, although he enlisted the Nepalese of various sub-cultural stocks in the Census of 1891.⁵ Perhaps, it was their late arrival and the ongoing process of migration that influenced him to keep the Nepalese out of his classification of the people of Sikkim. Now, the Nepalese constitute the numerically dominant community in Sikkim. Thus, over the centuries, the narrow fertile valleys of the inner Himalayas have been settled by the Tibeto-Burmese, Tibeto-Mongoloid and Indo-Aryan races, who have adjusted to the rigorous climate of Sikkim. The state recognizes two broad ethnic groups i.e. Lepcha-Bhutia and the Nepalese.⁶ Sociologically, the former may be further divided into two social groups with distinct dialects, distinct cultures with a sense of ethnic solidarity – the Lepchas and the Bhutias. Religiously speaking, the Lepchas (who were animist) and the Bhutias are Buddhist and the Nepalese are Hindus,

Ethnic Groups

The Lepchas: The Lepchas claim to be the autochthons of Sikkim. The Lepchas (in Nepali the word ‘Lap’ means Vile and ‘Che’ means ‘speakers’ i.e. vile-speakers, a contemptuous term as Lepchas spoke their own dialect and refused to adopt Nepali), “the Rong (the ravine-folk) as they call themselves ... are known to the Tibetans as ‘Mon-ba’ or ‘Mon-rik’, people of the Mon Country – a general Tibetan name for the lower Himalayas from Kashmir to Assam and Burma”⁷ The Lepcha concentration is normally found in the slopes of the hills in various parts of Sikkim. They are divided into a number of patrilineal clans (Ptso), which are supposed to have originated from supernatural and mythological ancestry.⁸ Earlier the ‘Ptso’ represented a geographical unit.⁹ *The Gazetteer of Sikkim* mentions 39 clans of Lepchas along the banks of Talung river, each of which is attached to a locality.¹⁰ The main function of the *Ptso* is to regularize marriage and prevent incest through exogamy. Gorer, who worked in

the Dzongu area of Lepcha settlements in Sikkim, states that except as an exogamic unit the *Ptso* is now functionless.¹¹ Though the family relations of Lepchas show traces of matriarchy, Gorer found a tendency more to patrilineality among the Lepchas. According to him, the '*Ptso*' supernatural descend, as it were from father to son; women have other different super-natural guardians, although all children are counted as members of their father's *Ptso*'¹²

The Lepchas had a simple material culture – a subsistence type of hunting and collecting as well as a primitive form of slash and burn type of cultivation of rice, maize and millet. Although they are now Buddhists originally their religion was basically animistic Bon and their priest, 'Boongthing' or 'Mun,' symbolizes the combination of holy specialists, magicians and medicine man. The male priest is called "Boong-thing" and the female is generally called Mun. Every clan has a priest, who in fact is an exorcist. Siiger, who also worked in the Dzongu area, states that "every *Ptso* has its own priest called Boong-thing or *padem*, whose office is hereditary in his own *Ptso*"¹³

Polyandry was prevalent among the Lepchas as well as Bhutias in the past. Conversion of Lepchas into Buddhism paved the way for a social intercourse at the highest level with the Bhutia aristocracy. The interaction was possible due to the 'ritual bond of blood brotherhood'¹⁴ that was established between the two tribes. The bond promoted the growth of a multiple-ethnic society in Sikkim, with the Bhutia invaders providing the ruling dynasty. The Lepcha commoners, who were driven to woods to lead a simple life, were well connected to the world outside, through their custom of *Ingzong* (literally means 'like younger brother') i.e. ritual friendship of economic ties. The Lepchas negotiated *ingzong* with "the Nepalese for their pigs, with the plains Indians for their copper-vessels, with the Bhutanese for their fine cloth, with the Tibetans for their rugs and with the Bhotias for their oxen,"¹⁵ under the patronage of their guardian spirit (*Komsithing*).

The Lepchas have their own language, which according to Mainwaring, is the oldest of all the hill dialects and is contended to be belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese family. In earlier days, they possessed rich culture, but with the advent of the Tibetans and process of Tibetanization, the old rich heritage of Lepcha literature, art and culture were destroyed. Unrestricted matrimonial relations with the Limbus and Bhutias led to erosion of the Lepcha tradition. In contemporary Sikkim, it is quite difficult to locate an all-exclusive Lepcha settlement outside the ruler's private estate

of Dzongu. Buddhism – the religion, which is the pivot of socio-cultural life is the main factor for closer affinities between the Lepchas and the Bhutias. A few of them have been converted to Christianity. They, being relatively better educated and more affluent, have shown an urge for the awareness of the Lepcha identity and a sense of assertion.¹⁶ However, inspite of their conversion to Lamaism or Christianity, they still retained their primitive and tribal ethos in their Lamaist and Christian ways of life.

The Bhutias : The Bhutias, who provided the royal dynasty in Sikkim represent the Tibeto –Burmese stock. They were the carriers of the Tibetan culture, Tibetan language, the Lamaist Buddhism and a combination of Pastoralism and semi-settled agricultural practices. The earliest phase of Bhutia immigration probably started with the Tibetan graziers and the missionary Lamas, who came to Sikkim in search of pastures and potential converts to their religion. It must be long before the 15th century when Sikkim was sparsely populated by the primitive tribes of Lepchas, few Limbus and Magars. The Bhutias who had migrated in the next phase were the traders, who were in the look out for new markets for bartering their goods. Finally came the Tibetan peasants in search of paddy fields. All these stocks found in Dermer-Dzong (Denzong – the valley of rice-a Tibetan term for Sikkim) wide scope of expansion.¹⁷ It was the establishment of blood-brotherhood in later half of the 15th Century, between a Bhutia patriarch named Khye-Bumsa from Phari (Chumbi Valley – Tibet) with the then Lepcha chief, The-Kung-Tek, that has laid a strong foundation for strengthening Lamaism and process of Tibetanization in Sikkim. The Lamaist Missionaries, who were trying to convert the animist tribe without much success, strongly felt the necessity of a strong authority, which could be instrumental in their mission. Later in 1642, a band of Tibetan Lamas discovering such qualities of leadership in one of the Bhutia peasant – Phuntsoh Namgyal,¹⁸ a descendant of Khye-Bumsa, installed him as the first ruler of Sikkim.

The consecration of the Bhutia ruler was a turning point in the history of Sikkim, which marked the beginning of Bhutia dominance over Sikkim. The Pagan Lepchas were converted into Lamaist Buddhism followed by the Tibetans. The new religion and the ruler made a deep impression on the socio-economic life of the Bhutia community. Moreover, the appointment of the Lepcha Dgongpens and the Bhutia Kalons by the first ruler led to the emergence of feudalism and bureaucracy,¹⁹

thus marking the hold of the Bhutias virtually complete over Sikkim. 'The dominance of the Bhutias was so overwhelming that the Lepchas remained the poorest and the most neglected of the people, barring a few who intermarried with the Bhutia elite to reach the level of equality.'²⁰

Apart from religious conversion, the matrimonial relations paved the way for cultural and social assimilation of the two communities. Thus a new community, a new people with their established religious faith, educational convention and long standing social federation, entered into Sikkim having profound effect on the social, economic and religious foundations of the early people of Sikkim.²¹

The inter-marriages between the two tribes provided an opportunity to move in the higher ladder of social hierarchy. The matrimonial relations between the Tibetan nobles and Lepcha chiefs or Dzongpens gave rise to a new affluent class of the Kazis. A Bhutia labourer with some savings, could be a trader, buy some cattle and land, marry a Lepcha chief's daughter and could consequently move in the higher ladder of social hierarchy as 'Kazis'.²²

The Bhutia social structure is patriarchal. The practice of polyandry finds no favour with the young generation in the land of the Lamaist. The Buddhists monastery and monk were the pivots around which revolves their daily life. The monasteries are the main repositories of Bhutia culture. Until recently, the monks were considered as 'the intellectual elite' of the Bhutia society and education was the sole preserve of the monasteries. Even the first ruler was declared as an incarnate Lama. The Lamaist Church of Tibet also undertook the role of the moral guardian of Sikkim. Hence the Lamas, who are a class by themselves, exerted tremendous influence and commanded respect in the society of Sikkim. Thus, the Bhutia immigrants became a stratified society with the Lamas (the Clergy), the Kazis (aristocrats) and the commoners arranged in a descending order in terms of social status.²³ However, with the abolition of feudalism and with the advent of democracy a new class of commoners – the neo-rich plebeians - emerged, thus adding another stratum in the social hierarchy.

The Bhutia immigration took place in phases. Risley has identified the original families and the sequence of their arrival. The earliest immigrants represented 14 main families of Tibetan origin. Of these, 6 were descendents of Khye-Bumsar and 8 were of other Khampas, now known as the *Lbeps-m-Tshanb Gyad*, or the tribe of 8 respectable names. In addition, there were 8 *Rui-Chhung* or little families, who came to Sikkim at various times, since the establishment of the monarchy. After this came

the *Chumbipas*, immigrants from Kham in Tibet and Hah in Bhutan to the lower reaches of the Monchu near Chumbi, which has further six sub-divisions.

In the north, the Lachen-Lachung Valleys were colonized by other immigrants from Hah and Paro in Bhutan, now known as the *Lhopen-Lhundub*. Finally, Risley identifies another category, in which he gives names of 12 other families.²⁴

The Nepalese : The term Nepalese is a very broad and generic term, which encompasses within itself, a number of hill tribes as well as Hindu castes. The Nepalese community in Sikkim is inclusive of three sub-cultural sectors: the Kiratis, the Newaris and the Gorkhas. The Kiratis include Limbu, Rais, Magars, Gurungs, Tamangs and host of other marginal tribal stocks. Among these Limbus and Magars are supposed to be the autochthonous inhabitants of Sikkim. The origin of the Limbus is veiled in obscurity. There are three 'septs' among them. One belonging to Lhasa gotra believed to have migrated from Tibet, while the Limbus belonging to Kasi gotra, are believed to have come from Benaras. A large number of them are believed to have emerged from the 'mother' earth, hence are called Bhuiputta. While a large majority of them are animistic and Hinduized some of them, particularly those belonging to Lhasa gotra, follow Lamaism. Risley narrates a Limbu folk-story taken from an old Limbu manuscript about the origin of Lhasa and Kashi gotra.²⁵ They have their own mythology, which delineates the creation of the (Universe and Man) and specific customs and laws. These Mundhums constitute the basis of their peculiar religion Yuma Sam Samyo or Yumasam Religion. The tribal priests called Phedangmas, Yebas and Yamas (the last being female priests) are the prominent members of the Limbu society and are responsible for all household rituals, ceremonies relating to marriages and funerals with divinations and exorcism of evil spirits through animal sacrifice.²⁶

The Limbus does not maintain much distance from the Lepchas and had a tradition of inter marriage with the latter. They are called Tsongs (cattle or yak merchants and butcher) by the Bhutias and Lepchas and Limbus by the Nepalese. The appellation Sikkim itself is a Limbu,²⁷ which denotes that they were one of the earliest settlers in Sikkim.

The Kirati tribes, with a stronger tribal ethos may broadly be classified into two groups, on the basis of their absorption into the larger civilizations. There are (a)

the animists-cum-Hinduized Gurungs, Magars, Rais, a section of the Limbus, and (b) the Lamaist Tamangs, Sherpas and a section of the Tsongs.

The second sub-cultural stock of the Nepalese in Sikkim includes the Gorkhas, like the Chhetris, Thakuris, and the Bahuns. With the emergence of the Gorkha power in Nepal during the reign of Prithvi Narayan Shah around the middle of the 18th Century, the Nepalese made numerous raids eastwards and clashed with the Bhutias as well as the Kiratas. The settlement of Gurkhas can be traced back to this period. The Newars, the third sub-cultural stock of the Nepalese, also entered Sikkim during this period, with the liquidation of Newari power in Kathmandu Valley by the Gurkhas. They monopolized the copper mines and minting industry in Sikkim. The Newars in Sikkim are, by and large, Hindus with the highest socio-economic prominence. Some of the most enterprising even emerged as the Nepali-counterpart of the Kazis and were drawn into policymaking and administrative process during the Maharaja's time. Along with them came a large number of service castes such as Brahmins (Bahuns), barbers and artisan castes such as smiths (Kamis), tailors (Damai) and shoe-makers (Sarki).²⁸

Of the Nepalese, who settled in Sikkim, the Bahuns occupy the highest position in the social hierarchy. They are mainly the agriculturists and are mostly orthodox Hindus, who would not normally have any matrimonial relations with other castes. However the rigidity of social attitude and behaviour, which the Brahmins maintained rigidly, is somewhat disappearing with the passage of time. The next in social rank are the Thakuris and Chhetris. They are entitled to wear the sacred thread and have Brahminical prejudices. Although there are some cases of inter-caste marriage, such marriages are still considered exceptions rather than rules.

On the whole, the Nepalese of Sikkim may be divided into two groups on the socio-ritual grounds: the Tagadharis, who wear second thread such as Bahuns and Chhetris and the Matwalis, who do not put sacred thread and are in the habit of drinking alcohol. The Tagadhari Nepalese maintains a social distance and look down upon the Bhutias, Lepchas and Kirats as 'carrion' eaters.²⁹

Despite the divisions of Nepalese into many tribes and sects, each having its own social system and language, the growing social intercourse among them, and similar experience of suffering from political and economic discrimination and adoption of Nepalese as common Lingua-franca, identical life-style and common religion have tied the members of this largest community together. The sense of unity

and fellow feeling has aroused an ethnic feeling among the Nepalese in Sikkim. Thus the Nepali Hindus as a group are united against the Lamaists.

Apart from these three predominant ethnic communities of Sikkim, mention must be made of the 'plainsmen'. Though relatively small, they constitute a socially and economically significant group. The Marwaris are the owners of the commercial establishments in the urban areas; they also have stretched their hands well into the villages through money-lending business. Besides, there are the Madesia traders and number of other plainsmen's community from different states to serve in the administrative and other posts.³⁰ The influx in the post-merger era had become a concern to the Lepcha-Bhutia and the Nepalese in general.

Political Organization : The political culture of Sikkim before the merger was oriented to theocratic feudalism. The ruler combining both the secular and religious authority was regarded as the embodiment of divinity. As an incarnate Lama, his responsibility was to rule the subjects in accordance with the tenets of the *Chhos* – the Dharma. His title ever since 1642 was Chogyal, a synthesis of two words *Cho* (Choss) as established religion and *Gyalpo*, the ruler or 'the king who rules according to the Divine Law',³¹ thus justifying the appellation.

Ideologically, the traditional Tibetan government was a synthesis of clerical and lay elements. "... there could not be any absolute separation between spiritual and temporal estates. Besides, the Lamas held a good number of civil posts. The apex, the *sakya hierach*, was the meeting point of both ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction. Here was a government possessed of both *Chhos* (Dharma) and *Srid* (Samsar)"³²

The multiple ethnicity and the British subjugation in later part of the history, made the Chogyal to incorporate many non-Tibetan and secular democratic elements into the theocratic political system. The emergence of Nepali Thikadars as counterpart of Kazis, and appointment of non-Tibetans as lay civil servants can be cited as instances. However, the Lamaists were given priority over other communities in matters of distribution of State resources, in the name of safeguarding the interests of the minority Bhutias and Lepchas. It was, in fact, a race between the numerically minority Bhutias and Lepchas on the one hand and the Nepalese on the other for access to the political power. The Lepcha-Bhutia combine, despite being a minority, had a complete political hegemony over the numerically dominant Nepalese. The Nepalese were discriminated in socio-economic and political domain. The Nepalese,

in response, tried to gain some political control by launching democratic movements, which ultimately led to the abolition of monarchy and subsequent merger of Sikkim with the Union of India in 1975.

Demographic Profile : Ever since the establishment of Sikkim's effective contacts with the British, the immigration of the Nepalese and their settlement in the state had been the most controversial issues. The administration found it difficult to formulate a feasible policy for their settlement. The uncontrolled inflow of the Nepalese in the beginning of the nineteenth century was taken by the Bhutia rulers as a threat to their power. Commenting on the changing population scenario a century back in 1894 Risley predicted in the *Gazetteer of Sikkim*: "The Lepchas are rapidly dying out, while from the west, the industrious Newars and Gorkhas of Nepal are pressing forward. Here also religion will play a leading part. In Sikkim, as in India, Hinduism will assuredly cast out Buddhism and the praying wheel of the Lama will give place to the sacrificial implements of the Brahmin. The Land will follow the creeds, the Tibetan (the Bhutias) proprietors will gradually be dispossed and will take themselves to the petty trade ... Thus, race and religion, the prime movers of the Asiatic World will settle Sikkim difficulty for us in their own way".³³

The first authentic information regarding population of Sikkim is the Census of 1891,³⁴ which puts the total population of the state to 30,458 that comprised 5,762 Lepchas, 4,894 Bhutias, 3,356 Limbus and the rest 15,458 Nepalese of various ethnic stocks. In 1909, J.C. White, the first political officer in Sikkim noted "... the greater number of the inhabitants of Sikkim ... are the *paharis* (Nepalese) who number nearly 50,000 (62.5%) of an estimated population of 80,000."³⁵ He noted the Lepcha population to be about 6,000.³⁶ The latest Census figures for the ethnic affiliation are available for 1931, when out of total population of 1,09,808, the Lepchas numbered 13,060 (11.89%), Bhutias accounted for 11,955 (10.88%) and the rest were mainly the Nepalese.³⁷ The 1951 Census data gives the religious affiliation of the people. Out of a total population figure of 1,35,725, 39,397 were the Buddhists with 13,625 (9.89%) Lepchas and 15,626 (11.3%) Bhutias. 81,872 were Hindus (the Hindu Nepalese) and 15,991 Yuma Samyo or Yamaism (Limboos). After ten years in 1961, the total population increased to 1,62,189 with 49,894 Buddhists and 1,08,165 Hindus respectively.³⁸

The Censuses of 1971 and 1981 have done the categorization on the basis of language spoken in the households. Although, both Censuses have common basis of categorization there are some discrepancies. In 1971, there was no separate mention of the groups like the Limbus or the Sherpas. But these groups were identified and separately mentioned for the first time in 1981. Secondly, the case of three different terms like the 'Bhutias', the 'Tibetan' and the 'Sikkimese Bhutias' were quite ambiguous. Even though the word 'Tibetan' is used for the Tibetan refugees, the ambiguity lies in the difference between the Bhutias and the Sikkimese Bhutias. Such discrepancies have been done away in 1981 Census report, as is shown in Table 2.1.

The Table shows that in 1981, Nepali language is spoken by a large majority (62.57 per cent) of the population in the State. While the Lepcha and Bhutia as a linguistic group accounts for only 7.26 percent and 6.9 percent of the total. It is also to be noted that after 1891 only the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Limboos are recognized as distinct ethnic groups, while all other groups were regarded as 'different tribes (races) of the Nepali community.'³⁹

Table 2.1: Language Classifications in 1981 Census

Sl.No.	Language	No. of Speakers	% Percentage
1	Nepali/Gorkhali	1,92,891	62.57
2	Lepcha	22,391	7.26
3	Bhutia	21,548	6.9
4	Limboo	17,922	5.8
5	Sherpa	10,726	3.4
6	Tibetan	4,149	1.3
7	Other Languages	18,899	6.1
8	Other Schedule VIII Languages	19,570	6.3
9	Other than Schedule VIII Languages	166	0.05

Source: Census of India, 1981, Series 19 – Sikkim Paper 1 of 1987. H.H. 16 Part B (1) pp. 26-27.

Table 2.2: District-wise Percentage distribution of two major religious communities of Sikkim (1991 Census)

State/District	Total Population	Hindus	Buddhist
Sikkim	4,06,457	68.4%	27.1%
North	31,240	36.9%	60.2%
East	1,78,452	69.1%	26.1%
South	98,604	71.2%	22.9%
West	9,8,161	74.1%	22.7%

Source : Census of India, 1991

The Census of 1991 gives the categorization on the basis of religion (Table 2.2). The Buddhists (comprising mostly Bhutias and Lepchas) account for 27.1% of the total population, whereas the Hindus constitute the largest share of 68.4%. Except an insignificant minority, who are converted into Christianity, most of the Lepcha-Bhutias are Buddhists. A comparative study of Census figures of 1891 and 1991 (Table 2.3) shows how the population of Bhutias and Lepchas, who are declared as Scheduled Tribes by the Presidential Order of 1978 and other ethnic communities like the Nepalese and others have changed over the last one hundred years in Sikkim.

A close scrutiny of the trend of population growth over the last hundred years brings to light that there has been a tremendous multiplication of population figures in Sikkim. It also becomes clear as to how the population balance has tilted in favour of Nepalese. The Lepcha-Bhutia combine constituted 35% of total population in 1891. Hundred years later their share of total population (along with others who are included in Scheduled Tribes) has tumbled down to 22.36%. The fall in their percentage has obviously gone in favour of Nepalese, who thus emerged as the largest social group, in contrast to the indigenous Lepchas and the ruling Bhutias, who have trailed behind in terms of population, hence becoming the minority community.

Table 2.3 : A Comparative Census Figures of 1891 and 1991

Sl.No.	1891 Census			1991 Census		
	Particulars	Population	%	Particulars	Population	%
1.	Bhutias	4,894	16.06	S. T	90,921	22.36
2.	Lepcha	5,762	18.91	Lepcha Bhutia Sherpa & Others		
3.	Nepalese	19,560	64.02	Nepali including	3,15,556	77.64
4.	Others/ Miscella- neous	242	0.8	S.C & Others		
	Total Population	30,458	100	Total Population	4,06,457	100

Source : Subba, J.R., *The Limboos of the Eastern Himalayas*, 1999, p. 120

The change in the demographic scenario thus widely affected the social, economic and political sequences, which obviously had wide repercussions in the inter-ethnic relationships.

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Chapter – III

Political History of Sikkim

Introduction

Viewed objectively in terms of historic antecedents, the geographical center, cultural emblems etc., the three major communities of Sikkim, the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalese, can be generally accepted as three ethnic groups. Coupled with this is the subjective self-ascribed awareness of separateness and recognition by others as a distinctive group. Hence to understand Ethnicity, Class and Politics in their proper perspective, a cursory glance at the historical evolution of political institutions vis-à-vis the administrative policy is inevitable. Because, these are the things that moulded the inter-ethnic relationships in Sikkim. This chapter would bring out an account of the shaping of political institution in the State, highlighting its impact on inter-community intercourse in different phases of history.

The history of political development in Sikkim may be divided into four phases: (i) pre-monarchy era; (ii) the period of theocratic-monarchy; (iii) feudal era and (iv) the dawn of modernity.

1. **Pre-monarchy era:** The history of pre-monarchy era is shrouded in obscurity, in absence of any written scripts and languages of the indigenous people. However, it is maintained that the aboriginal inhabitants, the Lepchas, lived alongside the tribes like Limbus and Magars, before the establishment of Bhutia kingdom. In Limbu tradition all of these tribes were included in Kirati stock, ruled by their tribal chiefs,¹ about hundred years back. Risley has enlisted Limbu as one of the three ethnic stocks residing in Sikkim. Although not much is known about the Magars, their presence in Sikkim along with the Lepchas at least from the 17th Century can be drawn from Risley's reference to an incident. It narrates the Lepchas and the Magars, who witnessed Phuntsog Namgyal (the first Chogyal) and his followers passing through Yangang, riding on ponies with the match-lock guns, told others that they rode on huge logs carrying sound producing sticks.²

Col. Mainwaring has reported of a Lepcha Punu (king) Turve, who reigned around 1425 A.D³ when, he guessed, was the time the Lepchas entered the country. With three more succession, the last being Tur-agek, the reign of *punus* ended. With his demise a new era ushered in Sikkim when the throne was usurped by the Tibetans.⁴ During this period the Lepchas had developed legends about their ancestry and vocabulary to recognize places and objects,⁵ marking the formative years of the cultural evolution of Lepchas. The ancient Lepcha book 'Chunakh – Akhen' gives the reference of Lepcha *punu* back to 330 to 320 B.C.⁶

The houses of the Lepchas- the mild, quiet, indolent and solitude loving ethnic group of Sikkim, are found in the most inaccessible places. Although they profess Buddhism now, originally they were animist, worshipping the spirit of the mountains, rivers and forests, a natural outcome of their surroundings.

The Lepchas had a simple maternal culture with a subsistence economy based on hunting and gathering. Agriculture was at a primitive stage with slash and burn type of rotational cultivations of rice, maize and millet.⁷ With the land in abundance the Lepchas, instead of fighting with the intruders, got mixed up with them or moved on to new pastures.

The Lepchas started organizing themselves in social order with the passage of time. The village was the most important territorial unit in the social system of the tribal clans.⁸ hereditary leadership of the clans started with the influential village headman assuming the role. Inter-marriages with other tribes like Limbus, Magars and Bhutias were not uncommon, since the Lepchas preferred to avoid inter-clan and inter-tribal feuds.

The most important festival was the worship of the Kanchenjunga summit, as it was regarded as the abode of the spirit of the Lepcha Bon religion. Bongthing, the animistic priest, had a significant role in all social ceremonies.

The Lepcha mythology says that after the usurpation of the throne by the Tibetans, the Lepcha animistic priests "were tricked into bringing all their writings to the (Buddhist) Lamas, who mercilessly burnt the manuscript and poisoned them."⁹ Then, they translated their own mythological works into Lepcha under the name of 'Tashi sung' (History of Tashi), which signifies the

all-seeing, omniscient and omnipresent Lord.¹⁰ This shows how the simple, native and animistic Lepchas were treated harshly by the proselytizing Lamas. With the establishment of Bhutia kingdom, with the consecration of the first Bhutia ruler in 1642, the Lepcha's subservience and the Bhutia's dominance began to take a firm root.

2. **Theocratic-Monarchy:** Gyabumsag (Khye-Bum-sa), the ancestor of the first ruler of Sikkim, who came to Sikkim during early Bhutia migration, developed 'friendship of blood brotherhood' with the Lepcha chief The-Kong-Tek.¹¹ It is said that the alliance marked the beginning of conversion of the Rong-folk to Buddhism under the influence of the Tibetans. Later, in the first half of the 17th Century, three celebrated Lamas belonging to Nyingmapa sect (Red-hat-sect) of the Tibetan Lamaism, who had to leave Tibet as a result of conflict with the yellow hat sect, entered Sikkim by different routes and met at 'Yaksam'¹² to decide the spiritual head and consecrated Phun-tso-Namgyal of Khe-Bhumsa's dynasty to be the first ruler of Sikkim in 1642 AD and gave the title of Chos-r-Gyal (Dharma-rajā or religious king),¹³ with both spiritual and temporal power. The Dalai Lama recognized the first ruler as a canonized Buddhist saint and honoured him "with a complimentary letter, recognizing him as the ruler of the sacred land, alongwith the ceremonial gift of silken scarf bearing Dalai Lama's seal, the mitre (hat) of the Guru Rimpoche, the devil dagger (phurpa), and the precious sand image of Guru."¹⁴ Since then, the newly established Bhutia kingdom got tied to Tibetan Theocracy and always sought the protection and aid of Tibet in case of aggression.

Due to docile nature of the Lepchas and their religious conversion into Buddhism, the Tibetan immigration increased unopposed. Apart from 'perpetual friendship of blood brotherhood' the Bhutias established matrimonial relations with the Lepchas and offered them important administrative positions. Such a calculated approach of 'cooperation and patronage' gradually brought the Lepchas under the complete domination of the Bhutias. King Chador Namgyal also studied the Lepcha language and invented a new script, in which his own rituals were written.¹⁵ All these incidents show how the Lepchas have been overshadowed by the culturally more dominant Bhutias.

Phutshok-Namgyal had to administer a vast area, many times the size of the present Sikkim. The area covered Limbuan (now in Nepal), Choombi Valley in Tibet, a part of the Western Bhutan, extending upto Titaliya on the Bengal-Bihar border with Darjeeling.¹⁶ Hence to establish a viable administrative structure was his immediate task. The Bhutia ruler sought favour of the Lepchas, the 'sons of the soil' who had the entire land in their possession, and avoided all possible conflicts. He was successful in courting the Lepcha loyalty by recognizing the 12 important Lepcha chiefs as the Dzungpens (Governors or administrators of the forts) and by dividing the country into 12 Dzongs (districts).¹⁷

The political history of Sikkim would be incomplete without reference to a council called 'Lho-men-tsong',¹⁸ which the ruler had made to win the confidence of the existing Kirati tribes and to maintain a cordial inter-ethnic relationships. In a meeting of all the tribal chiefs, he proclaimed the Sikkim Bhutias (the victorious Lhopas), the Membas or the Monpas (the Lepchas), and the Tsongs (the Limbus) as one family representing the father, mother and sons respectively. Moreover, the Magar chiefs, who did not come to terms with Bhutias were left out of the Council.

A Strained inter-ethnic relations

The cordial relations were not destined to last long. The history of Sikkim has witnessed many inter-tribal conflicts, raids and wars, though sporadically, during the five successive rulers. Although the Lepcha chiefs were content to align with the Bhutia rulers, the 'Limbu' and 'Magars' were not subdued easily. The Bhutias decided to win over the Limbus by marital alliances,¹⁹ and religious conversion. The king Tensung Namgyal himself married the daughter of a Limbu chief. The practice, thus set, was enthusiastically followed by the Kalons (ministers) and the Dzungpens. Of a dozen rulers, seven married Limbu ladies from Limbuana.²⁰ Yet, the incidents of revolts and expression of discontent continued sporadically and many of them, unable to maintain their independence against the Bhutias, migrated to the neighbouring countries.

The reign of Gurmed-Namgyal, the fourth king, was full of troubles. There were many attacks from Bhutan. While making fortification in his capital against these attacks, he displeased Tsongs and Magars, who were used as forced labour. Most of them fled to Limbuan and Nepal and became hostile to the Bhutias. Another incident

that throws light on Bhutia-Limbu's strained relationship was the assassination of Sri Junga Devasi,²¹ a Limbu, by the Bhutia Tachhang Lama of Pemiongchi monastery in 1741, when he revived the Kirati Mudhum religion. The Limbus had shown their vengeance against the Bhutias by covering the roof of their shed, tearing the pages of valuable Tibetan Literature, when they were assigned work to construct garrisons during the Sikkim-Nepal war.²²

A careful scrutiny of the course of events brings to light the under current of tension behind the apparent cordial relationship between the Lepchas and the Bhutias. The *History of Tibet* records many instances when the Lepcha 'sorcerers' tried to cast spell over the Bhutia kings. To cite an example, an attempt to raise a general insurrection by an 'evil spirit' was made, which had brought ill luck and misfortune to the Sikkim in general and to the Raja and his connections in particular. First he had entered the Rubdentse palace, from where he tried to diminish the prosperity of Sikkim State and later took refuge in Rinchenpong, where he conspired a general insurrection. Having failed in this too, he went back to Pasok to collect a body of 14 male and female Bijuas and Bijuanis of the Lepcha race called Bonbons and employed these sorcerers to work mischief by means of black art. but this produced no effect on the Raja.²³ The person thus possessed was finally enslaved and engaged in fetching water, splitting fuel etc.²⁴

As per another incident recorded in *History of Sikkim*, 5 Lepchas pretending to be the incarnation of great Lepcha wizard Guru Teshe Thing, succeeded in convincing the king of their supernatural power and almost tried to bring the king under their influence. The Buddhist Lamas, who were not to be taken so easily, however, proved that they did not possess any supernatural power at all. Finally, the trapas of the Pemiongche monastery stoned them to death.²⁵

However, an open rebellion against the Bhutia ruler took place in 1725, when Tasso Bidur, a Lepcha chief aroused a feeling of patriotism among the Lepchas. Claiming himself as the incarnation of the Guru Rimpoche (Padma Sambhava) he exhibited some miraculous power and acquired a large number of followers. He also stopped sending revenue to the ruler from Siliguri region and sought the help of the neighbouring Magar chief for his rebellion against the Bhutia king. But, his insurrection was crushed by Yangthang Desit, a Bhutia courtier.²⁶

The controversy regarding the succession of the throne in 1740²⁷ bears another testimony of strained relation. The fourth Gur-med Namgyal sparked off a

controversy by declaring that a child born of a nun would be his next heir. When a Bhutia Minister Chagzot Tamding refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the infant ruler, it was Chagzot Karwang of Barmoik estate, a Lepcha Minister, who saved the infant ruler. The period witnessed several quarrels and bloodshed, as the tug of war between two groups went on for three years. Finally, the Lepcha faction in favour of infant ruler gained strength and Chagzot Tamding was forced to flee Lhasa to plead his case before the Tibetans. Around 1750,²⁸ Rapden Sharpa was deputed by the Tibetan to investigate the dispute of succession of throne. The 'Magar' chief of Sikkim was outraged by the discourtesy shown to him by the Sikkim Darbar (Court) and is said to have persuaded the Deb Raja of Bhutan to attack Sikkim. This was the parting of the ways between the Bhutia rulers and the Magars, who were behind Lepchas in support of the infant ruler.

There was an attempt by the Limbus to revolt in 1752²⁹ but that was suppressed by the Bhutia ruler. Even during the Sikkim-Nepal war, the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Limbus had their separate garrisons, which were combined under Chutup and Deba Takaspo. During the period, the expansionist design of Gurkhas led to a series of raids of Sikkim, especially the Tista Valley and Terai, under the leadership of the Gurkha General Kazi Damodar Pandey.

British Paramountcy

Following the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814, which saw the defeat of Gurkhas, the East India Company occupied Sikkim as an ally. The British were prompt in assessing the strategic importance of Sikkim and the commercial possibilities with Tibet. According to the treaty of Segauli (2nd December, 1815), signed between Company and the Nepal at the conclusion of war, the southern part of Sikkim – the Morang strip at the foot of the Sikkim hills was surrendered to the British. The Morang strip was originally a part of Sikkim but it was annexed by Nepal during 1788-90.³⁰ Subsequently, the British agent on the Purnea Frontier concluded a treaty with the agent of Chogyal Tsungpsud Namgyal on 10 February 1817,³¹ at Titalia. This treaty demarcated the boundary between Sikkim and Nepal along the Mahanada and Mechi rivers and the Singilela mountain range.³² On 7th April 1817, the Governor General Lord Moira granted all the low lands, situated east-ward of the Meitche river and westward of the Mahanadi, formerly possessed by the Raja of Nepal, to the Sikkim

Raja but the Sikkim Raja had to acknowledge the supremacy of the British government over the said land.³³ The Sikkim Raja, who was sandwiched between Nepal and Bhutan, had his territories restored, but under British control and protection. This was a very costly deal for Sikkim as the East India Company assumed the position of Lord Paramount.

While fighting against the aggression of Bhutan and Nepal, the Lepchas always remained in the vanguard. But the protection against the foreign aggression could not end the old feuds between the Bhutias and the Lepchas in Sikkim. The Bhutias resented the Lepchas and Limbus, who rose to prominence as village chiefs, with the help of the administration during the reign of Gurkhas. Once these parts were restored after the 'Treaty of Sugoulee', the Bhutias started harassing them again. Trafficking of Lepcha- and Limbu women as slaves in Bhutan and Chumbi, assault, murder etc. became the common features.³⁴ The Lepcha chief minister Chagzot Bolek, who was one of the Lepcha Kazis, could not remain a silent spectator to these atrocities.

The *Gazetteer of Sikkim* gives an account of the quarrel between the Raja Tsug-Phud Namgyal and his own maternal uncle Chagzot Bho-lod³⁵ in 1819, which subsequently resulted in treacherous murder of the Lepcha chief minister and his family near Tumlong (the then capital of Sikkim) in 1826. Bho-lod's cousin Yuk-Lhat-Grup fled Sikkim fearing a similar fate and took refuge in Elam (Eastern Nepal) along with 800 of his Lepcha tribesman.

The Lepchas frequently raided western Sikkim, causing several frontier disputes between Nepal and Sikkim. Sikkim referred the matter to the East India Company for arbitration in terms of the provisions of 1817 Treaty. This gave an opportunity to the British to influence the course of events in the strategic area of Sikkim. The frontier disputes were settled with the British intervention in 1828, when J.W. Grant and Captain George William A. Loyd were deputed to Sikkim. During their visit Darjeeling drew their attention as a potential health resort and as a future political and commercial centre. But the Company had to wait till 1833, when the Lepcha infiltrators from Nepal made incursion in Sikkim.³⁶ The British obtained "all land south of the great Rungeet river and east of the Balasun, Kahil and little Rungeet river and west of Rungpo and Mahanadi river"³⁷ on 1 February, 1835. Although it was an unconditional transfer out of friendship of the Sikkimese ruler with the British

Governor General, an annual grant initially of Rs. 3000/- per annum, which was raised to Rs. 6000/- in 1846,³⁸ was fixed for the Sikkimese ruler.

It should be noted that with the emergence of belligerent Gurkha Kingdom in the 18th Century, the Indo-Tibet trade route, which was via Kathmandu Valley, came to be controlled by the Nepalese. Sikkim with the Bhutia rulers, who were theoretically under the tutelage of Dalai Lama and socially and politically aligned with the Tibetan aristocracy, occupied a unique position between Tibet and India in terms of strategic, political and commercial implications.

The relationship between the British and Sikkim began worsening, when the former undertook the programme of developing Darjeeling. Darjeeling provided numerous facilities for free trade in mercantile commodities and in labour, its extensive forest lands which could be reclaimed for cultivation attracted the large number of the Lepchas and the Nepalese to migrate and settle down. Such developments not only threatened the privileges, traditionally enjoyed by certain Bhutia families of Sikkim for instance - their monopoly of trade in this part of the Himalayas, but also disturbed the age-old population balance and inter-tribal relations in Sikkim. It became a source of embarrassment to Sikkim in her relations with Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet. In 1844 the ruler of Sikkim and Paro Penlop of Bhutan clashed at Phari in Tibet. The government of Tibet gave vent to its displeasure by restricting the Sikkim ruler's visit to Lhasa to once in eight years and also by curtailing the grazing rights that the Sikkimese on the border had always enjoyed in Tibet. In 1847, therefore, the ruler of Sikkim appointed one Tokhang Namgyal popularly known as (Pagla Dewan or the mad chief minister), a Tibetan of strong anti-British conviction as his chief minister.³⁹

The hostility between the Tibetan-Bhutia aristocracy and the British led to a number of British military expeditions to Sikkim between 1850 and 1860.

The Sikkim Raja was not happy with the British for over lording him. An internal conflict broke out in 1847⁴⁰ between the Bhutia faction led by anti-British Tokhang Namgyal and Lepcha faction led by pro-British Chebu Lama. The disorder was further aggravated due to Raja's retirement to the religious life resulting in factional rivalry on the question of succession to the throne.

The relationship between British India and Sikkim further aggravated in 1848,⁴¹ when the Sikkim authorities flatly refused the Governor General's expectation that Dr. Joseph Hooker, an English naturalist, would be allowed to pursue his

researches in Sikkim, on the plea that no foreigner could be allowed to travel in Sikkim. This obviously was due to the influence of Pagla Dewan, who had monopoly over Sikkim's trade with Tibet. Raja's discontent against the British culminated in 1849, on the second visit of Hooker, who was accompanied by Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling. On reaching the Tibetan border to investigate the possible trade routes, they were arrested and escorted back to Tumlong.

Consequently, the Raja of Sikkim lost Rs. 6000/- per annum that he was getting as compensation for Darjeeling.⁴² The British also annexed Sikkim Tarai and hill areas between Ramam and Rangit rivers. Following several incidents of kidnapping of British subjects in 1860, the Anglo-Sikkimese relation was further strained. Dr. Campbell led military expedition to Sikkim when Tokhang Donyar Namgyal and the ruler Tsugphud Namgyal fled to Tibet after abdicating in favour of his son Sidkyong Tulku.⁴³

Ultimately, a peace treaty consisting of 23 articles was signed at Tumlong, the capital of Sikkim on 28th March 1861.⁴⁴ While Sikkim remained theoretically independent, it had to make many concessions to the British. One important concession being banishment of Dewan Namgyal and his blood relatives and opening of Sikkim for free trade with India. Sikkim also agreed to render all possible help to the British in their efforts to develop trade with Tibet. Thus Sikkim became a de-facto protectorate of British India. Expulsion of Dewan Namgyal and his relatives was one of the early step for wiping out Tibetan influence in Sikkim, which was pursued more vigorously in due course.

A large-scale migration of Nepali speaking people started in Sikkim after the establishment of Sikkim as a British protectorate. Apart from restraining the pro-Tibetan Bhutias, the British encouraged the effort to reclaim wasteland and initiative for development.⁴⁵

Although the treaty of 1867 checked Tibetan influence for sometime, the court intrigues initiated by Dewan Namgyal continued till his death in 1886.⁴⁶ The Government of Tibet supported his faction. The terms of the treaty, especially the influx of Nepali speaking people and farming out of the Sikkimese mines to Nepali merchants from Darjeeling were treated as detrimental to the interest of Sikkim.

Tsugpnud Namgyal, during whose reign, the treaty of Titalia was signed, advised his ministers and Kazis not to settle men from Nepal and Bhutan. But despite opposition from the king, the Nepalese did manage to get the permission to settle in

Sikkim. *The History of Sikkim* describes – “In 1875, in direct defiance of the Royal Order, Chebu Lama allowed the *paharias* (Gurkhas) to settle in the land of Chakong, Rishi and Raman rivers”,⁴⁷ the example that was soon followed by the old Lasso Kazi and Phodong Lama and Khangsarpa Dewan.

In 1878, at the ruler's request, Ashley Eden, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, proposed an arrangement limiting the settlement of the Nepali speaking people to the south of the line, drawn across Sikkim from east to West, just a few miles to the north of Gangtok. An influential section of the Bhutias (Kazis) vehemently opposed it. As a result of the Nepalese settlement, some complications arose between Luchmee Das Pradhan, a Nepali Newar, and Lasso Kazi, the Sikkim Vakil, which was later culminated into a riot at Rhenock between the Bhutias and Nepali-speaking factions in 1880.⁴⁸ A modification of the proposal of 1878 brought a re approachement. *The Durbar Chronicle* claims that the powerful pro-British chief minister – Khangsarpa Dewan tampered the document prohibiting such settlements – in which this clause was added – “According to the Governor's desire, I promise to abide by the policy of allowing the Gurkhalese to settle in uninhabited wastelands of Sikkim”.⁴⁹ However, the Nepalese would not hold office of the village headmanship or similar position of importance.

Encouraged by the Tibetan aristocracy in their anti-Nepali drive, the Bhutias could not reconcile to the Nepalese settlement and British paramountcy. The Kazis were openly divided. The pro-British faction of Phodong Lama and Khangsarpa Dewan wanted to retain power with the support of the British, while the other section aligned with the Tibetan interests along with the ruler.

Though Thutob Namgyal had come to power with British support, he drifted away and succumbed to anti-British pressures. In 1883, he went to Tibet with his family, where the Tibetan government gave him warm welcome. In July 1887, he condoned the Tibetans occupation of Lingthu Frontier – a Sikkimese territory. In spite of the several invitations, the king refused to return to Sikkim.

The government of India resorted to military solution and the Tibetans were driven out of Lingthu by 20th March, 1888,⁵⁰ after a short fight. The Maharaja was arrested and on his return he was instructed never to go to Chumbi in future, and was asked to act according to the council of pro-British faction. The British advance into Chumbi alarmed the Chinese. Fear of losing influence over Tibet, they began

negotiation with the British. Consequently, an Anglo-Chinese Convention⁵¹ was signed at Calcutta on 17 March 1890.

The convention fixed the Sikkim-Tibet boundary and admitted the British government's exclusive control over the internal and external affairs of Sikkim. However, Tibet considered the agreement as imposed upon it by China and refused to recognize the line of delimitation. In spite of frequent frontier violations by the Tibetans, the Government of India completed the task of boundary survey and demarcation.

In 1888, the government of India created a political agency with a political officer at Gangtok to act as an observer on the Tibetan frontier. It also exercised effective influence on the administration. The first political officer re-organized the system of administration and set up a three-member state council to advise the king and conducted land settlement, forest and mineral surveys. Hence, with the appointment of political officer coupled with the signing of Anglo-Chinese Convention, the Tibetan hegemony over Sikkim came to an end.

The political structure of Theocratic Sikkim comprised the clergy, the aristocracy and the commoners. The third ruler Chador Namgyal, who was greatly influenced by monasticism, founded the Pemiongchi Monastery⁵² and commanded every second son of a Bhutia family to be ordained a monk of the monastery. A network of the Buddhist monasteries with attached huge estates was established. Some of them were maintained with the support of state exchequer. Apart from the theological learning it was also a residential college for religious studies and teaching center for crafts, script, art etc.⁵³ The monks, apart from religious duties, were very much influential administratively and politically. In fact, it was the clergymen who managed the affairs of the state in collaboration of the Kazis.

The secular life of the state was centered on the royal family and the nobles called Kazis. Although some notable Lepcha families were admitted to the nobility they were mostly of Bhutia- or pure Tibetan extraction. J. Edgar, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, records twelve Kazis⁵⁴ and several other officials in 1874, who exercised authority over the specified tract of land. Being the regional lords of the estates, the Kazis and officers enjoyed some "authority", but the final authority was the king in all matters. "They had no proprietary right in the lands, although they had a kind of hereditary title to their office"⁵⁵

Thus, the Kazis constituted a fluid social class.⁵⁶ The Kazis as regional lords, constituted the top echelon of the bureaucracy and were widely respected. As the commander of the contingents against the foes, they wielded considerable authority, hence becoming the power behind the throne acquiring a great economic and social dominance.

Feudalism

The appointment of J.C. White in 1888 as first Political Officer with an aim to check the Tibetan influence and manage administrative mess, had added another milestone in the history of Sikkim. The Durbar was divided on the issues of settlement of Nepalese and helping British India in encouraging trade with Tibet. The Maharaja who was altogether Tibetan in his sympathies and ideas,⁵⁷ was playing a vital role for anti-British intrigue to flourish. Since he was in the habit of living in the Chumbi Valley (Tibet), he was virtually cut off from the routine responsibilities of public affairs of Sikkim. Hence, in course of time, J.C. White became the de-facto ruler of Sikkim. He structured the administration by appointing an Advisory Council to guide Thutob Namgyal, that consisted four Kazis, two Lamas and two ex-Dewans (ministers). Hence he took away most of the executive power from the ruler.

White felt the necessity to re-structure the country's administration as "chaos reigned everywhere. There was no revenue system ... no court of justice, no police, no public works, no education for the younger generation"⁵⁸ As the coffers were empty, the basis of taxation and revenue was established after five years of arduous task. The country was sparsely populated and to reclaim more land under cultivation, "it was necessary to encourage immigration, which could be done by giving land on favourable terms to Nepalese".⁵⁹

White scrapped all the tenancy regulations and introduced the lessee-system of land-tenure. He set apart the entire arable land, except the ruler's estate on contractual lease for a specific period on a fixed annual rent. He undertook the plans for opening of roads, development of uniform law and justice and welfare schemes such as opening of schools, hospitals and many other developmental activities. To raise state revenue and strengthen British foothold, he along with the Lepcha Kazis encouraged the Nepalese settlement.

Since then, many political officers served the rulers of Sikkim, but the basic socio-economic structure as set by White remained the basic foundation of all the administrative policies. Thutob Namgyal was restored to power as a titular head, only after he had given an undertaking of good behaviour to the Government of India. However, the real power was vested on the political officer. Sideokong Namgyal, who met an untimely death, succeeded Thutob Namgyal. He was succeeded by his half brother Tashi Namgyal, who started his reign under the tutelage of Charles Bell. Hence, full powers were restored to the ruler in 1918 with the expectation of enlightened rule. He was showered different titles and was recognized as the Maharaja of Sikkim. By this time, Sikkim was virtually submerged under the incoming floods of Nepali immigrants. Even though Claud White's successors took a more restrained and balanced view of the question of Nepali immigration, the process set into motion could not be easily stopped and the Nepali influx continued unabated.

The early years of Nepali immigration were full of strife, with the splitting of Raja's Council into two groups. A British administrator highlighted this in 1894 :

From the commencement of our relations with Sikkim, there have been two parties in that state, one which may be called the Lepcha or National Party, consistently friendly to our government and a foreign or Tibetan party, steadily hostile. The family of chief has generally been by way of siding with the later, partly in consequence of their habit of marrying Tibetan woman and partly through their fondness for Chumbi. Of late years, a further complication has been introduced by the settlement of Nepalese in parts of Sikkim - a measure favoured by the Lepchas generally. These settlers look to us for protection, but their presence is regarded with disfavour by many influential Lamas, who alleged that they waste the forests, allowed their cattle to trespass and make themselves unpleasant neighbours in other ways...⁶⁰

In order to protect the interest of the original settlers, White proposed lower rate of revenue, forbidding of sale of land to newcomers and stopping of settlement of any non-Buddhist new comers in the lands of North Sikkim. To avoid mixed villages he proposed placing villages inhabited by the Nepalese exclusively under Nepalese Mandal and Lepcha-Bhutia villages under Lepcha-Bhutia Mandals.

The introduction of system of land lease was an event of immense significance from socio-political point of view. The Nepalese Thikadaar – a counterpart of Lepcha-Bhutia Kazis emerged from the Nepali commercial community of the

Newars, with their exclusive hold over copper-mining and minting activities. For Lamaist Kazis, to dig mines was a taboo.⁶¹ Hence, the Nepali immigrants, who could also procure land on lease in course of time, rose to prominence economically. With their sheer hard work many of them became 'Thikadaars,' the counterpart of Lepcha-Bhutia Kazis.

It was a calculated policy on the part of British to settle Nepalese. Writing about industrious nature of Nepalese, J.C. White writes,

The Paharias (Nepalese) who have migrated from the neighbouring densely populated areas of Nepal ... are on the whole a steady, industrious and thrifty people, very pushing and eager to take up new employment, they make excellent settlers, pay their rent regularly ... many of their headman are excellent managers ... Nepalese settlers in Sikkim by dint of hard-work and perseverance, rise to the important positions... in marked contrast to the Lepchas, whose indolent temperament always act as a deterrent and causes them to be out-distanced by more energetic races"⁶²

Besides the influx of Nepalese, the period witnessed the consolidation of the institution of Kazis on a new plane. Of course, there is divergent opinions on the origin of the Kazis.⁶³ Risley mentioned about 14 Bhutia Kazi families of repute, which could be admitted to the sacred Pemiongchi Monastery.⁶⁴ There were eight other families, who could be admitted only on payment of heavy entry fees. Most of the Lepchas aristocrats trace their origin to the Lepcha chief- Thekung Tek and majority of Lepcha Kazis belonged to the legendary Bar-Phungpo stock (i.e., flowing from on high or the patricians). Though, the Barphongpuso were made Kazis or Jongpens of the Lepcha districts, their descent is not a purely Lepcha one.⁶⁵

The history bears the records of Bhutia-Lepcha aristocratic families, inter-related by matrimonial alliances. The Kazis as the regional lords had a kind of hereditary succession to their office. Sinha has mentioned 12 number of Kazis from the source of Waddle and 21 as per Imperial Gazetteer of India.⁶⁶ The kazis had been very influential through out the history.

As the political system of Sikkim has been shaped in the mould of centralized feudal system of Tibet, the ministers and other important officers of the central government consisted of members of aristocratic families, who resided in the capital and were feudal lords simultaneously.⁶⁷ Hence, the central administration was dominated by Bhutias since its inception. Apart from the ritual and matrimonial

alliances the large-scale adoption of cultural artifacts and ideologies, polyandrous family structure, consequently led to a situation when no self respecting Kazi would claim to be of a pure Lepcha aristocratic origin.⁶⁸

For the purpose of land revenue there were three categories of Illakas (revenue divisions under the lease) as per State Revenue Roll,⁶⁹ viz., (1) leased out Illakas; (2) Illakas under direct management and (3) monasteries. There were 91 Illakas in category 1, which were leased out to various Illakadars on fixed annual Khazana (revenue) at various acreage rates. There were 11 Illakas under category 2, which were under the direct management of the state. The manager in-charge was to credit the collected revenue into the State Bank (the Jetmal Bhojraj Bank, a private banking concern owned by a plainsman). There were seven Illakas under category 3 of monastery estates, which paid certain fixed sum on account of household taxes. Taxes collected from the *ryots* were utilized for religious purposes in the monasteries.

There were 51 Addas (judicial cum criminal) courts in Sikkim in 1930, which were leased out to various lessees. Every lessee, manager of the estates and head of the monastery holding the Illakas was the court of original jurisdiction of that Illaka. Out of 67 Illaka courts,⁷⁰ 22 were invested with first class magisterial powers, 18 with second class, 10 with third class and 17 with the fourth class. Moreover, the ruler was the source of all authority.

Apart from the development of new administrative set up and the influx of Nepalese, this phase was also characterized by the settlement of few businessmen from the plains. White mentions, "the plainsman from India to be found in Sikkim are a few Marwaris and men of the Bunia or shop-keeper class, who have come for trading purposes and settled under the protection of the British Raj, since the expedition of 1888"⁷¹

In this context mention must be made of role of Messers Jetmall and Bhojraj, a Bankers group of Darjeeling that opened a bank at Gangtok in September 1899.⁷² The bank came to the service of British government during the Younghusband expedition, when J.C. White was instructed to borrow money⁷³ from the bank to meet the transport expenditure.

Thus, dwindling of the Lepcha-Bhutia population on the one hand and influx of Nepalese and few businessmen from the plains of India under the British patronage affected the population equilibrium of Sikkim. Polyandry being a socially endorsed practice, the Bhutias-Lepchas could not increase as fast as the polygamous Nepalese.⁷⁴

The emergence of Nepali Thikadaar as Lambodar Pradhan, who became one of the biggest landlords in Sikkim, advent of Indian traders and money-lenders in the economic scenario, growth of Nepali as lingua-franca were all the legacies of the British policy. The history of Sikkim thus shaped in the British period had repercussions on the socio-economic and political scenario in later phases of its history.

Dawn of Modernity

As India earned its independence on the 15th August 1947, the princely states were also freed from the British hegemony. ‘A stand still agreement’⁷⁵ signed between the Sikkim Durbar and the Government of India on 27 February 1948, ensured the continuity of “all arrangements, relations and administrative arrangements as to the matter of common concern existing between the crown and the Sikkim state on August 14, 1947”, till a new treaty was concluded. Sikkim also could not remain isolated and unaffected by the breeze of freedom. The ideas of Independence inspired some educated and intelligent Sikkimese to do away the yoke of feudalism and to bring the refreshing breeze of democracy in the political arena. Consequently, three political parties⁷⁶ ‘The Praja Sundharak Samaj’ at Gangtok (East), the ‘Praja Sammelan’ at Temi Tarku (South) and the ‘Praja Mandal’ at Chakhung (West) were formed.

These parties had no co-hensive action or goal. The common demand of abolition of land-lordism and establishment of popular government prepared the ground for the birth of the Sikkim State Congress’ with Tashi Tshering, the most respected leader of the time as the President on 7th December, 1947.⁷⁷ Forwarding three demands of (a) abolition of land-lordism (b) formation of a popular interim government and (c) Sikkim’s merger with India, the party petitioned to the ruler for a drastic change in the political structure.

Apart from formulating and presenting issues of radical political importance, the Sikkim State Congress started educating the masses through campaigns and movements. Its influence grew so rapidly that tension within a short span became a conflict between the ruling class and common people. Tashi Tshering in his pamphlet “Sikkim at the Cross-roads” wrote – ‘With the administration virtually in their heads, handful of feudal lords constituted the majority of the State Council and were in a

position to lord over the rest. The ambition of the landlords naturally conflicted with the interest of the people, who were helpless against such formidable opponents'⁷⁸ Although, the popularity of the Sikkim State Congress was more among the Nepalese, it avoided overt identification with a particular community.

The ruling class made an attempt to counter the growing popularity and organizational success of Sikkim State Congress by forming a new political party "Sikkim National Party", whose programme may be called the 'very ante-thesis of the policy of Sikkim State Congress.'⁷⁹ It was an organization of the aristocrat and the neo-rich Bhutias that sought to safeguard Lepcha-Bhutia interest against the Nepali dominated State Congress. In contrast to State Congress, the Sikkim National Party stood for an independent Sikkim. The affluent Bhutias with the backing of Lamas took control of the leadership of the Sikkim National Party.⁸⁰

The Sikkim State Congress launched series of non-tax campaign, non-cooperation movements and non-violent agitations in February 1949. In support of three point demands, the leaders courted arrest and appraised New Delhi of the urgency of political change in Sikkim. Endowed with organizational experience and positive assurances from politicians in New Delhi, the second Satyagraha Movement was embarked in May 1949. Ultimately the Maharaja agreed to install a five member popular ministry⁸¹ on 9th May 1949, under the leadership of Sikkim State Congress president Mr. Tashi Tshering.

The first popular government of Sikkim included two nominees of Maharaja, namely, Dorji Dadul and Reshmi Prasad Allay. Mr. Dimik Singh Lepcha and Mr. C.D. Rai represented the State Congress.⁸²

In the absence of clearly defined powers the ministry was hamstrung by the Sikkim Durbar, which was adamant in maintaining the status quo. The Durbar nominees were unenthusiastic in matters of agrarian reforms, administrative reforms and the popular government. The conflict reached such an uncompromising dimension that the political officer Mr. J.S. Lall,⁸³ who belonged to the Indian Civil Service, took over the administration of Sikkim on 11 August 1949 with unfettered powers. The action of Indian government was obviously shocking to the democratic forces but certainly a boost to the Sikkim Durbar. Hence the popular ministry, which signalled to be doomed right from the start, could not continue for more than 29 days. The State Congress could not reconcile to the dismissal of the ministry. Justifying the course of action, the Indian Government explained that 'the threat of disorder might

not have come from the State Congress but from the Maharaja's side'. Hence power was proposed to be transferred from popular ministry to the Dewan, who was selected from among the 'Indian Administrative Cadre' for the good of Sikkim and his administration would be for the briefest possible period.⁸⁴

The Dewan undertook remedial measures to alleviate the hardship of the masses by abolishing the privileges of the ^{lessee system and by providing protection} against the frequent evictions of the peasants from their patrimonial holdings. Measures were undertaken to reform the judicial, legal and revenue administration, ^{by providing a judicial system and a revenue system} - thus easing the conflict between the Durbar and the masses.

The 'Stand Still Agreement' signed in February 1948 kept conclusion of a new treaty pending. After Government of India's consultation with Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, issued a statement on 20 March 1950⁸⁵ indicating the principles upon which the new treaty would be based. It was agreed that Sikkim would continue to be an Indian protectorate in respect of external relations, defence and communication. They should continue to enjoy internal autonomy but the ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of good administration and law and order would be with the Government of India. It was agreed that a policy of 'progressive association of the people of the state with its government' would be followed. There was also a proposal to institute an Advisory Council, to be associated with the Dewan and a village *panchayat* on an elective basis as an effective process of education in the art of popular government.

Hence, the 'Indo-Sikkimese Treaty'⁸⁶, enshrining the above principles was signed at Gangtok on 5th December, 1950 by Maharaja Sir Tashi Namgyal and Hariswar Dayal, the Indian Political Officer in Sikkim. The treaty contained 13 articles and confirmed the status of Sikkim as an Indian protectorate.

The Treaty disheartened the leaders of the Sikkim State Congress, who from the very inception cherished the idea of establishing a popular government with the help of India. They felt let down, as the treaty ignored the people's aspirations. The establishment of a responsible government and people's administration was nowhere mentioned. Autonomy of Sikkim meant the autonomy of Maharaja. They alleged the Government of India of having a secret understanding with Chogyal. The Congress leaders boycotted the State Banquet given by the Maharaja to mark the occasion of signing of the 'Indo-Sikkim Treaty'. It was in this context of political unrest that the gap between the Lepcha-Bhutia and the Nepalese widened.

In the spirit of an understanding given by the Government of India to the leaders of Sikkim State Congress, an attempt was made to hold the election for local-self government in Sikkim in February 1951. The Sikkim National Party boycotted it on the ground that 'no safeguards were given to the indigenous population'⁸⁷

Against this backdrop, the polarization of politics along ethnic lines had developed after 1947. The discontent of the Nepalese with the Chogyal's pro-Bhutia-Lepcha policies and the Durbar's patronage to Sikkim National Party, to counteract the demands of democratization began to be expressed openly, leading to germination of seeds of communal trend. With the boycott of panchayat election, the Sikkim National Party emerged as the proclaimed champion of 'Indigenous Population'⁸⁸ by which they meant the Bhutia and Lepchas. It was argued that by virtue of their having already settled in Sikkim, when the Nepalese were unknown, they were classified as 'indigenous-population'. The Lepchas were bracketed with the Bhutias. The National Party leaders succeeded in convincing the masses that the State Congress actually sought to dominate the indigenous Bhutias and Lepchas. Consequently, although headed by a Bhutia, it began to lose the support of these communities. Even though the State Congress did not openly take up sectarian interests, it came to be branded as the party representing Nepalese interests, by virtue of drawing its support mainly from the community. The trend of ethnicising politics finally culminated into the introduction of the 'parity formula',⁸⁹ after much bargaining and discussion. The elective seats in the 'State-Council' were to be divided equally among the Bhutia-Lepcha and the Nepali communities and Maharaja was to appoint five nominees.

The parity formula has equated the voice of Bhutia-Lepcha constituting 25% of the population with the majority of Nepalese comprising 75%. Tashi Tshering refused to sign the agreement terming it 'unjust and communal',⁹⁰ while two other representatives of the State Congress namely K.R. Pradhan and Dimik Singh signed it as representatives of Nepalese and Lepchas respectively.

The Maharaja issued two Royal Proclamations in January 1952 and March 1953. Apart from the distribution of seats based on parity formula, one outstanding feature in the Proclamation was complicated mode of election to the State Council, 'whereas the Bhutia-Lepcha candidates were to be elected first by the Bhutia-Lepcha voters and then by the whole electorate of the Constituencies, the Nepalese candidates were to be returned by the whole electorate of that Constituency'⁹¹ The 1953

Constitutional Proclamation set out the powers of the Executive Council and its composition etc. and established a Diarchy,⁹² in which certain reserved subjects were kept under the exclusive control of the Maharaja, while the transferred subjects were to be administered by the people's representatives. The State Congress condemned these as contravention to Principles of Democracy.

However, the first general election in Sikkim was held in 1953, on the basis of parity formula. The communal infection had penetrated deep into the body politics of Sikkim. The National Party emerged as an equal contender winning all the six Bhutia-Lepcha seats, with the State Congress winning all the six Nepalese seats.⁹³ The great majority of the Bhutia-Lepcha voters rejected the State Congress as the Nepalese voters rejected the National Party.

A seventeen-member State Council was formed on 7th August 1953, with Dewan as its president. An Executive Council⁹⁴ of three members consisting of the Dewan (the ruler's nominee) K.R. Pradhan (The State Congress) and Sonam Tshering (The National Party) was installed. Hence, a diarchical government with communal overtones was inducted into the Office. The two parties with equal number of six seats each along with the five nominated members, the State Council was heavily outnumbered by the pro-palace councilors.

The Dewan J.S. Lall left Sikkim in 1954 and N.K. Rustomji took over as new Dewan. The role of new Dewan, a close associate of the Maharaja Kumar P.T. Namgyal, went in favour of strengthening the government of Maharaja.⁹⁵ Nothing could appeal more to Maharaja than Rustomji's taking pains to invent the items of national glamour such as Tibeto-Chinese pattern of house construction.⁹⁶

The Royal Proclamation of 1958⁹⁷ slightly modified the 'Parity System'. The number of the Councilors was raised from 17 to 20 with 6 representatives of Nepalese and Bhutia-Lepcha remaining unaltered. Two new elective seats, one general and other reserved for the Sangha (Monastery), were included and the nominated members were raised from five to six. The proclamation left out the "primary election" of the Bhutia-Lepcha candidates first by the electorate of their community only. The general seat was to be elected by the whole electorate of Sikkim. As it was considered 'unsafe' likely to go to the State Congress, the 'Sangha' (Monastery) seat was introduced to balance it, as it certainly would go to the National Party. The

addition of one more nominated seat added weightage in favour of the Maharaja and the National Party.

The Proclamation laid down very complicated and intriguing device of counting which reads:

The candidate securing the highest number of votes of the community, which he represents will ordinarily be required to have secured also at least 15% of the total votes of the other community for which seats have been reserved to entitle him to be returned. If, however, he fails to secure 15% of the votes of the other community, the candidates securing the next highest votes of their own community and who have also succeeded in securing 15% of the votes of other community will be eligible to be returned, provided the difference between the number of votes of their own community secured by them and the highest candidate does not exceed 15% of the total votes secured by the latter. If the difference is in excess of 15%, the latter will be regarded as returned, notwithstanding that he shall not have secured 15% of the votes of the other community.⁹⁸

Thus, the new Proclamation not only allowed the much detested 'parity formula' to continue, but also ensured the grip of pro-palace politicians in Council through the backdoor.

In the second general election held after the Proclamation the State Congress won majority of the elective seats, capturing all Nepali seats, one Bhutia-Lepcha and one general seat as well. The National Party could win only five Bhutia-Lepcha and Sangha seat. The Executive Council had been enlarged to five members. However, an 'Election Tribunal' appointed to investigate the alleged malpractices, delivered its judgement⁹⁹ on 25 May, 1959, declaring the election of K.R. Pradhan and N.K. Pradhan of State Congress and Sonam Tshering of the National Party as void. In addition, they were 'disqualified from the membership of Sikkim State Council for a period of 6 years.' However, an extra-ordinary Gazettee¹⁰⁰ "issued by Durbar on 4 September, 1959" reduced the period of disqualification whereby (a) Kashi Raj Pradhan and Nakul Pradhan were to be disqualified from seeking the membership of the Sikkim Council for a period of six months with effect from 15.5. 1959 and (b) Sonam Tshering to be disqualified for a period of three years with effect from 28.5. 1959.

In the bye-election that was to follow, Mr. K.R. Pradhan, the President of State Congress lost to C.D. Rai, the General Secretary of the same party so badly as to

forfeit his deposit (3013 votes for Mr. C.D. Rai against 634 votes for Mr. K.K. Pradhan).

Sorting out the internal differences the leading political parties such as State Congress, the Praja Sammelan, the Swatantra Dal and different groups of the State Congress merged to form the 'Sikkim National Congress' at a joint convention held at Singnam on 20 May 1960. The newly formed 'Sikkim National Congress'¹⁰¹ under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa later developed into a full-blooded opposition posing a tough challenge to the Sikkim Durbar. Stressing the need of a common platform, the founding father of the party pointed out the futility of the existence of small parties, holding divergent and conflicting views. 'Bearing in mind the large interest of the people of Sikkim, the parties decided to merge into one compact body known as the Sikkim National Congress'¹⁰². The founder president of the party further added: 'Sikkim run by Proclamation cannot be called a democratic country The aspirations of the people of Sikkim must find expression in the formation of responsible government based on a written constitution. Nothing short of this will satisfy the people of Sikkim. ...'.

Despite being the second largest party, The Sikkim National Congress was not given any seat in the new Council constituted on 1st June, 1960.¹⁰³ The new Party was cold shouldered and its demands were ridiculed. Disappointed by the response of Durbar, a delegation of Sikkim National Congress led by L.D. Kazi went to Delhi to convey their grievances and submit a memorandum enlisting the demands as establishment of a constitutional monarchy, representative government, etc.

The civil society during the period witnessed a growing communal discord and mutual distrust among the ethnic groups, which was a matter of great concern for the political leaders. The promulgation of 'Sikkim subject Regulation'¹⁰⁴ in July 1961, governing subject hood of Sikkim nationals further aggravated the situation. The regulation was highly discriminatory under which the Sikkimese Bhutias, Lepchas and Tsongs were among the categories of persons, entitled for citizenship, excluding the Nepalese. The Sikkim State Congress and Sikkim National Congress whose main base was Nepalese, strongly denounced this discrimination and brought it to the notice of government of India, on whose intervention, some changes were effected in it.

In the meantime, the Indo-China border conflict of 1962 has proved to be a god-sent blessing to the Durbar, resulting in postponement of the third election to the

State Council and declaration of emergency. A 'people's Consultative Committee'¹⁰⁵ comprising 31 members was instituted on 26 November 1962 to advise the government on defence and to strengthen internal administration. Headed by the Dewan as the Chairman of the Committee, the Pro-palace Sikkim National Party had the lion's share with 14 members, while the Sikkim State Congress and the Sikkim National Congress were given 5 and 2 seats respectively. Two seats were given to servicemen, one to Scheduled Caste League, while five to independents. Obviously, no constituent of the Advisory Committee except the pro-palace National Party could be happy. The various events in this period led to emergence of the Maharaja Kumar as the powerful Chogyal.

The third general election in Sikkim took place in 1967. The Proclamation of 1966 added four more seats to the State Council, one each for the Scheduled Caste, the Tsongs, the Nepalese and the Lepcha-Bhutias, thus raising the number of seats to 24, of which 18 were elective.¹⁰⁶

In the third election, the Sikkim National Congress emerged as the largest party by winning 8 of 18 elected seats followed by the National Party with 5 Bhutia-Lepcha seats, the Sikkim Congress with two and one each of the Tsongs, Scheduled Castes and an independent representing the monastery seat¹⁰⁷ The reservation for Tsongs and Scheduled Castes was interpreted as an attempt to introduce casteism along with communalism, as both these groups were hitherto considered as Nepalese.

The Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim State Congress, if were coalesced together would enjoy absolute majority among elected members in the State Council to reiterate their democratic stand. But such thing did not happen. The inter-party dissension that cropped up between these two parties made the State Congress to make an alliance with the Sikkim National Party. A stunning blow to the National Congress came when the party general Secretary Mr. B.B. Gurung, who had been elected on the party ticket from the West Constituency, joined the National Party/State Congress alliance.¹⁰⁸ Hence in the new Executive Council, the representation was not given to the party nominee but to Mr. Gurung along with two others, Netuk Lama of the National Party and Nakul Pradhan of the State Congress. Two others from the National Party and one from the Sikkim National Congress were sworn as Deputy Executive Councilors.

With the assumption of the office by pro-palace Executive Councilors, the activities of anti-Indian elements got such a fillip, which was evident from the press

statement issued by three Councilors in June, 1967 demanding revision of Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950 and also abolition of the 'protectorate' status.¹⁰⁹ The anti-Indian sentiment broke out. There was a procession of youngsters with large placards, bearing anti-Indian slogans like 'Indians get out of Sikkim', 'We want Independence',¹¹⁰ on 15th August, 1968. The 'Study Forum'¹¹¹ which was created in 1966 by the Chogyal and Gyalmo with Bhutia elite and the senior most government officials became the mouthpiece of the pro-Chogyal interest. The traditionally anti-Indian Study Forum came out openly as a pressure group and went on patronizing anti-Indian propaganda. The activities of the Study Forum and the role of Sikkim (fortnightly) published from Gangtok became a matter of grave concern to the government of India.

Dissension and defections among political parties characterized the period between the third and fourth general elections. The State Congress had been left only with the Nepalese under the newar ex-lessees and was virtually relegated to the third position. Its alignment with the Durbar and its opportunism undermined its popularity among the Nepalese. Even a minor party like Scheduled Caste League suffered a split. To add the political confusion, a new political party called 'Sikkim Janata Party'¹¹² avowed with socialist leanings was formed on December 18, 1969 by Mr. Lall Bahadur Basnet, the former general secretary of the Sikkim National Congress. Against this backdrop, the general election was held in April 1970. The Sikkim National Party securing seven seats emerged as the largest party, followed by Sikkim National Congress with five seats and the State Congress maintained third position and managed four seats.¹¹³

In spite of the large-scale defections, the Sikkim National Congress emerged as a common political platform, as it won not only the general seats covering the entire Sikkim for the second time but also managed to get Nepalese, Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong candidates elected on its tickets. The palace backed National Party could not become a party of all communities of Sikkim and seats won by it were all Bhutia-Lepcha. It had also undergone a split just before election.

In the formation of Executive Council, the Sikkim National Congress was openly discriminated taking one member only in total members of 6. The National Party and State Congress were given more weightage with three and two members¹¹⁴ respectively. Despite its participation in the government, Sikkim National Congress continued its role of opposing the Durbar. Ultimately, its president was dismissed

from the Executive Council, when it leveled charges of corruption and extravagance against the ruler.

The ethnic colour in the different political parties became prominent once again, when the Nepali politicians of the State Congress and the Janta Party decided to merge into 'Sikkim Janta Congress'¹¹⁵ in a meeting held on 15 August, 1972. The National Party with the support of purse and power was in an advantageous position. The National Congress was yet to be recovered. The creation of Sikkim Janta Congress by the Nepali politicians had created serious apprehensions in the minds of Lamaist. There were even rumours that local Bhutias and Tibetan refugees were being armed to terrorize Nepalese and to force them out of Sikkim.¹¹⁶

Amidst such ethnic and communal tension the fifth general election was held in January 1973. The National Party won all the seven Bhutia-Lepcha seats and two Nepali seats. Two independent candidates, elected on the 'Sangha' and the 'Scheduled Caste' seats, also chose to join hands with the National Party. The National Congress as in the previous election won the general and Tsong seats along with three seats reserved for Nepalese. The Sikkim Janta Congress trailed behind with only two seats.¹¹⁷

On the eve of their success in the elections, the pro-palace elements turned out to be more hostile toward the Nepalese. They warned the Nepalese that unless they adopt Lamaist way of life, they would be forced to leave Sikkim¹¹⁸ A minor controversy arose on the day of counting of votes on 2 February 1973, when the representatives of the Sikkim National Congress complained against the officers of aiding the National Party in rigging the election and boycotted the counting.¹¹⁹ This led to a heated exchange of words between the members of the Sikkim National Congress and the Sikkim National Party, who happened to be a Nepali and the Bhutia respectively. Eventually, this verbal exchange of words took a communal turn. Since the complaint of the Sikkim National Congress Party was ignored, it brought the two Congress parties closer on long standing demands for popular government, written constitution, fundamental rights, universal franchise based on joint electorate and abolition of the 'parity-formula'¹²⁰

The polarization of the communities along the ethnic line was complete with the National Party standing as a party of Bhutia, Lepcha while the Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim Janta Congress as those of the Nepalese. There were few

Bhutia-Lepcha leaders attached to Sikkim National Congress, but it didn't alter the fact that it drew strength from the majority Nepalese community.

Two Congress parties formed a Joint Action Committee with L.D. Kazi as the Chairman,¹²¹ and started to organize masses in favour of their demands. The ruler cold-shouldered these and went ahead with the appointment of a six-member Executive Council, tilting towards the National Party with four and one each from the Congress parties. The new State Council, to be inaugurated by the ruler on 28 March 1973 was boycotted by the Congress Councilors. In the meantime, the president of the Sikkim Janta Party Mr. K.C. Pradhan was arrested on the seditious charge.¹²² The action of the Durbar added fuel in the fire and infuriated the masses, particularly the younger generation, who were actively participating in the demonstration at Gangtok. The Joint Action Committee urged upon the Chogyal and served an ultimatum¹²³ to fulfill their demands, failing which they would prevent the Golden Jubilee Celebration of Maharaja's birthday on 4th April and would launch mass movements. The Durbar failed to measure the anguish of the masses. A confrontation between the pro-palace and pro-people was inevitable, as the pro-palace establishment went ahead with the arrangement for the celebration, inspite the ultimatum.

On 3rd April 1973, the Nepalese of Sikkim began to assemble in Gangtok in batches,¹²⁴ carrying Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim Janta Congress flags and shouting slogans. On the 4th April 1973, while celebration was going on in the palace chapel and the ruler was taking ceremonial salutes at the Polo ground, thousand of demonstrators clashed with the police, leading to *lathi* charges and firing. The situation went out of control when a Bhutia police official fired two shots, which was soon followed by a discharge of burst of rifle fire. A reign of terror and vandalism was let loose. The demonstrators were pouring into Gangtok from different parts of Sikkim and continued on 5th April too. Durbar's administration was totally collapsed in the south, west and in the east, where people had virtually established a 'Janta Raj' (People's administration).¹²⁵ The degree to which the movement has been ethnicized can be gauged from the fact that 'anyone wearing the Nepali dress, or just the Nepali cap, or just carrying a *khukri* (dagger used by Nepalese) was beaten up and hauled off to a camp prepared for detaining demonstrations. A number of innocent people including a number of milkmen became the victim of brutality'.¹²⁶ The Tibetan refugees were issued *lathis* and asked to help the police. Warrants of arrest were issued against the leaders of the Joint Action Committee, who fled their homes. Mr.

Avatar Singh, a senior officer of the Ministry of External Affairs was sent by the government of India to assess the situation in Sikkim.

When the situation had gone out of control, the Chogyal requested the Government of India to intervene to restore law and order and then to take over the administration. The leaders of the Joint Action Committee also requested the Government of India to intervene in order to save the innocent people of Sikkim from the ruthless repression of Durbar. The anti ruler sentiments went on increase and the demonstrators burnt the effigies of the Chogyal, the Gyalmo, and the Crown Prince and demanded abdication of the ruler.¹²⁷ The Indian army took over the charge of law and order and the administration was taken over by the political officer.¹²⁸ The Government of India appointed B.S. Das as the chief administrator on 9th April 1973. The ruler's domain had been virtually restricted to the palace only.

The Tripartite Agreement: May 8, 1973

After normalcy had returned, the negotiations between the ruler, the different political parties and the Government of India resulted in signing of Tripartite Agreement on 8th May 1973. The Chogyal, the Foreign Secretary of the Government of India and five representatives from three major political parties – The Sikkim National Party, The Sikkim National Congress and The Janta Congress - were the signatories.

The Agreement envisaged the future constitutional set-up and Sikkim's relation with India. These included the establishment of a fully responsible government with a more democratic constitution, guarantee of fundamental rights, rule of law, independent judiciary and greater legislature and executive powers for the elected representatives. Ensuring adequate representation of various sections of the population in the Executive Council, the agreement reads:

No single section of the population acquires a dominating position due to mainly of its ethnic origin and then the rights and interests of the Sikkimese of Bhutia-Lepcha origin and of the Sikkimese of Nepali origin, which includes Tsong and Scheduled Castes origin, are fully protected.¹²⁹

According to the agreement, the Chief Executive invested with enough authority, would be nominated by the Chogyal. He is to ensure good administration, communal harmony and rapid economic and social development. The Palace establishment and the Sikkim Guard remained directly under the Chogyal. It also provided for a 'Legislative Assembly' elected for four years. Thus, the powers of the

Chogyal were drastically reduced, even though he remained the 'Head of the State'. The grip of Bhutias in every field had been shaken and the Nepalese were assured a fairer deal. For all purposes, the hold of Government of India in the internal administration increased enormously.

The first election under the new democratic set up, 1974

Before Sikkim went to the poll in April 1974 for the first popular democratic set up, an announcement regarding the nature of representation of various ethnic groups in the Legislative Assembly was made, allocating 15 seats for 'Lepcha-Bhutia', 15 for 'Nepalese', one each representing 'Sangha' and the 'Scheduled Caste'.¹³⁰ The pattern of reservation was to be such that no community would dominate over the others. To ensure this, the seat for 'Sangha' was virtually for the Bhutia-Lepchas, while the one for the 'Scheduled Castes' represented the Nepalese. The old practice of communal voting was replaced by the principle of one-man one vote. Parity between two major stocks was still maintained but in a diluted fashion. The Sikkim Youth Congress and others expressed apprehensions that the arrangement would embitter the relations and lead to political polarization on ethnic lines.¹³¹ By this time, the Joint Action Committee had merged with the Sikkim Congress presided over by the Kazi Lendup Dorji.

The election result credited a landslide victory to the Sikkim Congress. The party had won 31 seats out of 32 in the new assembly, with the Party President Kazi Lendup Dorji returned unopposed from the Tashiding Constituency. All the 15 reserved seats for minority Bhutia-Lepcha had been captured by the Sikkim Congress with its own Lepcha-Bhutia candidates. One notable victory was the victory of Congress in 'Sangha' seat. In this functional constituency with Buddhist Lama voters representing 57 recognized monasteries, it was the first time that a candidate other than the one representing monastery association and backed by the National Party had won the Sangha seat.¹³² L.D Kazi emerged as the undisputed leader of Sikkim. The magic of 'one man – one vote' had thrown out the National Party from its monopolistic control over Sikkim administration, which was thriving on communal and complicated voting pattern. On the basis of the mandate from the masses, the Sikkim Congress requested New Delhi to send constitutional expert to draft a Constitution for Sikkim.

Very soon, the confrontation between the Chogyal and democratic leaders began. The victory of Sikkim Congress was undoubtedly a big jolt to the pro-palace groups. The Chogyal was yet to reconcile to the loss of his authority. The mutual resentment could well be gauged, when the members of the Assembly refused to take oath in the ruler's name and boycotted the dinner hosted by him on the eve of the Assembly Session.¹³³ Consequently, the newly constituted Assembly passed a resolution requesting New Delhi "to examine the modalities for Sikkim's participation in the political and economic institutions of India"¹³⁴ The Government of Sikkim Bill, 1974, was introduced, which envisaged a three-tier system in which the ruler was reduced to a figure head, the Chief Executive as the head of the administration and the Chief Minister along with his Cabinet to be responsible to the Assembly for the non-reserved subjects.¹³⁵ But the pro-palace groups like Palace Guards, Private Militia of the Chogyal, some Bhutias, Tibetan refugees and the pro-palace bureaucrats,¹³⁶ attempted to prevent the Assembly from approving the Bill. The members on their way to the Assembly were confronted. The demonstrators' gheroed the Assembly. However, the Draft Bill was passed which required the consent of Chogyal to become an act. But the ruler refused to give consent and instead sought clarifications from Delhi on section 30(a)¹³⁷ of the Draft Constitution, through which the Government of Sikkim may seek participation and representation for the people of Sikkim in the political institutions of India. Fearing it would erase Sikkim's separate identity the Chogyal expressed apprehension that the Clause 30 of the Bill instead of safeguarding Sikkim's separate identity under the Treaty of 1950, would badly affect it.¹³⁸ The Sikkim Congress retaliated by passing a resolution which reads, "There is only one way out for the Chogyal. Either he acts strictly subject to the provisions of the government of Sikkim Act, 1974 and the May 1973 agreements or quit the Sikkimese political scene."¹³⁹ On the advice of the Government of India and the impending threat of removal, the Chogyal was compelled to give his assent to the Government of Sikkim Bill, 1974 on 4 July 1974.

In the midst of these developments, ethnic issues began to surface once again. Fearing that the Chogyal would lose power, a section of people urged upon the Constitutional Experts to provide certain 'special safeguards' for the ethnic minority in the Constitution to prevent Bhutia-Lepcha from being dispossessed of their powers and rights and from being made 'fugitive' in their own homeland.¹⁴⁰ The Lepchas, having no trust either on the Bhutias or the Nepalese apprehended that if Sikkim

remained a separate entity, the Nepalese would take over the government. The Lepchas, having suffered under the Bhutias for centuries, would become second class citizens under the Nepalese. They suggested Sikkim's merger with India and Lepcha-Bhutia to be given the privileges enjoyed by the Scheduled Tribes in India.¹⁴¹ It was under such circumstances that the first election took place as per May 8 Agreement.

The New Ministry Vis-à-vis the Chogyal

On 23rd July 1974, a five-member ministry under the chief minister-ship of L.D. Kazi was installed. The resolution of the Sikkim's Assembly seeking closer ties with India, through participation in its political and economic institutions was now taken up by the ministry. The chief minister stressed upon implementation of the provisions of the Agreement by the government of India for realizing the desires of the people of Sikkim. Accordingly, the 36th Constitutional Amendment Bill was introduced in the Parliament. Inserting article 2A the Bill states, "Sikkim, which comprises the territories specified in the Tenth Schedule shall be associated with the Union on the terms and conditions set out in that Schedule."¹⁴² Thus, the Bill that was passed on 7th September 1974, granted Sikkim the status of an 'Associate State' and provided her representation in the Indian Parliament.

The reactions

The granting of the status of an Associate State to Sikkim evoked mixed reactions in India as well as in Sikkim. The Chogyal protested on the ground that the move would abolish Sikkim's separate identity guaranteed under the Treaty of 1950. He further opined that the people of Sikkim as a whole were not in favour of this proposal. Whereas, the Sikkim Congress, the Sikkim Assembly, the Sikkimese Cabinet and all the democratic forces in Sikkim welcomed the development. Thus, ultimately, the liberal democratic forces established their edge over the feudal anachronism of the Lamaist Namgyal dynasty.

Merger

The strained relationship between the Chogyal and new ministry however continued. The Council of Ministers objected to the Chogyal's proceeding to Nepal to attend coronation of the king of Nepal to be held in March 1975, with the apprehension that this might provide him an opportunity to raise the issue of Sikkim in International Forum. However, defying the sentiment of the Council of Ministers, the Chogyal went to Kathmandu, where he was alleged to have a parley with the Chinese and Pakistan's representatives.¹⁴³ On his return, he was confronted with the demonstration in the border town of Rangpo, leading to a clash between the Sikkim's guards and the demonstrators. For the Chogyal it was very difficult to reconcile himself to a status of a titular head. The mutual antagonism between the Chogyal and the Council of Ministers reached such a point that the Sikkim Assembly met and unanimously passed a resolution demanding the abolition of the Institution of Chogyal and merger with India.¹⁴⁴ A referendum to seek public opinion was organized, which went overwhelmingly in support of the resolution seeking the abolition of the Institution of Chogyal, making Sikkim a constituent unit of the Indian Union. The Indian Parliament agreed to the merger and accordingly proposed the 38th Constitutional Amendment Bill, making Sikkim the 22nd state of the Indian Union. The Bill passed by the Parliament on 26th April 1975, was inserted under Article 371(F) of the Constitution.¹⁴⁵

With the Integration of Sikkim with Indian Union, the long-cherished desire of many people of Sikkim materialized. Thus, the controversial chapter since 1947, which had been overshadowed by ethnic undertones, came to an end making the dawn of new democratic era in the Sikkimese political arena.

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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,¹ 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.²

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.³ 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.⁴

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 voters⁵ 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."⁶ 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.'⁷ 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 alignment⁸ 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, 1979.⁹ In the meantime, an Ordinance, known as the 'Representation of

the People (amendment) Ordinance 1979,¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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 Sikkimese¹⁵ surfaced for the first time in the politics of Sikkim.

Closely related to this was the issue of declaring Lepcha-Bhutias as Scheduled Tribes.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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
Total	32	32

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'.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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'²¹ 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).²² 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.²³ 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.²⁴

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.²⁵ 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 1979.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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*.'³⁰ 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.³¹

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,³² 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"³³

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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶

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.³⁷

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.³⁸

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.³⁹ 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).⁴⁰

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',⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

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,⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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,⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ 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".⁵² 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"⁵³

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.”⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

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 council⁵⁶ 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”.⁵⁷

Another organisation supposedly representing the interest of the Bhutia-Lepchas ‘Denzong Lho Mon Chodrul’ was formed in August 1992,⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

In the meantime, what really detonated the powder was the verdict of the Supreme Court on February 10, 1993,⁶¹ 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.⁶²

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 4th 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 18th April 1993,⁶³ where public response was very encouraging. Ever since its second public meeting in Ravangla in South Sikkim on 28th 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.⁶⁴

An open confrontation between 'Sikkim Democratic Front' supporters and the ruling party youths took place in Namchi on 18th June 1993, which led to the complete destruction of Sikkim Sangram Parishad youth camp.⁶⁵ Flushed with the Namchi victory, the 'Sikkim Democratic Front' mustered enough courage to invade the state capital on 21st June, where nearly 1500 supporters marched along the National High Way. On 22nd 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.⁶⁶ 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).⁶⁷

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”.⁶⁸

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',⁶⁹ 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 4th 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 4th May 1994, that provided income tax exemption for Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim. The provision was withdrawn when Sikkim Sangram Parishad's Member of Parliament Mrs. Dil Kumari Bhandari, sought similar exemption for all sections of Nepalese in Sikkim.⁷⁰ 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 7th 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 9th 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 7th 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 9th 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.⁷¹

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.⁷² 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,"⁷³ 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.⁷⁴

The Legislative Assembly Election, 1994

The State Assembly election in Sikkim on 16th 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.⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶

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.'⁷⁷

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.⁷⁸ 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 21st 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.⁷⁹ 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'.⁸⁰ 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.'⁸¹ 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.⁸² 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".⁸³

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,⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ The state government has decided to issue ration cards only to Sikkim subject holders and regular government employees.⁸⁶ The Sikkim Official Languages (Amendment) Act 1995 has recognised Newari, Rai, Gurung, Magar, Sherpa and Tamang as the official languages of the State.⁸⁷

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.⁸⁸

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.'⁸⁹ 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 27th October, 1996.⁹⁰ 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'.⁹¹

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 3rd 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.⁹²

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 5th 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.⁹³ 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.⁹⁴ 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 2nd 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.⁹⁵

The Sixth Legislative Assembly Election

The sixth Legislative Assembly Election was held on 3rd 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.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸ It may be conceived as a class as it comprises the 'comprehensive and separate collectivities of individual',⁹⁹ 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>
Landlordism	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)
Total	12 (100.00)	18 (100.00)

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',¹⁰⁰ 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	Sche- duled 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.

Notes and References

1. Karubaki Datta, 'Inter-ethnic relations in Sikkim in Historical Perspectives', Occasional Paper No. 11, (North Bengal University : Centre for Himalayan Studies, 1997), p. 27.
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Chapter – V

In Search of Ethnic Mind – A Village Level Study

A reference to identity is inevitable in any discussion on ethnicity. For an appropriate comprehension of the mechanism of delineation of identity, some observations on the system of boundary maintenance is a must.¹ This chapter is a result of a micro-level study of three dominant communities and their interrelationship at the village level. The purpose of this field study was to look into the economic, social, cultural and political processes, through which the three dominant ethnic communities develop an ethnic consciousness, maintain their distinct identity, and practice it at the village level in everyday life. To put the problem in a different way, the objective underlying the village level study, following fieldwork method, has been to understand the process of reproduction of 'ethnic consciousness' in social space and its application in the individual- and group behaviour by the members of all three communities. By this exercise we would be able to ascertain whether ethnicity is just a creation in the sphere of polity by the interested parties (the neo-class in particular) or a spontaneous outcome of the social and cultural praxis (the ethnic consciousness and practice). This is also necessary because the study of ethnicity at the level of polity only cannot be complete unless we understand how it exists and operates in the social and cultural spheres.

Selection of field

Lingmoo and Yangang, two villages situated within a distance of 12 kms. in south district, have been chosen for my village level study. Having a common history of feudalism, like other parts of the state, these two villages were two separate estates belonging to the feudal lords called the Kazis. Rai Bahadur Ugen Gyatsho and Rai Bahadur Lobzang Chiden were the feudal lords of Yangang and Lingmoo estates respectively by virtue of grants from the Maharaja.

In Lingmoo, the Bhutias are in minority with only 10 households. I, therefore, decided to study the Nepalese and the Lepchas in this area. The study of the Bhutias

in Yangang was necessary because I wanted to study the triangular relationship between three major ethnic communities in the state. I have not taken into account four Kazi households in Lingmoo and two in Yangang, since by virtue of their higher socio-economic status, they are concentrated mostly in urban areas holding posts in higher level of bureaucracy. Hence the scope for interaction between the Kazis on the one hand and the other three major communities on the other, at the village level, was almost absent.

Lingmoo

(1) The location and the boundary

Situated in Ravangla sub-division of south district of Sikkim, Lingmoo is 26 kms. away south of Singtam town, an important commercial centre in East Sikkim. It is divided into four revenue blocks, viz., Lingmoo, Lingmoo Kolthang, Lingmoo Pepthang and Lingmoo Tokday. One large hamlet or sometimes two or more small hamlets together constitute one unit of revenue block, which can elect one member to the Gram Panchayat. Even though the road is unsurfaced, it is motorable. Apart from number of local jeeps that link Lingmoo with its district head quarter Namchi and Singtam, a daily 'Sikkim Nationalised Transport' bus service connects it with Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim.

A government secondary school in Lingmoo Kolthang block and three primary feeder schools (one in each block), including a Sanskrit Pathsala run by the Education Department of Sikkim and a private English medium nursery school constitute the educational infrastructure of the region. A primary health centre, a police out-post, agriculture and forest offices, veterinary dispensary, horticulture and land revenue block office provide various services to the villagers in Lingmoo.

Its boundary is marked on the east by 'Kaw' Khola (river), on the west lies the Mangzing busty, the reserved forest on the north and on the south lies Teesta river, that demarcates the boundary of south and east district. Two rivulets, 'Elaichi Khola' and 'Tokday Khola,' demarcate the boundary of Pepthang, Kolthang and Tokday blocks. A village road separates upper Lingmoo from the rest of the blocks.

(2) *The demographic profile*

The total number of households in all four blocks of Lingmoo taken together was 353, with a total population of 1678 at the time of my field work in 1996. 49.1% of the population were male and 50.9% were female (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 : Households and population in Lingmoo

S.1 No	Name/Block	Total No of Households & Percentage	Population Male	Population Female	Total
1	U/Lingmoo	29 (8.2)	80 (50.3)	79 (49.7)	159 (100.00)
2	Pepthang	74 (21.0)	175 (46.3)	203 (53.7)	378 (100.00)
3	Kolthang	133 (37.7)	410 (51.00)	394 (49.00)	804 (100.00)
4	Tokday	117 (33.1)	159 (47.2)	178 (52.8)	337 (100.00)
	Total	353 (100.00)	824 (49.1)	854 (50.9)	1678 (100.00)

Source : Office of the Gram Panchayat, Lingmoo, 1996

Table 5.2: Community-wise Distribution of Population

Sl. No.	Block	Lepcha	Bhutia	Sherpa	Nepali	Total
1	U/Lingmoo	88 (39.6)	15 (24.2)	29 (22.1)	27 (2.1)	159 (9.5)
2	Pepthang	07 (3.1)	-	-	371 (29.4)	378 (22.5)
3	Kolthang	108 (48.6)	33 (53.2)	14 (10.7)	649 (51.4)	804 (47.9)
4	Tokday	19 (8.5)	14 (22.5)	88 (67.1)	216 (17.1)	337 (20.00)
	Total	222 (100)	62 (100)	131 (100)	1263 (100)	1678 (100)
		(13.25) ▶	(3.6) ▶	(7.8) ▶	(75.2) ▶	(100.00)

Source: Office of the Gram Panchayat, Lingmoo, 1996

Of the blocks, Kolthang has the largest concentration of the households and population; its 133 households constitute 37.7% of the total households in Lingmoo and a population of 804. Tokday stands second in terms of households, whereas

Pepthang stands second in terms of population size. Upper Lingmoo ranks the lowest with fewest households and the smallest population (Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

An ethnic break-up of population (Table 5.2) shows that the Lepchas were dominant in Kolthang, with highest 48.6% followed by Upper Lingmoo, which account for 39.6% of the total Lepcha population. The Bhutias constituted the smallest group of the total population and were scattered in three blocks except Pepthang block. The Sherpas, a Scheduled Tribe, were mostly concentrated in Tokday block comprising 67.1% of the total population. The Pepthang block had least Scheduled Tribe population, with very few Lepchas and no Bhutia or Sherpa. The three blocks Kolthang, Pepthang and Tokday had the highest concentration of Nepali population, whereas in Upper Lingmoo the Nepalese constituted only 2.1% of the population.

For an intensive study, I had taken all 41 Lepcha-households concentrated on two hamlets in upper Lingmoo and Kolthang and some from among those scattered in Pepthang block and Tokday block thus constituting 23% of total households under study. I had selected 10 Bhutia households (5.6 per cent of the total) and 22 Sherpa households (12.4 per cent of the total) also. Besides, 105 households comprising Nepalese of various sub-cultural stocks were taken for intensive study (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Community-wise break-up of households and population under study

Sl.No	Ethnic Group	No. of Households	%	Total Population	%
1.	Lepcha	41	23.00	222	21.14
2.	Bhutia	10	5.6	62	5.90
3.	Nepali	105	59.00	637	60.6
4.	Sherpa	22	12.4	129	12.3
Total		178	100.00	1050	100.00

Source: Fieldwork. 1996

Hence, I covered a total of 178 households for my fieldwork. The sample represented 50% of total households and 1050 individuals (62.5% of total population of the four blocks of Lingmoo) (Table 5.3). The religious background of the households in the area of my study was like this: 57.8% were Hindus, 41% Buddhist and

an in-significant minority of 1.1% were Christian. The Hindus accounted for the largest religious group because the Nepalese constituted the largest ethnic group in the area.

The Origin of the term Lingmoo

The Lingmoo do not have any recorded history to show who the earlier inhabitants were. The terminological explanation, although controversial, indicates that it is of Lepcha origin. One version says that the word Lingmoo is a corrupted form of Lepcha word “Lick” means to call and “mong” means the destruction or end. The folk tale tells us that once the calling of evil spirit had caused epidemic that took away a lot of human lives. Another version says ‘Ling’ means slant and ‘mo’ means place. As the lower part of Lingmoo is flat that goes on narrowing in the upper part, it looks somewhat slanting from a distance. Whatever may be the true meaning or origin, the name itself appears to be of Lepcha origin. The name of all four blocks is also believed to be of Lepcha origin. Hence, even though the Nepalese are numerically dominant and few Bhutias households are there, the Lepchas could be taken as the earliest inhabitants.

Settlement pattern

A look at the actual scene of village local community clearly reflects the historical process in the composition of entire population in the area. 41 of the Lepcha houses were in two hamlets – Upper part of Lingmoo, middle Kolthang block. The original Bhutia households were concentrated near the Lepcha cluster in upper part, except those newly constructed houses, which were found in the Nepali dominated regions in the middle part. The Nepalese were found scattered in all four blocks. This also suggests that the Lepchas were the earliest settlers in the region.

Despite having a common economy of terrace cultivation and staying in adjacent areas for long, the patterns of interaction between the Lepcha and the Bhutias and that among the Nepalese were totally different. The Nepalese being Hindus and the Lepcha-Bhutias being Buddhists, their ethos and values and ways of life were significantly different. The difference in history, tradition, religion and culture gave

these communities different identities that guided the pattern of their interactions and their inter-relationships.

The Lepchas of Lingmoo

'Social organization' is now generally understood as something evolving out of a dynamic process of social relations. A study of family, marriage and kinship would provide us an opportunity to explore the nature of social relationship between the communities under study. Hence to begin with, I shall deal with the social organization of the Lepcha community in terms of their family, marriage, kinship network and their settlement pattern.

(1) Social Organization of the Lepchas

The 41 Lepcha households that I studied in Lingmoo could be grouped into nine patrilineal clans (P'tshos). Among the household heads, twelve belonged to Log-bo-bo-Clan, seven each to Samba Tongden and Tuk-nel-mu, five to Namchu-mu, four to Bongsong-mu, three to Tung-ter-mu and one each to Taryang-mu, Suryak-mu and Tali-mu P'tsho.

Table 5.4: Clan-wise distribution of Lepcha Households

Sl.No.	Clan	No. of Households
01	Tuk-nel-mu/Achan-mu	07
02	Log-bo-bo	12
03	Samba-Tongden	07
04	Taryang-mu	01
05	Suryak-mu	01
06	Namchu-mu	05
07	Bongsong-mu	04
08	Tung-ter-mu	03
09	Tali-mu	01
Total		41

Source: Fieldwork, 1996

The heads of two households namely, Chong Pintsho Lepcha and Passang Tshering Lepcha (Household Nos. 19 & 35), both belonging to Bongsong-mu clan and another household head Lakpa Lepcha (Household No.18) belonging to TarYangmu Clan were the first generation migrants to the area. The household heads like Mr. Lakpa, a Lepcha language teacher in Lingmoo Secondary School, and Mr. Chong Pintsho Lepcha, a forest guard in the forest department, had come from Lingee Payong, a neighbouring village, recently bought land and settled down in a Lepcha cluster. Mr. Passang Tshering Lepcha, who came as a Tibetan Language teacher in 1962 along with his wife, is now leading a retired life after serving in many government schools. He finally settled down in a Lepcha cluster. Ladup Lepcha and Lendup Lepcha (Household Nos. 36 and 37) were his sons separated after marriage (Genealogy Chart Nos. 1 a, b). Ugen Lepcha, belonging to Sur-yak-mu P'tsho (Household No. 26) was also the first generation migrant from Tumin, a nearby village in east district, who came here after marrying a Nam-chu-mu woman of Lingmoo area and was staying in his in-laws house as an adopted son or Pu-tshop' (Namchu-mu genealogy, chart no 5). A commonly followed norm among the Lepchas is that in the event of a woman or a group of women being left sole possessor of property, they must acquire, either by marriage or adoption, a male who can inherit the property.

The head of only household belonging to Talimu clan, Mr. Daw Tshering Lepcha (Household. No. 15), was a second-generation migrant. His father Mr. Thendup Tshering had migrated to Lingmoo after marrying a woman of Log-bo-bo clan, bought land and settled here. Being the only son, he had no relative from his fathers' side.

It was very difficult to trace out who came first. But from the genealogical network the villagers could recall that the people of Log-bo-bo clan had been the earliest settlers in the Lingmoo region. It is said that when Yoksum (west Sikkim) was made capital of first Bhutia Kingdom, two Lepcha brothers belonging to Log-bo-bo clan, having failed to adjust with the Bhutias migrated out. One went to a village called Salim Pakyel in North Sikkim, where this clan is found in plenty and other came to Lingmoo. Log-bo-bo households are divided into two patrilineal relationships (Charts 7 a & b). Along with them came the carriers of load, who on the way took shelter making hut of a plant they called Tuk-nel, hence came to be known as Tuk-

nelmu. Although they claimed themselves as Log-bo-bo, the master clan, the fact was not; as La-Tshering Lepcha (Household No. 17) had married a Log-bo-bo girl i.e. daughter of Passang Kipu Lepcha (Household No. 12). As P'tsho (clan) is exogamous, a Log-bo-bo man cannot possibly marry a woman belonging to the same clan. Seven Tuk-nel-mu households were divided into two-patrilinial kin groups, of which genealogical relationship was traceable (Chart 3a & b). Mr. Baghey Lepcha and Tondup Lepcha belonging to Tungter-mu clan and Pentok Lepcha of the same P'tsho were second and third generation migrants from Ralay, a nearby village in the east district. The Namchumu clan could trace back upto third generation (Chart 5). Seventy years old Damai Lepcha of SambaTong-den clan (Household No. 33) could recall upto fourth generation back in Lingmoo (Chart 6 b). Seven households belonging to SambaTong-den P'tsho were divided into three groups among which genealogical relationship was traceable (Chart 6 a, b, c). Before the establishment of Lingmoo as a feudal estate, the chiefs must have been from among the Lepchas, as the word 'Athing' in Lepcha is a respected term for the landlord. I presume, the feudal estate might have been introduced during Rinchen Lepcha, as he had been referred to as the *Mandal* (Chart 7a). In the administrative arrangement of feudal system in the past, a local unit called block had a headman as Mandal.³

The households belonging to the same clan were interrelated through relatively closer kinship ties as shown in genealogies of Lingmoo Lepchas. It also revealed that there is a predominant tendency among the male members to remain in their natal community. Except two male members of Tuk-nel-mu clan, who had left Lingmoo and settled in a neighbouring village called Mangzing and one Log-bo-bo male, who had shifted to Samdong in his in-laws house as a 'Pu-tshop', all the Lepchas have stuck close to their natal village. Except very few cases, the girls normally marry outside the village.

(2) Settlement Pattern of Lepchas

The P'tsho or patrilinial clan is most important unit of Lepcha kinship organization. In earlier times it represented a geographical unit. In 1937 Gorer, in his *Lepchas of Dzongu*, also found the tendency for majority of the men to be members of the same P'tsho in a village.⁴ In Lingmoo village too, the clan-factor worked behind the clustering of houses. All seven houses belonging to Tuknel-mu were clustered in close proximity in the upper hamlet. Except two Log-bo-bo's households (one in

lower hamlet and another in Ppethang block) nine households belonging to the clan had clustered in upper hamlet. The Namchu-mu clan members were found in the lower hamlet and all Samba-tong-den clan members except one household, were found in the middle hamlet in Kolthang block. All Bong song-mus had settled down in the middle hamlet and three Tung-ter-mu households were in lower Kolthang areas.

(3) Marriage

The main function of P'tsho is regulation of marriage and prevention of incest. Traditionally, marriage was allowed among the members of the same clan only after nine generations.⁵ The Lepchas of Lingmoo had no prescribed or preferential marriage arrangement and they had a strong tendency to avoid marriage or any form of sexual relation among lineage members on the father's side and several generations on the mother's side. According to my data, no marriage between members of the patri-clan had taken place so far. La Tshering Lepcha (Household No. 17) claimed that he was a member of Log bo-bo clan and married a Log bo-bo girl in the same hamlet. However, his neighbour whispered that he was a Tuk-nel-mu by clan and his forefathers had come along with the Log-bo-bos as load carriers.

Among the Lepchas of Lingmoo most marriages are virilocal in nature. In the last thirty years, only five marriages had taken place within the hamlets of Lingmoo. These are the marriages between (a) a Bongsong-mu man and a Samba Tongden woman, (b) a Samba-Tongden man and a Namchu-mu woman, (c) a Tuk-nel-mu man and a Log-bo-bo woman, (d) a Tungter-mu man and a Namchu-mu woman, and (e) a Namchu-mu woman and a Suryak-mu man (Household No. 26), who had come here as *Pu-tshop*. The other marriages had taken place with the man and woman from the neighbouring villages like Mangzing, Kaw, Payong, Lingee, Chadey, Tumin. Besides, women were exchanged with villages located in other districts. Such marriages account for 53.7 % of the total marriages (Table 5.5). Some of the villages in other districts with which women were exchanged were Tashiding, Kabi, Nampatam, Yen, Loom, Kambal etc.

I did not find any case of brother-sister exchange marriage. One noticeable new trend among Lepchas was that with the spread of education, many in the younger generation were going out of village for study or for jobs. For them, the affinal network seems to have broadened, over a larger geographical area. The marriages within village comprised only 12.2% whereas 34.1% were within the district. The

highest 53.7% of affinal relations were of inter-district in nature. However, no marriage among the Lingmoo Lepchas had taken place outside the state of Sikkim.

Table 5.5: Affinal Network of Household heads of Three Ethnic Communities in Lingmoo

Sl. No	Caste / Ethnic Groups	Village	Within District	Other District	Other State	Nepal	Un-married	Total
01	Lepcha	05 (12.2)	14 (34.1)	22 (53.7)	-	-	-	41 (100.00)
02	Bhutia	-	03 (30.00)	05 (50.00)	-	01 (10.00)	01 (0.9)	10 (100.00)
03	Nepali	20 (18.2)	38 (34.5)	32 (29.1)	07 (6.4)	12 (10.9)	01 (0.9)	110 (100.00)
04	Sherpa	8 (36.4)	9 (40.9)	3 (13.6)	-	02 (9.1)	-	22 (100.00)

Source : Fieldwork, 1996

I found some interesting changes in the forms of marriage among the Lepchas in the Lingmoo area. The traditional negotiated marriage, in which the groom had to serve in in-laws house for three years before marriage, was found to be on the wane. In the last 15 years, there was only one such case of the negotiated marriage. Marriage by elopement had become a socially accepted form among the Lingmoo Lepchas. In such marriages no elaborate rituals are performed and the expenditure is comparatively less. On the third day of elopement, some persons from the boy's clan visit the girls family and inform them the whereabouts of the eloped couple and seek an apology with a bottle of liquor and other gifts. Depending on the convenience of the boy's family, which bears the financial burden, the formal marriage-feast takes place at a later date. Thus, with the diminishing trend of negotiated marriage, the importance of the *Phami-bu* or *bek-bu* as the mediator or go between the two families, has been considerably lost and his role is now confined to only leading the proceedings at the time of *bree* (marriage) on the feast day only.

Among the Lepchas, there is a tendency to marry in a known community, with which an affinal network is already established. Once a woman is brought from another village, she is liable to establish further matrimonial contacts in her native village. Gorer also noticed among the Dzongu Lepchas, 'a tendency for a woman's daughters to marry back into their mother's old village'⁶ provided the rules of descent are not violated.

Among the Lepchas, a man can inherit the wives of all his elder brothers, real or classificatory. The wives of all his paternal and maternal uncles, real or classificatory, provided these 'uncles' are younger than his parents but not younger than himself, and all the younger sisters of his wife, real or classificatory could also be inherited by Lepcha men⁷. This institution of marriage among the Lepchas is called *An-gop*. I found two such cases. One was that of Sonam Tshering (Household No. 1) of Tuk-nel-mu clan, who had inherited his elder sister-in-law, after his brother's death. In another case, Chong Pintsho Lepcha (Household No. 19) was forced to marry his deceased wife's brother's daughter.

(4) Family type

Nuclear family was the most common and widespread of the family types, which comprised 73.2% of the total families. Next in number was the family of 'nuclear extended' type, which constituted 26.8% of the families. Joint family was conspicuous by its absence among Lingmoo Lepchas (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6: Types of family among different ethnic communities in Lingmoo

Sl.No.	Ethnic Group	Nuclear	Nuclear Extended	Total
01	Lepcha	30 (73.2)	11 (26.8)	41 (100.00)
02	Bhutias	09 (90.0)	01 (10.0)	10 (100.00)
03	Nepali	84 (80.00)	21 (20.00)	105 (100.00)
04	Sherpa	17 (77.03)	05 (22.7)	22 (100.00)
	Total	140 (78.7)	38 (21.3)	178 (100.00)

Source: Fieldwork, 1996

Table 5.7: Family Size among the ethnic communities in Lingmoo

Sl. No.	Ethnic Group	Family Size (Number of family members)			
		0-5	6-10	11+	Total
1	Lepcha	17 (41.5)	24 (58.5)	-	41 (100.00)
	Bhutia	04 (40.00)	06 (60.00)	-	10 (100.0)
	Nepali	50 (47.6)	51 (48.6)	04 (3.8)	105 (100.00)
	Sherpa	10 (45.5)	11 (50.00)	01 (4.5)	22 (100.00)

Source: Fieldwork, 1996

As shown in Table 5.7, families having 6-10 members were the most numerous, comprising 58.5% of the total families. The smallest families with less than 5 members constituted 41.5%. None of the Lepcha families had more than 11 members as found among the Nepali families.

(5) *Lepcha houses*

The traditional Lepcha houses are constructed on raised platforms supported by huge pillars resting on stone slabs. The space below is used for storing firewood, implements and sometimes, animals. However, in some houses modern characteristics have been added keeping the old house intact. Unlike the traditional houses, which are normally made of wood and mud, the use of cement has become common. But the traditional belief about selection of site and auspicious day *Chu* still exists. The entrance of a Lepcha house most preferably should be in the east and not west. In spite of introduction of modern traits like electricity, corrugated iron sheds, drinking water pipes, glass panel etc, the traditional structure was still intact, excepting a few households.

The traditional oven 'Thup', made of three stones (*Gya-pu*) fixed on earth, was still common. Thirteen households still had (Thup), whereas the rest had elevated hearth made of stone or mud, which are called as *Gya-thup*, a slightly modified form of Nepalese *Chula* (hearth).

(6) *Dresses*

The women's dress had high influence of Tibetan and western dresses. If the younger generation was exposed to western dresses like pants, shirts, skirts and even Indian dress like Salwar Kamej, the woman of older generations used the 'Bokhu', the Bhutia dress. The Lepcha women living in Lingmoo had completely given up their traditional dress 'Thokrodum'. 'Thokro', the original Lepcha dress for men, normally a thick piece of woven cloth fastened over one shoulder and tied at the waist with a sash hanging upto the knee, had become very rare. Only four households, where members were educated, use of this traditional dress was found on formal occasions. 'Gya-dur', a loose trouser upto the knee for the males, was commonly worn by the

members of the older generations; they were seen wearing this dress with 'Han-Taz', a Tibetionized shirt.

(7) Community Life

There were two Gumpas (monastery), the pivot of community life, situated at the highest point of the upper and middle hamlets. The houses of peasants and monks were mixed; hence there was no clear-cut division as such. All Lamas (monks) in lower Gumpa were Lepchas. However, in the upper 'Gumpa' the head Lama was a Bhutia. The entire Buddhist festivals are celebrated in Gumpa according to the Tibetan Calendar.

Apart from the Lamas, the traditional priest 'Bong-thing' is equally important, even after the adoption of Buddhism. Hence, like other parts of the state, a unique combination of their traditional animistic beliefs and the traits of Buddhism were an important feature of religious life of the Lingmoo Lepchas.

The Lepchas of Lingmoo had organized themselves in an association called Tarjum. Although unregistered, it served the community members as a social welfare organization. Every household had to pay Rs. 50/- as admission fee. The money thus accumulated was normally lent to the Lepcha members, in case of unforeseen incidents like death, at a very low rate of interest. On the 7th day of Namsong, the Lepcha New Year, the Lingmoo Lepchas, who normally are members of Tarjum, organize a kind of get-together, with an arrangement for feast. The traditional priest, Boong-thing, worships deities and evokes the evil spirit keeping the tradition of Lepcha legend. The young Lepcha boys and girls visit houses to houses in groups playing Loso, in which prayers are offered to Gtbu Rum (God-Greater) for prosperity and doing away with the evil obstacles in the following year. The Tarjum serves as an important unifying bond among the Lepchas in Lingmoo.

The Bhutias of Lingmoo

The Bhutias of Lingmoo were numerically insignificant. Besides the Kazi's families, there were only ten households belonging to three patrilineal clans. Hence, except for some references to their socio-economic status for comparison with the Lepchas and

Nepalese, the detailed discussion of their social organization and socio-cultural life will be done in the section on Bhutias of Yangang.

Nepalese in Lingmoo

The Nepalese had settled in Lingmoo mostly in the last Century. As in other parts of Sikkim, in Lingmoo also the Nepalese had come as a result of the over-exploitation of cultivable wasteland at their place of origin in eastern Nepal. A few others came from villages in Sikkim, being pushed out due to pressure of increasing population.

The method of settlement of Nepalese in Lingmoo is representative of the way in which Nepalese have penetrated into Lepcha-Bhutia territory. Although few households were found in upper Lingmoo at the periphery of Lepchas and Bhutias settlements, most of the Nepali houses were scattered in middle and lower parts. Here too the Kazis and a few Lepcha and Bhutia households possessed the most favourable and large extent of land.

The Nepali community in Lingmoo was made up of diverse ethnic stocks like Bahun, Chettri, Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Tamang, Magar, Sherpa and the Scheduled Castes like Kami and Damais. Except very few households, the Nepalese in general are the first to fifth generation migrants in Lingmoo area.

Sherpas in Lingmoo

Among the Sherpas (a Buddhist community, which has been recognized as Scheduled Tribes since 1978) of Lingmoo, Lapchen Sherpa, Passang Sherpa and Nima Sherpa (Household Nos. 9, 13 & 14)- the first generation migrants from Nepal, were tenants in Kazi's land. Chumbi Sherpa (Household No. 1) who migrated 20 years ago from Neh-Broom, a neighbouring village, to his in-laws' village Lingmoo, was the tenant of a Bhutia landlord. Lapchen Sherpa (Household No. 9) came to his paternal uncle's house at Mangzing from Nepal forty years back, married a woman from Lingmoo and had settled on a Bhutia's land as a 'Kuthiar' (tenant). 69 years old Passang Sherpa (Household No. 13), a man with grandchildren and a first generation migrant from Taplejung of Nepal, came along with his uncle in Lingmoo, when he was 12 years old, was still a tenant in Kazi's land. In spite of settling here for many generations, the Sherpas were either landless or owners of small plots of land, surviving on leased in land of Kazis, Bhutias, Lepchas and in a few cases that of Nepalese. Passang Sherpa

(Household No. 8) was a tenant of a Bahun (Nepali). Sangyen Sherpa (Household No. 10) though a fourth generation migrant, was still landless and was a tenant of Kazi. Very faithful and loyal to Kazis, he avails of patronage from them.

Except Nima Sherpa (Household No. 14), who came along with his wife from Nepal and Nima Sherpa (Household No. 16), who also married a girl from Nepal, who came to visit her uncle's house at Temi, all other affinal networks of Sherpa community were more or less restricted within Sikkim (Table 5.5). They answered in the negative, when asked whether they still maintain their link with their natal community in Nepal. Mr. Nima Sherpa (Household No. 14), who was an expert bamboo craftsman and settled here for 23 years as a tenant, said that poverty had pushed him here and came with a view to improve his economic status. Though a first generation migrant he had no links with his natal community in Nepal.

Others among the Nepalese in Lingmoo

(1) Migration and economic adaptation

Nepalese representing older generations told me that their grandfathers or great grandfather had migrated from Nepal. On payment of an initial *Nazarana* to the then landlord known as *Chardam Thekki*, which literally means four pie, they were granted permission to settle on a specific land. The settlers had to deforest the land earmarked for them. The first and second-generation migrants had bought the land from earlier settlers.

The Karkis, belonging to Chettri caste, had 13 households in Lingmoo and were considered to be among the earliest Nepalese settlers here. As can be seen in genealogical chart of Karki clan (Chart No. 1) most of the descendants had settled in Lingmoo. Due to population pressure some of them had migrated to Mangan (North Sikkim), keeping their parental land in Lingmoo for many years as they could get enough land from the Lepchas and Bhutias in easy terms, at the place of their new settlement. Practicing animal husbandry, simultaneously with agriculture by keeping a large number of cattle *goth* was a very lucrative business initially. Except K.B. Karki (Household No. 98) and Chandra Man Karki (Household No. 104) and his one brother, who had migrated to Nepal, all other Karki families had stayed in Mangan (North Sikkim) and practiced animal husbandry along with the agriculture. Most of these families came back to Lingmoo during last 15 years. Surabir Karki (Household

No. 8) still owned a *goth* there and was a frequent visitor. They could take control of land owned by the Bhutia-Lepchas there without much difficulty, as there was enough land in North Sikkim. At the same time, they continued to keep constant social and economic contact with their parent community in Lingmoo. Most of them, however, have come back due to economic hardship developed there, over the years, as a result of population growth. The third and fourth generations, as shown in the chart of Karki genealogy (Chart no.1) were the young couples settled down separately after their marriage only a few years back.

Another numerically significant clan in upper Lingmoo is Khatiwara clan of Bahun caste consisting of 19 households. Although related, these households could not trace their genealogical links and were divided into three groups. Nandalall Khatiwara, who had migrated from Illam (Nepal) along with his family, was a yak herder. The yaks died on the way due to unsuitable climate. Hence, his descendants, comprising eight households as shown in the genealogical chart no.2b, were known as Chouri Pala meaning one "who domesticates yaks". Mr. Bhim Lall Dahal (Household No. 58) of Bahun caste, who migrated from Tarku, came with his parents 43 years back. Besides owning 3 acres of land he was a tenant of the Kazis. Dina Nath and Lok Nath (Household Nos. 48 & 49) were his brothers, who were born in Lingmoo and had separated after marriage. Mr. Parsu Ram Adhikari (Household No. 49) had no relatives in Lingmoo. Hailing from Tumin (a village in east Sikkim) he had inherited small plot of landed property from his father-in-law, who had no son, and settled down in Lingmoo as *Ghar-Juwai*. He was also a sharecropper (*adhia*) of the Kazis. Aita Bahadur Rai (Household No. 16) came here 19 years back with his friends and stayed in Samdup Lepcha's house doing various agricultural and domestic chores. Married to a woman from lower Lingmoo, he had settled down as a tenant in Mr. Samdup Lepcha's land. Another such case was Bhim Bahadur Subba (Household No. 50), who came from Maney Bhangzyang (West Sikkim) in 1961 to serve as a forest guard under the department of forest. Married to a woman of the same caste in Lingmoo, he settled here after retirement. Besides owing a small plot of land, he was a tenant of Tshering Bhutia. He was living with his grand children. Pahalman Kalikote (Household No. 68), a Chettri by caste, too had the same story. He had migrated from his natal village in Namthang to his in-laws village in Lingmoo. He owned a small plot of land and was a tenant of the Kazis for 20 years. Other first generation migrants from Nepal, namely, Chandra Man Chamlagai, Buddhiman

Bhattarai, Sajan Kumar Biswakarma, Robin Gurung and Man Bahadur Chamlagai (Household Nos. 63 to 67) were the young tenants of the Kazis, who also had to perform various manual and domestic chores at the house of their landlord. They were the Sukumbasis or landless. Lila Nath Khatiwara (Household No. 49), who was born and brought up in Mangzing, a neighbouring village, migrated to Lingmoo in 1981. His father used to live in Lingmoo sometime back but had shifted to be a tenant of Lepcha in Mangzing. He now owned one hectare of land, besides being a tenant of a Bhutia and the Kazis.

All other third to fifth generation migrants either had to deforest the land they were now living on or bought it from the earlier settlers. As land was sufficient and Lepcha- Bhutia population was small, the immigrant Nepalese had little difficulty in settling down to the Lingmoo area. The 'locals' had accepted them without any resistance. About the early Nepali colonies, the *History of Sikkim* says, "since the year 1871.... there was an influx of Gorkhalis from the neighbouring state of Nepal. They settled down for good and began digging, hoeing, smashing and overturning rocks, felling down trees and turning the courses of streams at such a rate that all jungles were turned into fields, in a very short time ... they brought in large herds of buffaloes, cows and sheep which filled every hill top and jungle, high and low".⁸

The process of settling down of the Nepalese might have required a great deal of individual efforts, when they first migrated. As in other parts of the state, they had to bear all the exploitation by the Kazis. An octogenarian Bhanu Das Gosai of Lingmoo, who was a third generation migrant, narrated how his grandfather and Padma Singh Basnet, another Nepali, came from Nepal, deforested the land and settled down. No one objected when they fell trees as land was plentifully available and it was not valued much. But they were not allowed to study and they had to give an undertaking to the Kazis that they would not study. He himself had some elementary education from a Nepali teacher in another village.

He also recalled those difficult days during feudal period, when they had to carry *Kalobhari* (black-load) (special consignment compactly packed in black tarpaulin) and even sometimes pork and beef, without caring for their religious sentiment, upto Gangtok and Kalimpong free of costs. They also had to offer free service, in the form of forced labour, known as *Jharlange* and had to serve their landlord or the Kazis in rotation by way of doing various household activities called *Kuruwa*.

If these were the darker sides there were brighter sides too in the experience of the Nepalese. While there were many landless and marginal peasants who had to struggle a lot, there were the successful Nepalese too. Some Nepalese were also the tenants of successful Nepali landowners. Many Nepali immigrants turned out to be tenants after serving the landowners as farm- or domestic servants for years. Earning of tenant status also earned them some economic stability.

For management of the estate, the Kazis had appointed certain officials from among the Nepalese, Bhutias and the Lepchas. Those who were appointed in such official posts as *Mandal*, *Khaardar*, *Karbari*, *Subedar* were the beneficiaries as compared to common masses. One such case was that of Parsu Ram Basnet, the father of Rudra Singh Basnet (Household No. 51). He recalled that poverty in Nepal had pushed his father, who came here in search of new land. He had elementary education and could read and write Nepali. He served as a police in Darjeeling for a short period before coming to Lingmoo. Being very faithful to the Kazis, he was bestowed with the title Hawaldar. In recognition of his ability to settle the cases of disputes he was conferred the title of Subedar later. His son, Rudra Singh Basnet, was a well-established man, with a nice house at Lingmoo, owning more than 10 acres of land and lucrative income from his orange orchards. Two of his sons were serving as teacher and all younger children were studying in schools and colleges. In addition to his own land, he was a tenant of a Bhutia landlord.

Another successful story is that of 45 years old Ritu Barna Chettri (Household No. 97), who was a third generation migrant. His grand father Abi Dal Khulal came with his friends from Nepal and stayed in Tumin (a village in east district). After marrying the daughter of Mr. Parsu Ram Basnet (cited above) of Lingmoo he shifted to his in-laws village, where his father-in-law gifted him a small plot of land. The land was too little for his four sons. All his sons, excepting the second one who died untimely, were married and settled in Lingmoo. Gorka Bahadur, Jit Bahadur (Household Nos. 85 and 86) and father of Ritu Barna Chettri were the tenants of the Kazis. Life for Ritu Barna Chettri was very tough at the beginning. Educated upto primary level, he once went to Manipur, worked with his friends while staying there for ten years in search of a better life. As a result of his sheer hard work, he was a well-established man now owning two houses, one of which was a concrete cemented building, and a grocery shop. He also served as a village post-master for some years. He bought land but still cultivates the land of the Kazi as a tenant.

Another instance of successful establishment was that of Mr. K.B. Karki (Genealogy chart of Karki family, Household No. 98). A third generation migrant, aged 58, and educated upto class X, he served as a primary teacher earlier. He was a very successful businessman owning two big shops at Lingmoo and a big landowner with rich cardamom fields. His children were well educated, who studied outside Sikkim.

If there were a few successful stories there were the cases of failures as well. There were many Nepali households, which were still in the lowest rung of economic status, landless or marginal farmers and were tenants of the Lepcha, Bhutia, Kazi or Nepali landowners. Life for them was not a bed of roses. 45 years old Tek Bahadur Chhetri (Household No. 26), although a fourth generation migrant, was still landless; he was a sharecropper and tenant of Mr. Nidup Lepcha. For survival he also had to serve as an agricultural labourer. His two brothers migrated to Neh and Mangzing, two neighbouring villages. Abject poverty in the family had pushed them out.

Thirty-six years old Kul Bahadur Kamar (Household No. 81), a third generation migrant, bears yet another story of failure. Studied upto primary level and living with his six children and wife, he was the owner of half-an-acre dry land. He was a sharecropper of Ghanashyan Khatiwara, a Nepali (Household No. 1). Despite the facilities like free education in the form of free textbooks, free uniforms and exercise books and a high school in the village itself, his two sons aged fifteen and thirteen, dropped out after studying upto class III and IV respectively. Possessing a pair of oxen and cows, he had a hard time in meeting his bare necessities for a hand-to-mouth existence. All these instances clearly indicate how the degree of achievement among the Nepalese in Lingmoo varies.

(2) Family type and affinal network among Nepalese in Lingmoo

Like the Lepchas, the nuclear and nuclear extended families were common among the Nepalese. I did not find a single joint family among them (Table 5.6). The growing preference for nuclear family was clearly evident, as 80.00% of the families were nuclear in nature. The same was noticed among the Sherpas and Bhutias as well.

Among the Nepalese only 3.8% of the households had more than eleven members in the family. Even among those Nepalese, who used to have a big family previously, as polygyny was commonly in practice, there is an increasing tendency to

have smaller families. The modernization and spread of education had a lot to contribute to the rising preference for smaller family norms among Nepalese. The decline of joint holding of landed property may have also contributed to the trend. It is to be noted here that 47.6% and 48.6% of the families among the Nepalese had family size in between 1-5 members and 6-10 members respectively (Table 5.7).

A look at the Table on affinal network (Table 5.5) of the heads of the households indicates to a more widespread and broad-based affinal network among Nepalese. Unlike Lepchas and Bhutias, whose kinship network was confined to the locality, 10.9% and 6.4% of Nepali households had affinal network in Nepal and in neighbouring state of West Bengal respectively. They had relatives in Darjeeling district of West Bengal, and one each had relatives in Assam and Manipur. There were some Nepali families in Lingmoo, whose siblings had migrated back to Tarai region of Nepal. However, it is important to note that none of the families had any link with their natal community in the hilly areas of Nepal, from where their grandfathers and great grand fathers had migrated to Lingmoo. Those who have migrated to Nepal recently, and settled mostly in Tarai region had a very good affinal link with their place of origin, although. Bom Bahadur Kharka, Chandra Bahadur Kharka, Bhim Bahadur Kharka and Harka Bahadur Kharka (Household Nos. 27, 29, 30 and 69) - all four brothers had their wives from Nepal. Their paternal uncle, who continued to be in Nepal, had a key role in establishing their affinal relationships. However, 18.2% of marriages took place within the village, 34.5% within district and 29.1% in other districts of Sikkim. Among Sherpas too, two households had affinal relations in Nepal, the rest being within the village (36.4%), within district (40.9%) and 13.6% in other districts of Sikkim (Table 5.5).

Socio-Economic Status of the Lepchas, Bhutias, and Nepalese of Lingmoo

(1) Educational status

Education is an important indicator of socio-economic status. A look at the community-wise enrolment in Lingmoo secondary school (Table 5.8), which is the only High School in the village, would reveal that the Nepalese have marched ahead of the other two communities during the last four years.

Table 5.8: Community-wise enrolment in Lingmoo Secondary School (1995-98)

Sl.No.	Ethnic Group	1995	1996	1997	1998
1.	Lepchas	31 (7.0)	37 (8.0)	30 (6.4)	33 (7.3)
2.	Bhutias	13 (3.0)	17 (3.5)	20 (4.3)	15 (3.3)
3.	Nepalese	370 (83.52)	390 (82.27)	389 (83.41)	378 (83.61)
4.	Sherpas	25 (5.6)	27 (5.6)	24 (5.1)	19 (4.2)
5.	Others	04 (0.9)	03 (0.6)	03 (0.7)	07 (1.6)
Total		443 (100.00)	474 (100.00)	466 (100.00)	453 (100.00)

Source: Office of the Head Master, Lingmoo Secondary School.

The enrolment of the Lepcha students was not proportionate to its population ratio, which was (13%) (Table 5.2). The enrolment of Lepcha students was 7% in 1995 and 8 % in 1996. But the percentage share gradually declined to 6.4 % in 1997 and 7.3% in 1998. The enrolment of Bhutia students was the highest in 1997 at 4.3%. In addition, some children of Bhutias families were studying out in public schools in Gangtok, Singtam and Kalimpong, even though they constituted a numerically insignificant part of the total population in Lingmoo. None of the 41 Lepcha families had sent their children out in the public schools. Hence, the original settlers of Lingmoo, the Lepchas, had a very dismal performance in the field of education. On the contrary, the Nepalese have shown their alertness in availing of the benefit of free educational opportunities provided by the state government. The Nepali students comprised 83.6% of total enrolment in 1998 in Lingmoo Secondary School. The Nepali students maintained their percentage share over the last four years. The share of the Sherpas in school enrolment remained more or less the same except in 1998, when it slightly declined (4.2%).

Table 5.9 gives us the levels of education among different communities and age groups. One may get a pyramidal structure while examining the levels of education. The Table 5.9 shows that the highest percentage of the literate people

Table 5.9: Community and age-wise Educational Break-up (excluding Minors and Illiterates)

Sl. No.	Educational Level	Age Group	Lepcha	Bhutia	Sherpa	Napalese	Total
1.	Batchelor Degree (B.A., B.Sc., B.Com.)	15-30	1	-	-	14	15
		30 +	-	-	-	1 15	1 16 (2.19)
2.	Higher Secondary	15-30	03 0 (12.5)	02 4 (12.5)	02 (16.25)	17 22 (65.6)	24 32 (4.38)
		30 +	01	02	-	05	08
3.	Upto School Final	6-14	03	07	03 (4.1)	01	04
		15-29	15 23 (31.9)	02 06 (8.3)		26 40 (55.5)	46 72 (9.57)
		30 +	04	04		12	20
		50 +	01	-		01	02
4.	Upto Class VIII	6-14	03	07	02 (1.9)	19	29
		15-29	11 19 (18.0)	04 14(13.3)		43 70 (66.6)	60 105(14.40)
		30 +	04	02		06	12
		50 +	01	01		02	04
5.	Literates Upto Class V	6-14	53	10	32	124	219
		15-29	32 105(22.1)	03 17 (3.5)	22 68(14.3)	93 283 (59.8)	150
		30 +	18	04	12	49	83 473(64.88)
		50 +	02	-	02	17	21
6.	Monastic & Sanskritik Education	6-14	02	-	01	-	03
		15-29	01 13 (41.9)	-	- 01 (13.2)	03 15 (48.3)	04 31 (4.25)
		30 +	01	01 02 (6.4)	-	04	06
		50 +	09	01	-	08	18
Total			165 (22.6)	43 (5.89)	76 (10.4)	445 (61.04)	729 (100.00)

Source : Field Work, 1996

(64.88%) had studied only at the primary level. 14.40% of total literate studied upto class VIII. People having higher education among all communities of Lingmoo were very few with only 2.19% graduates of the total literates. 4.38% of total literates had education upto the Higher Secondary level and 9.57% had studied upto the school final level. Community-wise, the Lepchas accounted for 22.6%, the Bhutias (5.89%) and Sherpas (10.4%) of the total literates. The Nepalese accounted for the highest percentage of 61.04% of the total literates. The Nepalese figured on top of all levels of education. One positive sign was that the rate of enrolment of the children in the 6-14 age group was on the rise among all communities. Even in matters of early enrolment the Nepalese outscored the other communities.

One noticeable feature of educational scenario in Lingmoo was loss of interest in monastic/sanskritic education among younger generations in all three major communities. Although 4.25% of total literate had this kind of traditional education,

the interest among the younger age groups was clearly on the decline. This was happening despite the fact that monastic education was highly valued by the Buddhist Bhutias and Lepchas. A pragmatic calculation was possibly working in the minds of those Lepchas and Bhutias, who wanted to see education as a means of getting a job in the modern sectors.

Earlier, for the Buddhist families it was a must to send the second male child for becoming a monk. Now there was no such obligation; the Buddhists too could freely opt for modern education. We, thus, could notice that there was a sharp decline of children going for religious education. Only 3 children from Lepcha Community and 3 from Nepalese community upto the age of 29 were having religious education. This loss of interest in religious education and an increasing awareness for availing the advantage of modern education could be the reasons for increasing number of enrolment in Lingmoo Secondary School. It is worth mentioning here that the education department of the state government has made education free and even the textbooks and exercise books are supplied free of cost to the students upto Class XII. Free uniforms are supplied upto class V. Consequently, although the literacy rate among all communities is on rise, the achievement in higher education is nothing encouraging.

(2) Constraints in higher education

The low score in higher education level may be attributed to a high rate of dropouts. The lack of awareness among parents, poverty, transportation problem may have contributed to the students not pursuing higher education. There was only one High School at Lingmoo and the students had to walk a long distance from the fur-flung villages to reach the school. Among the Lepchas, alcoholism was socially recognized and not considered a taboo in general. The youths too were seen consuming 'Chiang' (*chi*), a fermented millet and alcoholic liquor. A qualified leadership, which could have motivated the youths for education, was also absent among the Lepchas. In the Lepcha hamlet of upper Lingmoo, there was only one graduate, working as a Lepcha language teacher in a school, three each had passed Higher Secondary and School Final. But in lower hamlet, there was none who has passed the School Final examinations. However, the educated youths, whatever may be their number, were the source of inspiration for the children to go for education. Recently there was an effort

at the State level to revive and maintain Lepcha culture. The organisation like 'Rongyong mutanchi Rong Tarjum', i.e. Sikkim Lepcha Progressive Association was created, with the objective to organise the Lepchas and inject in them a sense of awareness and pride for the Lepcha tradition and culture. The block level branch of the said association was recently opened in Lingmoo. But according to the president Mr. Samdup Lepcha, the response from the Lepcha community in general was not very encouraging. He cited lack of education and ignorance as the responsible factors. The educated Lepcha youths, however, were showing some positive responses to the programmes of the Lepcha Youth Association.

The traditional higher or privileged social position of Nepali Bahuns and Chettries may be attributed to their better achievement in the field of education. Their early exposure to relatively modern Nepali society may have equipped them with the ability to make the best use of the material resources at their disposal. Migration itself can be interpreted as a positive move for social and economic betterment. Being migrants and because of their better control over human resources, the Nepalese succeeded in outscoring the autochthonous Bhutia-Lepchas in their race for economic and social development. To have an atmosphere conducive to education of the children, the non-consumption of alcohol at home have helped the Nepali children a great deal. But in contrast, the habitual indulgence of Lepchas in *Chiang (Jaar)* or *Rakshi* (liquor) alongwith their religious freedom in regard to these consumption have definitely affected their economic status as well as the educational achievement of their children to a large extent.

(3) *Land and income*

Besides education, land and income are other important yardsticks to measure one's socio-economic status. However, reliability of these data is always doubtful, since for fear of income tax and Tenancy Act the informants hesitate to disclose the accurate data on property and income. The income certificate at the disposal of the household heads also seems to be fake since the recorded income often does not match with the life style of the person in question. Although I have tried to get closer to the actual figures by cross checking and by establishing good rapport with the respondents, I don't claim cent percent accuracy.

Table 5.10: Distribution of households according to annual income and community

SL. Income (in Rs. per annum)	Ethnic Groups			
	Lepchas	Bhutias	Sherpas	Nepalese
1 Upto – 4000	14 (34.1)	02 (20.00)	12 (54.6)	49 (46.7)
2 4001 – 6000	13 (31.8)	03 (30.00)	05 (22.8)	19 (18.0)
3 6001 – 9000	07 (17.0)	01 (10.00)	02 (9.0)	11 (10.5)
4 9001 – 12000	04 (9.8)	-	01 (4.6)	03 (2.9)
5 12001 – 1500	-	-	-	-
6 15001 – 29000	-	-	02 (9.0)	05 (4.8)
7 30000 +	03 (7.3)	04 (40.00)	-	15 (14.2)
Total	41 (100)	10 (100)	22 (100)	105 (100)

Source: Fieldwork, 1996

Table 5.11: Distribution of households according to community and landholding size

SL. No.	Ethnic Group	Size of land holdings (in acres)						Total
		Landless	0-2.5	2.5-5	5.5-10	10.5-20	20+	
01	Lepchas	-	13 (31.7)	19 (46.3)	06 (14.7)	02 (4.9)	01 (2.4)	41 (100)
02	Bhutias	-	03 (30.00)	02 (20.00)	01 (10.00)	01 (10.00)	03 (30.00)	10 (100.00)
03	Nepalese	16 (15.2)	40 (38.1)	29 (27.7)	10 (9.5)	08 (7.6)	02 (1.9)	105 (100)
04	Sherpas	8 (36.4)	06 (27.3)	07 (31.8)	01 (4.5)	-	-	22 (100)

Source: Fieldwork, 1996

A simultaneous look at Tables 5.10 and 5.11 on annual income of the heads of the households and size of holdings would reveal that a large majority (i.e., 66%) of the Lepcha households falls in the two lowest income groups. About 34% of the Lepcha households had an annual income of less than Rs. 4000 and another 32% had an annual income varying between Rs.4000/- and Rs. 6000/-, although none of the Lepcha households was landless. Another 27% of the Lepcha households had middle

level income varying between Rs. 6000 and 12000/-, and only about 7% of the households were in the highest income category with more than Rs. 30,000/- per annum. Those in the highest category included two-government servants and a big landowner. In contrast, the Bhutias, although numerically a minority in the area, presents a totally different picture. 40% of the Bhutia households were in the higher income groups and the rest were somewhere in the lower income categories. The majority (54.6%) of the Sherpas were in the lowest rung of the income ladder. The numerically dominant Nepali community did not present a better scenario. A large section of the Nepali households (i.e. 46.7%) occupied the lowest of the income categories. Only 14.2% of them belonged to highest income group. The rest were somewhere in the middle rung of the income ladder.

The Table (No. 5.11) about land holding pattern shows that among the Lepchas, who were the earliest inhabitants in the region, none was land-less. However, a significant portion of the Lepcha households (31.7%) were the marginal land owners with an average holding of less than 2.5 acres. The largest section of the Lepcha households (46.3%) could be termed as small farmers with 2.5 to 5 acres of land. Only 3 household heads owned more than 10.5 acres of land. Mr. Samdup Lepcha was one of the big landowner possessing more than 20 acres of land. The Bhutias shows a drastically different picture. None of them were landless and a significant 30% belonged to highest land categories possessing more than 20 acres of land.

The relationship between size of holding and income could be understood by examining the case of the Nepalese. Among them it was found that the proportion of households with marginal and small-holding was almost same as the proportion of households in the lowest income categories. The large majority of the Nepali households were small landowners, holding upto 5 acres of land. Despite being numerically dominant communities only 1.9% of the Nepali households could be placed in the big land-holding category. In case of Nepalese size of holding and income do not always tally. Thus, while only 1.9% of the Nepali Households were in the biggest land holding category, 14.2% per cent of them constituted the highest income group. It indicates that income does not depend on land only. Because of their greater access to human resources the Nepalese explore many areas other than agriculture for a greater control over material resources. They have access to government service, they do cattle rearing while owning large number 'Goths'

thereby dealing with dairy products like butter, gee etc., which was a very lucrative business. Besides, a growing trend among the Nepalese is to own a grocery shops (which earlier was domain of the plainsmen); they owned seven shops in the Lingmoo Kolthang. Although the Biharis and Marwaris are known to have generally controlled business in the state, they have not yet penetrated into Lingmoo proper.

Among the Sherpas 36.4% of the households were landless and none possessed more than 6 acres of land. The landless mostly included the first generation migrants from Nepal and those, who inspite of settling for many generations, could not keep pace with the demands of the competitive society. Even in terms of productive use of land the Sherpas lagged behind the Nepalese. Because of their ability to work hard the Nepalese, even with a small plot of land on lease and with low consumption pattern, were able to sustain themselves.

(4) Occupational distribution

Lingmoo being an agrarian economy, land is an important source of income and livelihood of the people living in the region. Most of the people, irrespective of caste and community, were directly or indirectly dependent on land for their livelihood.

Table 5.12 would tell us that 39.2% of Lepcha household-heads were cultivating owners. A slightly higher percentage of them (44%) belonged to owner-sharecropper-wage labour category. It is interesting to mention here that none of the Lepcha households was tenant or sharecropper of the Bhutias or Nepalese. A Lepcha tenant and sharecropper had leased in land of the Lepchas only. The term 'wage-labourer' here needs a little explanation. It does not include agricultural labourer alone but includes the masons, carpenters, and others engaged in house construction on daily wage basis. The agricultural operation was normally done with mutual exchange of labour (a system known as *parma*) among neighbours or with those in the periphery. Such mutual exchange of labour among the Nepalese and the Lepchas was very rare, although it was not totally absent. Like the Nepalese the Bhutias too had ventured outside the agricultural sector. 50% of Bhutia households were either non-cultivating owners, government employees, or government employees also owning small business like bar-shop. Unlike the Nepalese, the Sherpas had little variation in their occupational pattern; their economic activities were confined to agriculture alone.

Table 5.12: Occupation of the household heads

Sl. No.	Occupational Category	Ethnic Group and Percentage			
		Lepchas	Bhutias	Nepalese	Sherpas
1.	Cultivating Owner	16 (39.02)	02 (20.00)	40 (38.00)	07 (31.8)
2.	Cultivating Owner cum Share-cropper cum wage-Labourer	18 (43.9)	02 (20.00)	06 (5.7)	02 (9.0)
3.	Cultivating Owner-Share- Cropper -Tenant	-	01 (10.00)	17 (16.2)	01 (4.6)
4.	Tenant cum Wage Labourer	-	-	13 (12.4)	8 (36.4)
5.	Cultivating Owner-Tenant	01 (2.4)	-	15 (14.3)	01 (4.6)
6.	Wage Labourer-Share-Cropper-Tenant	-	-	-	01 (4.6)
7.	Cultivating Owner cum Lessor	03 (7.3)	-	02 (1.9)	02 (9.0)
8.	Non-Cultivating Owner and Minor Business as Bar Shop and Tea Stall	-	01 (10.00)	-	-
9.	Cultivating Owner-Lessor Business	01 (2.4)	02 (20.00)	03 (2.9)	-
10.	Government Service	2 (4.9)	02 (20.00)	09 (8.6)	-
	Total	41(100.00)	10(100.00)	105(100.00)	22 (100.00)

Source : Fieldwork, 1996

Government service is viewed by the people as the most lucrative occupation and therefore carries high status in society. Here again, the Nepalese and Bhutias present a better picture than the Lepchas. Education is the most important means for having a secure employment in the government sector and the Lepchas with little access to education find it very difficult to find an entry into this sector, despite having the reservation facility. The government sector offered jobs in schools and colleges, health, offices, development programmes, police etc. Only two Lepchas from the area of my field study were employed in government service, one as a Lepcha Language teacher in a school and another as a forest guard.

(5) Cultural difference among the communities

The Nepalese in Sikkim are mostly the migrants, early as well as recent whereas the Lepcha-Bhutias are the original inhabitants. The migrant Nepalese have risen to the place of prominence in the field of economy, society and polity of the State and now they constitute an integral part of its civil society. They now occupy a position at par with the Lepcha-Bhutias in terms of their economic status.⁹ Since the Nepalese, Lepchas and Bhutias have lived side by side for so many years, they have created a common ground for their economic, social and political interaction. Although they largely have a relationship of good understanding loaded with fellow feeling they are far from being assimilated.

In Lingmoo, the difference in religious ethos of Buddhism and Hinduism was responsible for different life styles followed by the Lepchas and the Hindu Nepalese. Chie Nakane in her study in a village called Pabyuk in east Sikkim in 1955 remarked that "inspite of having same technology of cultivation, Nepalese with their even poor resources than Lepchas-Bhutias could produce much higher and consumes much lower". She further remarked that the Nepalese with recognized institution of polygyny, marriage for them means acquisition of more labour,¹⁰ for agricultural activities. However, this might be true previously when land was plentifully available. But now, even when reality has changed, when there is population pressure and fragmentation of land, polygyny continued to be in practice in Lingmoo. Thus, Gambir Singh Karki (Household No. 25) had three wives, Man Bahadur Gurung (Household No. 35) had two wives, Rudra Bahadur Karki (Household No.45) had two wives, Teka Ram Dahal (Household No. 54) had two wives, Kali Bahadur Barakoti (Household No. 94) had two wives and Mitra Bahadur Acharya (Household No. 77) had two wives.

A very remarkable difference was noticed in the work habits of the Nepalese on the one hand and the Lepchas on the other. When the Nepalese could engage themselves in all kinds of work of a manual labourer like agricultural labourer, road construction, building construction, sawing etc. the Lepcha and Bhutia peasants were found reluctant to go beyond their traditional set of works confined to their villages and their periphery. Among the 25 labourers engaged on muster-roll basis in R.D.D.

department in Lingmoo for road repairing and construction, I did not find a single Lepcha or Bhutia labourer.

The Bhuddist Bhutia- Lepchas had an expensive consumption pattern. They were in the habit of spending beyond their abilities at the rites and rituals performed at death and marriage. The Lepchas were required to meet their social obligations like donations in cash and kind like millet, rice, oil etc. during occasional festivals at 'Gumpa' (monastery). The common habit of consumption of alcohol and meat at death and marriage related ceremonies make their living very expensive. In contrast, the expenditure in Nepalese marriage is negligible. The institution of bride price and lavish wedding feasts that include high consumption of meat and alcohol among Lepchas swallow up their accumulated wealth and make them indebted. The Nepalese follow a few Hindu festivals, the main being Dasai, Tihar, where the expenditure is quite less. Consumption of alcohol and meat is tabooed, especially among the higher caste Nepalese. But a new trend, that of using liquor and meat during son's marriage, had developed among well off Chettris. The Bahuns too do not use these. However for the Nepalese belonging to Mongoloid ethnic stock, like Limboo, Rai, Tamang, Gurung etc., liquor or meat are not tabooed.

(6) Land alienation

Perhaps it is such lavish expenditure on various social occasions that led the Lepchas to sell or mortgage their lands, which had gradually fallen in the hands of the Bhutias or Nepalese. The purchase of land owned by the Lepcha-Bhutias by the Nepalese has been legally forbidden by the Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917. However, the alienation of Lepcha lands in Lingmoo had not been discontinued completely. There were cases when a section of illiterate and impoverished Lepchas, who were indebted as well, were lured with meager cash and persuaded by the economically dominant Bhutias and Nepalese to sell their land. One can cite the instance of late Passang Gyalpo Lepcha who had given his land to a Chettri (Nepali) for Rs. 600/- only. A document was made with mutual understanding. After the death of Mr. Passang Gyalpo Lepcha, his twenty-eight years old son Yangpa Lepcha said that Mr. Chettri encroached beyond the demarcated land. A case was filed in District Court. Mr. Chettri's advocate told Mr. Lepcha to return all the expenditure incurred by Mr. Chettri in constructing two houses on the land. Mr. Lepcha was left with no choice but to make

a compromise. Mr. Lepcha commented 'Rich can do anything as they like'. Another instance to cite was that of Mr. Nidup Lepcha, whose land had been encroached by a Nepali. Although it is said that the land was transferred on the basis of an understanding many feel that it was a case of forgery. 'Such a tendency seems unavoidable in a plural society in which the various groups have entirely different values and ways of life'¹¹

(7) Ethnic Boundary – Its Maintenance

Language being the hallmark of cultural identity the three dominant communities had retained their respective languages. Since the Nepalese are numerically dominant, Nepali has become the lingua franca of all communities in Lingmoo, as in other parts of Sikkim. Nepali is widely spoken in urban areas and by the people who move in and out of the state. In the neighbouring Darjeeling hills, where the Nepalese predominate, and in neighbouring Nepal, Nepali is most widely spoken language. Moreover, the richness of Nepali literature had given the language a wider acceptability. Despite the omnipresence of Nepali language, the Lepchas and Bhutias in Lingmoo and in other parts of the state have been able to preserve their language by way of using their respective languages as a means of communication within their own communities. The Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepali and Limboo languages are taught in schools in the state and the education department has provided language teachers for the schools. The traditional dance forms of the Lepchas, Bhutias, Nepalese and Limboos are performed by the school children during Independence day celebration, which contributed a little in retaining an awareness about their culture, which, otherwise, might have been forgotten amidst dominant Nepali culture.

The Nepalese find it very difficult to learn the Lepcha language, which has a very complex structure but the Lepchas and Bhutias are much more successful in learning Nepali. Apart from ease or difficulty involved in learning a language, the factor that facilitates the spread of a language in its essence or necessity in terms of means of communication and literary market. On all these counts Nepali has outscored the other native languages in the state.

The dress code is another factor, which has helped the major communities in retaining their district cultural boundaries. Although, the dress of males of all these three communities has been westernized as wearing of pant and shirt has become

common, the males of older generations have maintained their traditional dresses. The women too have maintained their distinct identity in terms of dress; none of the Lepcha or Bhutia women wears *sari* which is so commonly used by the Nepali women. The Nepali women of older generation wear *Gunuin* (sari) and *Chaubandi Chole* (blouse). By being influenced by the Bhutia dress pattern, the Lepcha women now wear Bokhu whereas their traditional dress was Thokrodum. Very few women of new generations now wear their ethnic dresses. The dress of younger girls in all communities was either westernized or Indianized as Salwar-Kameej and jeans had become very popular with them.

Inter-community marriages were very rare. One Bhutia man, Mr. Tshering Bhutia, a government employee, had married a Nepali woman, a teacher in a village school. This was, however, after the man had divorced his first wife, who was a Bhutia. There was another case where Adung Lepcha married a Nepali woman. Both these Nepali women belonged to Rai ethnic stock of the Nepalese. There were two other cases where Lepcha men had married Bhutia women. Chong Pintso Lepcha (Household No. 19) and Lendup Lepcha (Household No. 37) married Bhutia women. Mingma Tshering Lepcha (Household No. 10) married a Sherpa woman. Despite having a common religious bond and sharing similar values and ethos, the intermarriage between the Bhutias and Lepchas was not common in Lingmoo. There was not a single case where a high caste Nepali had established marital relationship with the Lepchas or Bhutias.

The social inter-relationship between the three communities depends on the economic status too. I could observe that the households with low economic status, who had to bear other indices of backwardness simultaneously, had confined their interaction within their ethnic community in and around the village. But the well-to-do households among the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese, where members were educated and had some exposure to the larger society, had shown an inclination for free interaction. Marriages, religious festivals and other social occasions continued to be largely intra-community affairs, although there was a new trend of inviting members of other communities as well. The higher caste Nepalese generally considered the Lepchas and Bhutias as beef eaters and unclean. In Bhutia-Lepcha houses, during marriages and death rituals or on other occasions, when members of all ethnic communities may also gather, a separate cooking arrangement is made for the Nepali guests. On such occasions food is prepared by the Nepali upper caste cooks.

Except for a very few cases of mutual exchange of agricultural labour, which is locally called *Parma*, between the Nepalese and the Lepchas living in the periphery, all agricultural operations are managed by the members of the same community. A common feature of the well-to-do households in all the three communities was that they all sued to keep a *Gothala* (cowherd) from Nepal. The cowherds were appointed on annual contract. They had to help their masters in agricultural operation, especially in the cardamom fields, which were normally managed with such attached labourers.

(8) *Caste and religious associations*

The Bhutias being numerically insignificant in Lingmoo, there was no such thing as village level Bhutia association but two Bhutias households were members of Ravangla (Sub-Division) Tribal Association called Kidu. This was a branch of the state level Tribal organization for which the members have to make a monthly contribution of Rs. 5/- each. It was an organization, set up for the welfare of the Bhutias in the state.

Earlier in this chapter we have discussed about the village level association, Tarjum, of the Lepchas in Lingmoo. Besides Tarjum there was a block level branch of Sikkim Lepcha Association called Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum, for which each constituting family has to make a monthly contribution of Rs. 5/-. The money thus accumulated is divided on 50-50 basis between the local branch office of the organisation and the Central Executive Body at Gangtok. The aim of the Association was to revive Lepcha culture and bring an awareness among them about their rich tradition and culture.

The Sherpas of Lingmoo too had their own association called Sherpa Samaj. The contribution they make is utilized for buying utensils, which are lent out on payment to those who needed these during various social occasions like marriage and death. Annual payment was must. For performing community *pujas* as Sansari puja and Deywali, each family has to contribute Rs. 50/- and 5 k.gs. of millet for making *Chiang* (fermented millet).

Besides, there were three clubs, namely, Sungava Club, Indrani Club in upper Kolthang and Jan-Jagrithi Club in Lingmoo Tokday, all headed and dominated by the Nepalese. Unlike Tarjum, Kidu and Sherpa Samaj associations, which were to protect the interests of particular ethnic communities, the clubs controlled by the Nepalese

were for nurturing the cultural, sports talents of the youths of all ethnic communities and was a kind of social welfare associations.

(9) Ethnicity – its manifestation

To elicit the multiple discernible criteria of ethnicity, stable as well as transient in various combinations, and how they manifest according to the situation, I would like to illustrate two case studies from Lingmoo. Although there was no such thing as ethnic tension in Lingmoo there were the situations, when ‘we’ feeling of a particular ethnic group came to the surface. One such incident occurred on 7th June 1996 during my stay at Lingmoo. A Nepali primary school teacher from the village itself was beaten up ruthlessly by a group of Lepchas in the school compound on charge of mishandling a Lepcha girl student of class III. Mr. Chhetri, the teacher in question, filed a case in the district court. The Lepcha youths approached the Sikkim Lepcha Association, Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum at Gangtok, for support and the Association stood by the Lepchas with legal advice. Later Mr. Chhetri had to pay the compensation according to the verdict of the Court. Although, the grievances of the Lepchas were not targeted against the Nepalese as a whole and as such it was not a case of ethnic tension, the incident demonstrated how the ‘we’ feelings among the Lepchas could work to organise the community at a time of attack on their rights. The incident also demonstrates that there is a ‘feeling of difference’ among the communities, suppressed in the collective consciousness in normal situation, which comes out in the open in the form of ethnic action or some kind of animosity against another community.

Another instance of inter-ethnic stress took place in 1988, after the Gram Panchayat election. Mr. M.M. Chhetri and Mr. S.K. Basnet (both Nepali) were the President and General Secretary of the Gram Panchayat. Mr. Ugen Rapgyal (a Bhutia Kazi), as the people alleged, had backed the President, Mr. M.M. Chhetri. On certain points of misunderstanding between them, Mr. Basnet claimed to have gone to Gangtok and told the Chief Minister “Democracy has come all over India but not in Lingmoo”. The influence of Mr Rapgyal on Mr Chhetri generated anger in a section of the local Nepalese, who planned to organize a ‘black flag’ in protest. A Nepali teacher, a close friend of Mr. Kazi, recalls that the angry section of the Nepalese used to avoid him and branded him as one ‘belonging to Kazi’s party’.

It was after 1993-Gram Panchayat election, that there was no unanimous candidate for the post of Presidentship. Mr. Rapgyal and Mr. M.M. Chetri were the aspiring candidates. The Nepali elected representatives in the Gram Panchayat were sworn in the name of 'Gita' – the Hindu scripture. They persuaded one Bhutia lady representative not to support Mr. Rapgyal. The situation became very tense and there was a lot of horse-trading to form the majority. After the swearing in ceremony, the same evening, the Bhutia lady elected candidate switched over to Mr. Rapgyal's group, who finally managed to be the President. However, he could not complete his five years term. A vote of no confidence was moved later on, when only Mrs. Bhutia supported him. Another candidate Mr. Basnet, with the support of a few Nepali members, was elected as the new President and continued in the office till there was a fresh election in 1997. This case also gives an indication of the fact that ethnicity finds a 'playing ground' in politics. To place the correlation in other way around, it would not be wrong to suggest that power politics does provoke the ethnic feelings of the people.

The normative behaviour of people, belonging to various linguistic groups, is apparently stress free. But when sometimes they fight among themselves or get charged with a feeling of relative deprivation, language becomes an issue of arousing ethnic feelings. The descriptive terms coined by the members of an ethnic group ethnologically often speak for an ethnic mind. Such terms are representatives of the collective consciousness of a community about another community. In Lingmoo, the Lepchas commonly call the Nepalese as *Cham-Chet Bandabu*, meaning a person who has shaved his hair. It may be mentioned here that the higher caste Nepalese keep portion of their hair in middle of the head. The other terms used for the Nepalese by the Lepchas are *Hursuk moong*, which means devil of another country and *Kum-cho-mu*, meaning shrewd people. Another term used by the Lepchas to refer to the Nepalese is *Loom Chong*, meaning people from mountainous area, which is not necessarily derogatory. The Nepalese also retaliate by using the derogatory terms like *Lapche* and *Sino-Khanay* (defile-eaters) for the Lepchas and *Giddha* (vulture) to Bhutias as they are fond of meat. Often the members of an ethnic community are restrained not to use these terms of reference. But these are a part of their ethnic knowledge and commonly shared feelings and therefore sometimes find spontaneous expression, as an expression of hatred.

To sum-up, Sikkim, which traditionally had a strong tradition of Tibetan culture is now facing a strong influence of Nepali culture. The difference in their cultural traditions of the Lepcha-Bhutias on the one hand and the Nepalese on the other causes considerable tension. The cultural and social gap between these two groups of people in the state is too great to allow them to be assimilated.¹² The outlooks of people are not similar always. The younger generations, which are educated and have the necessary exposure to the wider world and the mass media, have an opportunity to develop a mass culture. But the traditional barrier between, the Lepcha-Bhutia on the one-hand and the Nepalese on the other is still so great and rigidly maintained that a cultural unity, not to speak of cultural assimilation, seems to be an impossibility.

A report on Yangang

(1) Location

Sandwiched between Neh-Broom busy and Ravangla, the sub-division head quarter, Yangang lies 30 kms. away from Singtam. Like Lingmoo, administratively it is divided into four revenue blocks, which together form Yangang-Rangang Panchayat Unit. It is surrounded on the east by Neh Broom busy, on the west by Ravangla, on the north by the reserve forests and on the south by villages called Sangmu and Nampruk. The Bhutia households I have studied fall in Salemthang and Dumpattam hamlets under Rangang-Yangang blocks, which are inhabited overwhelmingly by the Bhutias, although one could find some Nepali households as well.

The word Yangang appears to have a Bhutia origin. The relevant folk story goes like this. A Buddhist monk, while crossing the forest was very exhausted and reached this place for rest. As he arrived here he uttered *ki-yanga* i.e. place of joy or peace. It is also interpreted as 'Ridge of the Fortune'. However, in absence of any written document nobody could be sure about the explanations.

(2) Households and population

For my study in Yangang, I planned to cover 51 households, which had a total population of 312, of which 51% were male and 49% female (Table 5.13). One was Lepcha household and two households, which claimed to be the Bhutia (which were

in fact Lepcha, as could be guessed from their clan) were kept outside the scope of my study. By religion, all of these households were Buddhist.

Table 5.13: Households and sex-wise break-up of population studied in Yangang

Sl. No.	Ethnic Groups	Total H.H.	Male Population	Female Population	Total Population
1	Bhutia	48	147 (50.7)	143 (49.3)	290 (100.00)
2	Lepcha	03	12 (54.5)	10 (45.5)	22 (100.00)
	Total	51	159 (51.00)	153 (49.00)	312 (100.00)

Table 5.14: Clan-wise distribution of Bhutia households

Sl.No.	Clan	Total No. of Households
01.	Gen Sarpa	12
02.	Phenpu Nadipa	11
03.	Chechu-tharpa	08
04.	Nam-Changkup	06
05.	Phenpu-Lhasungpa	04
06.	Sangdarpa	03
07.	Ethenpa	01
08.	Assampa	01
09.	Labrang	02
	Total	48

Source: Fieldwork, 1996

(3) *The Bhutia clans*

In Yangang, 48 Bhutia households were divided into nine different clans (Table 5.14). Though some of them belonged to the same clan, they could not trace their genealogical link among themselves. The settlement pattern shows that a Bhutia

hamlet was actually a cluster of households belonging to a particular clan. They were divided into 16 patrilineal kin groups. The genealogical relationship among these groups was traceable as is indicated in the genealogical chart of the Bhutias of Yangang.

Unlike the Nepalese in Lingmoo, most of whom could trace out their history of migration, the Bhutias of Yangang couldn't trace out the exact or even tentative year of their migration to this village. However, those who were third and fourth generation migrants had come from other parts of Sikkim.

From whatever information I could gather from the elderly people in the village about the history of migration it appeared that the clans like Gensarpa and Phenpu-Nadipa were the first settlers in this region. All eleven households belonging to Phenpu-Nadipa-clan could trace out their genealogical relationship. Only those households, which had settled in Yangang and their genealogical link was taken into account in preparing the genealogical chart of Bhutias (Chart No. 1).

The Gensarpas (Charts 2.a & b) claimed to be the earliest settlers in Yangang, though they couldn't exactly trace their link. The Gensarpa (Chart 2.c) were the third generation migrants from Lingee, a village in south Sikkim. The Gensarpa (Chart 2.d), headed by Top Tshering Bhutia, was the first generation migrant from Sangmu. The Namkarpas or Namchangkup (Chart 3.a) could not trace the year of migration but Passang Bhutia and Chung Chung Bhutia (Chart 3.b) were the second generation migrants. Their father had migrated from Barfang of south Sikkim. Two households, headed by Kunjang Namgyal Bhutia and Chong Namgyal Bhutia (Chart 3.c) were the third generation migrants. Their grand father came here as head Lama of the Gumpa (monastery) from west Sikkim.

The members of Chechu-tharpa clan (Chart no. 4) were the third and fourth generation migrants from west Sikkim and all eight households could trace their genealogical relationship.

The members of Phenpu-Lhasungpa clan (Chart 5) came to Yangang four to five generations back from Sosing (South Sikkim). Datche Bhutia (Household No. 14) was the Dorjee-Lopen (Head Lama) of Yangang Gumpa. They still maintained link with their relatives in natal village. Before embracing Buddhism, they were the priests to carry out funeral rites and various other rituals.

The Sangdarpas (Chart 6) were the second-generation migrants from Lingmoo village in South Sikkim. There was one household belonging to Ethenpa clan, (Chart

7) who migrated from Sosing, a village in south Sikkim as *Khu-ma* of Mr. Chongen Lama (Gensarpa Household No. 46). So, he had no relations from his father's side. There was one household belonging to Assampa clan. He was the first generation migrant from Bis-thang (West Sikkim), who had come along with Kalu Bhutia, as *Khu-ma* after marrying a girl from Yangang (Chart No. 8)

Two households (Nos. 17 and 48), headed by Nim Tshering and Phurba Bhutia, belonged to Labrang clan (Chart 9), and were considered as having lower status and inter-marriages with them was not allowed. Originally, the illegitimate child born out of woman slave or servant (*Youm*) was called Labrang. The mother of the heads of these two families was a *Youm* (woman servant) in Sonam Topgay's (Gensarpa clan-Household No. 6) father's house. The heads of these two households were land-less and tenants of Bhutias. Their houses were recently constructed under Indira Awas Yojna Scheme.

(4) Lineage

Among the Tibetan commoners, who were the ancestors of the Sikkimese Bhutias, the term *Rus*, derived from the word *Rus/Pa* (bone), indicates a genealogical relationship through the father, i.e. lineage or patrimonial family group.¹³ But the Yangang Bhutias used a word, *Rig*, slightly different in pronunciation, to mean clan, i.e., relationship through *Ri* (which means bone). Although the general principle is patrimonial lineage, the Gazetteer of Sikkim has pointed out bilateral elements in the operation of the rules of succession and inheritance, as follows¹⁴:

- (a) Son
- (b) Grandson etc. through the males
- (c) Brother by same mother
- (d) Father's brother's son]
- Father's sister's son] By choice.
- Mother's brother's son]
- Mother's sister's son]
- (e) If only distant relatives, they receive only a portion, a portion going to Lamas and the remainder to the Government.
- (f) If no relatives, funeral expenses etc. to the Lamas and remainder to the government.

Thus, not only the relatives from the father's side but also mother's brother's son and mother's sister's son stood on equal footing in matters of inheritance. Among the Bhutias, even the daughter's husband (son-in-law), though belonging to a different

Rig takes the son's place as *Khuma*, in absence of son and stands on the order of succession. Pheda Bhutia (Household No. 21) and Top Tshering (Household No. 35) were such cases in Yangang.

Table 5.15: Affinal network among the heads of households

Sl. No	Ethnic Group	Village	Within District	Other District	Other State	Un-Married	Total
01	Bhutias	09 (18.8)	21 (43.8)	15 (31.2)	01 (2.1)	02 (4.1)	48 (100.00)
02	Lepchas	01 (33.3)	01 (33.3)	01 (33.3)	-	-	51 (100.00)
Total		10 (19.6)	22 (43.1)	16 (31.4)	01 (2.00)	02 (3.9)	51 (100.00)

Source : Fieldwork, 1996

The data on affinal network (Table 5.15) indicates that 18.8% of the marriages had taken place within the village. 43.8% of the marriages had taken place in the neighbouring villages like Karong, Ben, Sangmu, Sosing, Ravangla etc., and 31.2% in other districts of Sikkim. There was only one household head Mr. Topden Pintso Bhutia (Household No. 41) whose wife was from Kalimpong (Darjeeling district). So, the affinal network among the Bhutias was relatively more widespread than that of the Lepchas.

18.8% i.e. nine out of forty-eight marriages had taken place within the village, Yangang. The members of Chechutharpa clan had affinal relationship with the Phenpu-lasungpas, Gensarpas and Phenpu-Nadikpas. Affinal relationships were also found between the members of Gensarpa, Phenpu-Nadikpa, Ethenpa, Namchankupa and Chechutharpa clans. The Namchankupas had established marital relationship with the members of Phenpu-Nadikpa and Gensarpa clans. In general, the Gensarpas and Chenchutharpas had provided the maximum number of spouses. However, the data is based on affinal relationships of heads of the households only. The members of the new generations definitely had a wider affinal network, since with modern education they had wider opportunity to move out of Yangang in search of jobs and other income opportunities, which provide them wider scope for bride selection.

In establishing marital network, the role of the kinsmen appears to be important. There are many cases where the brothers and sisters have married in the neighbourhood in the same settlement. To cite one case, the wives of Tsheten Pintso, Lachung Bhutia, Phur Tshering (Household No. 15, 18 and 19) were sisters from a neighbouring village, Lingmoo. There were also other cases, where the spouses, coming from nearby places besides Yangang, were related or cousins.

(4) Family type and size

Among the Bhutia families (or households) in Yangyang 62.5% were nuclear and the rest were of 'nuclear extended' type. There was no single joint family among them. Looking in the size we found that 62.5% of the families had 6-10 members. Only one family had more than eleven members. 35.4% of the households had between 1 and 5 members (Table 5.16).

Table No. 5.16: Family type and size among the ethnic communities

Sl.No.	Type & Size	Bhutia	Lepcha
1.	Nuclear	30(62.5)	02(66.6)
2.	Nuclear Extended	18(37.5)	01(33.4)
	Total	48(100.00)	03(100.00)
1.	0-5 members	17(35.4)	-
2.	6-10 members	30(62.5)	03(100.00)
3.	11 +	01 (2.1)	-
	Total	48(100.00)	03(100.00)

Source: Fieldwork 1996

Normally, the girl after marriage leaves the parental family. The widow/widower mother/father prefers to stay with her/his son. The unmarried sons and daughters normally stay with their widow mother or widower father. Except those in younger generation, who leave the village temporarily for study or service, there was tendency among male members to remain attached to the village and the community. Hence the consanguinal kins normally found in the same community,

were siblings or parents and children. All eleven households of Phenpu-Nadikpa clan were clustered quite closely and their relationship could be seen in the genealogical chart.

Unlike the Lepchas of Lingmoo, where affinal network was mostly confined to neighbouring villages, within and outside district, the Bhutias had more spread-out affinal network in all parts of Sikkim. Those having higher economic status among the Bhutias had affinal network with the Kazis. For example, Nim Tenzing Bhutia and Dorjee Pintsho married Kazi's daughters and Topden Pintso had his wife from Kalimpong (Darjeeling district of West Bengal).

Chie Nakane has pointed out that free choice of spouses among Bhutias from a wide geographical area is coupled with the permissibility of cross-cousin marriage.¹⁵ However, among the Bhutias of Yangang there was a tendency to avoid cross-cousin marriage. I could find only one case of cross-cousin marriage, which was still being looked down upon by the people. The grandson of Changen Lama (Household No. 46) had married his cousin. The passing away of parents of Mr. Lama immediately after the marriage had made people superstitious about cross-cousin marriage.

(6) Marriage

Among the Lepchas of Lingmoo marriage by elopement was common. Although this form of marriage was gaining popularity with the Bhutias, negotiated marriage was not totally out of fashion. As negotiated marriage was still in practice, a brief discussion on its stages would not be out of place.

The maternal uncle of the boy or in his absence, any senior member of his family normally approaches the maternal uncle, *Ajyang*, of the girl with a bottle of liquor, one hundred rupees and a silken scarf *Khada*. This stage is known as *Kha-Chang*. The second stage is called *Nang-Chang Thungse*, when the date of marriage, bride price is fixed and other marriage conditions are finalized. The negotiation is followed by a feast, where *Chiang* is served. Here too the bridal party must take *Chiang* (fermented millet), rice and a slaughtered chicken.

Once the date for marriage is fixed, which may be one month to two years after the final negotiation the *Ajeng Khapsey* (or marriage) and *Chiang Thung* i.e. the celebration with *Chiang*, take place. The payment of bride price, locally called *Ring Tapse*, includes the cash, *Chiang*, golden ornaments and a slaughtered ox. Of course, the cash varies according to the economic status of the families from Rs. 10,000 to

20,000. Some return, in the form of dowry, is normally made after one or two years by bride's parents, when the daughter and the son-in-law are called. The married couple normally brings slaughtered chicken, pig and Chiang. The dowry, *Pizong*, includes the utensils, golden ornaments, and clothings, bedding and even land. Hence, although the daughter does not have any right over the land of her father there is a practice, where she can have it as a gift.

The marriage by elopement, *Kum-Kgapsey*, in which expenditure incurred is comparatively less than in negotiated marriage, was also growing among the Bhutias. In case of such marriage, the boy's party which includes the maternal uncle and others, goes to the girl's house and seeks an apology and tells about her whereabouts. Some penalty, *Kinge Tapse*, has to be paid which, will be followed by the wedding feast.

(7) *Role of monastery in community life*

Yangang village has a monastery named Gyen-Tashi-Palding. The name is drawn from the Tibetan words *gyen* (monastery), *tashi* (Good), and *palding* (Deep) which together means 'a beautiful monastery situated in deep area'. The Nigmapa sect controls the monastry. Since the Lepchas are not many in number in upper Yangang (they have their concentration in lower Gagyang), where they have their own small worshipping center called Maney Lhakhang. They, however, come to Yangang monastery (Gumpa), which is the biggest monastery in the vicinity, for larger occasions.

The institution of Gumpa had been the pivot of the community life of the Bhutias since they had embraced Buddhism long back. At Gumpa, the Buddhists of all ethnic groups get an opportunity to interact. Common religion and the shared values and religious practices usher in some sense of unity among the ethnic communities. Gumpas are usually established at the highest point of the village. In Yangang too Gumpa was located at the highest point of the village, from where one can have a view of the whole valley and the forest.

Unlike Phodong and Phensang, which were studied by Chie Nakane in 1955, had separate settlements for the Lamas and peasants;¹⁶ the settlements here, however, were of mixed type. Except one Lepcha household near Gumpa, a substantive number of Bhutia households were below the Gumpa. There were few numerically

insignificant Nepali households and three Lepcha households (two of them speak Bhutia and claimed themselves as Bhutias). Hence, two hamlets, Salemthang and Dhumatam in Rangang and Yangang block Panchayat were Bhutia dominated. The lower Yangang, below the Bazaar area, were Nepali dominated whereas the Lepchas were found in lower Gagyong block.

The Gumpa owns nearly eighteen acres of land. The common Buddhists, living within the jurisdiction of the Gumpa, support it with contributions for all kinds of pujas or ceremonies. Chie Nakane in her study of Pabyuk and Phensang mentioned about Zinda. In Yangang also, the concept of Zinda exists, which means a distinctive area that includes several hamlets within the jurisdiction of the Gumpa. People living in that area, who supposedly take the service of the Gumpa, provide the economic support for its proper functioning. The Zinda is somewhat nearer to Jajman among Hindus. Besides, there was a Gumpa Fund set up with the cash collected by selling the crops from land, controlled by the Gumpa and tilled by the Bhutia tenants. All festivals of the Tibetan Calendar like Dawa-Thangpu (Tibetan New Year), Saga Dawa, Pang Lhabsol and Turkyap are celebrated at Gumpa at community level. The Lamas stay in the dormitory of the Gumpa and their activities are strictly regulated by the monastic order. Other festivals like Durkpa Tsesi and Lhabab Duchen are normally done at individual level at home. The expenditure includes food for monks, oil for lighting lamps, the Chiang, and other materials for the daily use of the attending monks as free gifts.

The executive members of monastery were responsible for collecting donations (the amount of which vary according to economic standard of the contributing family) and maintenance of the Gumpa. The donations were made both in cash and kind. The gifts and donations made by ministers and other higher officials during their visit are utilized for repairing and construction purposes. Mr. Rinchen Ongdi Bhutia, Top Tshering, Nim Tenzing Bhutia and Palden Pintso Bhutia (Household Nos. 30, 35, 37, and 39), who represented economically well-off Bhutias, were the members of the executive body.

The Gumpa and Zinda are closely interrelated since the Lamas too were the Zinda of the monastery as other laymen. The monks normally had wife and children and when there were no ceremonies at Gumpa, they could reside with the families. Some of the monks were holding jobs in secular field simultaneously. Mr. Pegya Lama, a monk, was a Bhutia language teacher in Yangang Secondary School. All the

monks whom I had met in Yangang were married and were engaged either in secular job or in peasantry, when no ceremonies are held in the monastery.

Unlike Lingmoo Gumpa, which was more of a Maney-Lhakhang than a Gumpa in real sense, a monastic school known as Sheyda had been in operation since 1990 in Yangang monastery. There was one monastic teacher appointed by the Ecclesiastical Department of Government of Sikkim, enjoying the same salary as a primary teacher of a government school. He is supposed to teach basic Tibetan script, basic rules, reading and writing skills, chanting of prayers with proper intonation, playing and knowing the names of various instruments used in *pujas* etc. During my fieldwork, there were fourteen students belonging to Lepchas and Bhutias community. There is no age bar, but in order to attain the various ranks in Lama's hierarchy, it was necessary for them to register their names in the Gumpa. The students from the village normally come from their home but those having their houses at distant places ususally stay at Gumpa's dormitory. A head boy manages everything. The uniform, normally a robe of maroon colour and scriptures are supplied by the government but the food expenditures have to be met by the parents of the boys. The students, who excel in studies, are even sent to Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, located at Gangtok, for higher religious learning. Hence, the institution of Sheyda or monastic education bears tesimony of the importance of religious education among the Buddhists living in the state.

There is no ethnic bar in the recruitment of Lamas, though Bhutia Lamas outnumbered Lamas from other communities. The population composition may be one of the factors responsible for poor representation of Lepchas among the Lamas. The idea of sending intelligent and healthy son for monastic training does not find much favour among the Bhutias of Yangang and seems to have a diminishing trend. The monks usually come from middle and lower economic background. They were either dropouts from schools or from among those who could not take the advantage of modern education. There was no restriction or custom, in terms of descent, status, wealth and occupation of one's father, that could prevent an individual from becoming Lama.¹⁷ However, in case of Pemayangtshé Gumpa, the largest monastery in Sikkim, the admission was open only to the sons of Bhutia aristocrats. The *Gazetteer of Sikkim* states that fourteen noble families of Tibetan origin, had the right to be admitted to the monastery without payment of entry fees. Eight other minor

families of Bhutia nobles were also admitted into the monastery, but only on payment of a large amount of entry fees.¹⁸

(8) *The hierarchy and training of the Lama*

The training of Lamas (monks) normally begins between the age of five and ten. In Yangang, however, there were children who began their training at a relatively higher age. At the start of the monastic training, the boy's head is ceremonially shaved, given a monk's robe and religious name and the vow.¹⁹ The ideal training is expected to continue in all the stages and ranks of priesthood. The rank of Dorjee-Lopen is the highest in the hierarchy. The Lamas have to perform various roles and duties in the monastic organization in festivities and prayer services of the Gumpa. The *Gazetteer of Sikkim* has given the hierarchy of the monks as existed in Pemayangchhe.²⁰ With minor regional variation the basic structure remain more or less the same in all Gumpas of Sikkim. The hierarchical structure and the persons holding the various ranks in Yangang Gumpa are presented in Table 5.17.

Table 5.17: Ethnic background of the monks and their ranks in Yangang Gumpa

Sl. No.	Rank	Ethnic Group/Age of the Lamas	Period of Appointment	No. of Lamas
1	Dorjee-Lopen	Bhutia (81 Years)	Till Death	1
2	Dor-chung (Officiating Head)	Bhutia (63 Years)	Till Death	1
3	Geydol (Chief Manager)	Bhutia (63 Years)	3 Years	1
4	Omze-Tipa (Manager)	Bhutia (69 Years)	3 Years	1
5	Chutempa (In-Charge of monks)	Lepcha (59 Years)	3 Years	1
6	Ochumpa (Officiating monks)	Bhutia (34 Years)	3 Years	2
7	Chenzipa (Officiating monks)	Bhutia (35 Years)	3 Years	1
8	Nyepo	Bhutia (59 Years)	3 Years	1
9	Chinyel (Kitchen In-Charge)	Bhutia (40 Years)	3 Years	1
10	Kunyel (Lamp Care-Taker)	Bhutia (28 Years)	3 Years	1
11	Tongpa (Conch shell Blower)	Bhutia (13 Years)	3 Years	1

Source: Field work, 1996

In Yangang Gumpa the ranks like Kansopa (a monk on duty at a special prayer at evening as has been mentioned by Chie Nakane in *Pabyuk*) and Tshap-dipa (who burns incense and sprinkle water before *pujas*) did not exist. Other monks discharged the duties assigned to them in the structure.

An apprentice boy in the Gumpa spends a couple of years in studying the basics like chanting of prayers, reading scriptures with proper intonation and the rules governing the Gumpa activities, maintenance of discipline in relation to his teachers and predecessors. After that he is given the rank of Tongpa, when he has to do cleaning, sweeping, serving of tea and breakfast to senior Lamas and blow conch-shell during the prayer. After three years, he is promoted to the next higher rank, that of Kun-Yel.

The ranks of Tongpa and Kun-Yel are in the nature of a novitiate.²¹ For higher ranks like Chinyel, Nyepo, Chenjipa, Ochungpa, Chutempa, Omzetipa, one has to serve for three years at each stage before moving up in the order. The Lamas, once placed in positions of Dorjee-Lopen (Head Lama) and Dorchung (officiating head Lama) continue till death. To climb up the ladder the Lamas not only have to serve for three years at a rank, they must also have to have command over prayer books, the techniques of performance of ceremonies and detail preparation of materials needed for ceremonies. Once a Lama passes the Kunyel stage and reaches Chinyel rank, he is regarded as a professional Lama and is asked by the people to perform various ceremonies in death and marriage.

Since the aspiring Lamas outnumber the posts, the chances of moving beyond the rank of Chutempa become very limited. As appointments for the post of Dorjee Lopen or Dorchung is for life it is very difficult for the Lamas to reach there. In Yangang, most of the Lamas were in Chutempa-rank and in ranks even lower than that. After the death of Dorjee Lopen, the post remains vacant for three years and the Dorchung normally looks after the whole administrative set-up during this period. After three years, the members of the Zinda and Executive Committee appoint the Dorchung or Geydol as the Dorjee-Lopen, depending on their relative experience and proficiency in the field.

Unlike those Lamas of Phodong and Phensang Gumpa, as described by Chie Nakane²², there was no arrangement for fixed payment for Lamas in Yangang. For the *pujas* at the community level the necessary articles and food-items are provided to the Lamas. However, when people ask them to perform *pūjā* at home in the name of the deceased or at a marriage function a payment is made. The payment varies according to the economic standard of the host. The amount of payment also varies according to rank of the Lama in the hierarchical order. For example, Rs 10 to 20 if the Lama is a Tongpa and Rs. 100 (at least) as of a Dorjee Lopen.

In Yangang Gumpa, all posts in the hierarchy, excepting the post of Chutempa, which was occupied by a fifty-nine years old Lepcha from Gagyong (Lower Yangang), were occupied by the Bhutias. Since Yangang was a Bhutia-dominated area, the monastic organization was almost totally controlled by the members of Bhutia community.

Common features of the Bhutias and Lepchas

There are some features, which are shared by the Lepchas and the Bhutias. Their common religion is chiefly responsible for the similarity among themselves and for their differences with the Nepali Hindus. Firstly, the nuclear family was the preferred type of family among both the Bhutias of Yangang and the Lepchas of Lingmoo. Secondly, the custom of bride price was common among the Bhutias as well as the Lepchas. Thirdly, the inheritance of property by the males, the practice of polyandry and polygyny, though not very common, were found among the members of both the communities at the two places, I have studied.

There was no case of polyandry or polygyny among the Bhutias, although among the Lepchas in Lingmoo I found a few cases where the younger brother had inherited elder sister-in-law, in case of death of the elder brother, *Angop*. Though institutions like levirate and sororate had existed in the past, with the passage of time and with the changes in reality and perceptions, these were not seen in practice any longer. Among the Nepalese in Lingmoo, I found a few cases of polygyny. However, I did not find any man in Yangang having a secondary wife. There were cases of second marriage, which could occur only after the death of the first wife of the man marrying for the second time.

The inheritance goes on male line in both the communities, where the property is divided among sons. A daughter is normally excluded from the share of her father's property. However, she can inherit in the absence of a son. Two such cases were found among the Bhutias in Yangang. Sometimes a Bhutia couple adopts a son, when they do not have one of their own. This institution of adoption of a son is called *So-Tu* or *Phuchap*. Khichung Bhutia (Household No. 47) had legally adopted a child belonging to the Nepali community. After adoption, the clan of the adopting parents is given to the child.

Inter-community marriages

In view of basic similarity in terms of their customs and high degree of religious and cultural similarity, intermarriages should have been a common feature between the Bhutias and Lepchas. But according to my data, intermarriage is not common. There are delicate problems of historical, religious, political and social nature, which stood in the way to promotion of exchange of women between the two communities.

I found only one Lepcha household-head, who was living within the vicinity of Bhutias in Yangang, with a Bhutia wife. Excepting the head of household No. 27. Passang Sandarpa who had a Nepali wife belonging to Rai community, none of the forty-eight Bhutia household heads had married a Lepcha or a Nepali woman. After the death of his wife and marriage of his daughters, he was staying alone looking after the cattle. He had leased out his land to one of his fellow villagers for cultivation. But, among the younger generation of Yangang Bhutias, there was a growing trend of finding life partners from among the Nepalese. Among the educated younger generations the marriages that took place in the last few years, there were four cases of Bhutias marrying Nepali women of various ethnic stocks. One Bhutia woman was married to a Nepali man and another woman to a plainsman. However, such cases of inter-ethnic marriage were mostly confined to the educated and employed youths, who had been staying away from home, at the places of work. Asked if they had any problem, the parents of the couple responded that although they would have preferred affinal relationship within the Bhutias community, they have no other option but to accept the new trend. It is important to note that despite this change in the mindset of the newer generations, there were not too many cases of intercommunity marriages.

Two household-heads, Mr. Kapu Bhutia and Singee Bhutia (Household No. 49(a) and (b)), although claimed themselves as Bhutias and could speak the language, were in fact Lepchas, as could be ascertained from their clan. Moreover, my colleague who was a Bhutia from Yangang itself and accompanied me during my fieldwork whispered that they were Lepchas. Both of them had married women from lowly placed Bhutia clan known as Labrang. Both these households belonged to low economic stratum and owned small plot of lands. Settled in between the Bhutia houses, they had a kind of identity crisis and therefore tried to identify themselves with the Bhutias. Though, normally the Bhutias do not serve as agricultural labourer in Nepali households; these two household heads were often serving the Nepali as

well as Bhutia households. One son of Kapu Bhutia (Household No. 49(a)) was a house servant (*Yoku*) in a Bhutia family.

Mention must be made of two families of Nim Tshering and Phurba Bhutia (Household Nos. 17 and 48), who belonged to a lower stratum i.e.. Labrang. There was no concept of purity and pollution among the Bhutias and no commensal relations regarding *kaccha* or *pacca* food as was found among the Hindus, but the intermarriages of the Bhutias and Lepchas with them were looked down upon in their respective communities. So, unlike the caste system among the Hindus the origin of Labrang appears to be based more on economic status.

Although there is no restriction in terms of commensal relation, the Bhutias highly resent the intermarriages with the Labrangs. The son of Sonam Topgay Gensarpa (Household No.6) had been ex-communicated and expelled from his property share for marrying a Labrang woman and was considered "as dead" by his parents. His father believed that the acceptance of his son and his Labrang wife would invite a lot of social criticism. The couple was staying in a lower village. Although they had the right to join the monastic school to become monks, they would not have been given any higher rank. In the monastery they were given to sit in the back row Gyap-da, whereas the other Lamas sit in the front row called Chok-de, according to their ranks. The monks belonging to Labrang category had to blow the Nagara – a kind of trumpet, put water in the Chiang of Lamas and to do various other chores like cutting fire-wood etc. in the Gumpa.

Relative socio-economic standing of the communities

The following Tables 5.18 & 5.19 on annual income and land holding highlight the economic status of Bhutias of Yangang.

A close look at the Tables below would reveal that the Bhutias enjoyed a better economic position as compared to the Nepalese and Lepchas. 22.9% of the Bhutia households belonged to the lowest income category but an equal share of households were in the highest income category as well. ^{The remaining} were distributed in the middle income groups. Whereas among the Nepalese of Lingmoo a significant number of households were landless, only 2 of 48 households among the

Table 5.18: Annual income of the Heads of the Households

Sl.No.	Income Level	Ethnic Group and Percentage	
		Bhutia	Lepcha
01	Upto - Rs. 4000	11 (22.9)	02 (66.7)
02	4001 - 6000	10 (20.8)	01 (33.3)
03	6001 - 9000	03 (6.3)	-
04	9001 - 9001	01 (2.1)	-
05	12,001 - 15,000	07 (14.6)	-
06	15,001 - 29,000	05 (10.4)	-
07	30,000 +	11 (22.9)	-
Total		48 (100.00)	3 (100.00)

Source: Fieldwork, 1996

Table 5.19: Landholding Categories

Size and percentage of Land Holding								
Sl. No.	Ethnic Group	Land less	0 - 2	2.5 - 5	5.5 - 10	10.5 - 20	20 +	Total
1.	Bhutia	2 4.2	14 29.1	11 22.9	8 16.7	5 10.4	8 16.7	48 100.00
2.	Lepcha	-	3 100.00	-	-	-	-	3 100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 1996

Bhutias in Yangang were landless and these included those two households belonging to the lower category of Labrang (Table 5.19).

The Table shows that a significant 16.7% of the households among the Bhutias were in the highest category possessing more than 20 acres of land, whereas only about 1.9% of the Nepali households and 2.4% of the Lepcha households in

Lingmoo were in this category of land (Table-5.11). Again, 29.1% of the Bhutia households owned between 0 and 2.5 acres of land but 38.1% of the Nepali households belonged to this category. Majority i.e., 46.3% of the Lepcha households in Lingmoo were in 2.5 – 5 acres category, and all the three Lepcha households of Yangang owned less than 2 acres of land.

Table 5.20: Occupation of the Heads of the Households in Yangang

Sl.No.	Occupational Category	Ethnic Groups and Percentage	
		Bhutias	Lepchas
01.	Cultivating Owner	05 (10.4)	-
02.	Cultivating Owner/Share-Cropper-Wage-Labourer	04 (8.3)	02 (66.7)
03.	Cultivating Owner-Share-Cropper/Tenant	06 (12.5)	-
04.	Tenant-Wage Labourer	01 (12.1)	-
05.	Cultivating Owner-Tenant	02 (4.2)	01 (33.3)
06.	Wage Labourer-Share Cropper-Tenant	01 (2.1)	-
07.	Cultivating Owner-Lessor Animal Rearing	13 (27.1)	-
	Cultivating Owner-Lessor- Minor Business-Contract	04 (8.3)	-
09.	Non-Cultivating Owner (Contract/Business)	10 (20.8)	-
10.	Government Service	02 (4.2)	-
	Total	48 (100.00)	03(100.00)

Source : Field Work, 1996

Table 5.20, which presents the occupation of the Bhutia and Lepcha household heads of Yangang, shows that the highest share (27.1%) of Bhutia households were in the cultivating owner-cum-lessor-cum-animal rearing category. These households, although cultivating a portion of their land themselves, had lease out a part of their land to others. The size of non-cultivating owners, who normally lease out land and do some kind of business, was also significant. It constituted 20.8% of total households among the Bhutias. Only 2.9% of the Nepali and 2.4% of the Lepchas households in Lingmoo were in this occupational category (Table 5.12). In Lingmoo

also, inspite of being a small minority, the economic status of Bhutias was comparatively better than that of the Nepalese and the Lepchas. Among the Nepalese and Lepchas of Lingmoo, cultivating owner and cultivating owner-cum-share-cropper-cum-wage labourers constituted the largest occupational categories but among the Bhutias of Yangang only 8.3% of the households fell in this category.

The better economic status of the Bhutias may be attributed to the better status they enjoyed during Kazi's regime. Some of them held various posts meant for looking after the management of the estates. As the tribals are legally forbidden to sell their land to the non-tribals it has remained with them. As compared to the Lepchas, the Bhutias are better educated and they do not indulge in excessive consumption of liquor like the Lepchas. Moreover, the Bhutias of Yangang were more ambitious; enterprising and more conscious than the Lepchas of Lingmoo.

Educational Level

Table 5.21: Community-wise enrolment of Students in Yangang Senior Secondary School

Sl. No.	Years	Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha	Others	Total
01	1998	306 (63.09)	101 (20.82)	058 (11.95)	20 (4.12)	485 (100.00)
02	1997	284 (67.45)	74 (17.5)	48 (11.4)	15 (3.56)	421 (100.00)
03	1996	286 (65.00)	09 (21.5)	43 (9.77)	16 (3.63)	440 (100.00)
04	1995	270 (65.85)	76 (18.5)	43 (10.48)	21 (5.12)	410 (100.00)

Source: Office of the Principal, Yangang Senior Secondary School, (South) Sikkim.

The Yangang Senior Secondary School, the main educational institution in the village, had higher percentage of enrolment of Bhutias children than the Lepcha counterpart (Table 5.21). The higher enrolment of Nepalese is due to numerical domination of Nepali population in middle and lower Yangang. The Bhutias also show their growing interest in modern education.

Table 5.22: Age-Wise and Sex-wise break-up of Educational level among Bhutias of Yangang (excluding minors and illiterates)

Sl. No.	Educational Level	Age Group	Male	Female	Total
01	Post-Graduate	15-30	01	-	01 (0.4)
02	Degree B.A./B.com./B.Sc and other technical qualification	15-30	05	06	15 (6.4)
		30 +	02	01	
		50 +	-	01	
03	Higher Secondary	15-30	08	04	17 (7.3)
		30 +	05	-	
		50 +	-	-	
04	Class IX upto School Final	6-14	02	02	41 (17.7)
		15-30	09	20	
		30 +	01	02	
		50 +	05	-	
05	Upto Class VIII	6-14	05	03	41 (17.7)
		15-30	12	04	
		30 +	06	07	
		50 +	03	01	
06	Literates upto Class V	6-14	19	36	92 (39.8)
		15-30	09	10	
		30 +	03	12	
		50 +	02	01	
07	Monastic Education	6-14	05	-	24 (10.3)
		15-30	08	-	
		30 +	04	-	
		50 +	07	-	
GRAND TOTAL					231(100.00)

Table 5.22 shows a growing inclination among the Bhutias for modern education. The free education provided by the state government and the prospects of having a secure job in the organized sector has become an incentive for secular education. There was one post-graduate and 15 graduates^{and} with technical qualification serving in various occupations in the organized sector. The monastic education still holds some significance among the Bhutias although it was no any longer attracting

the Bhutias of younger generation. There were still 13 Lamas in the age group of 6-29 years, either studying in the monastic school or occupying higher positions in the hierarchy of the monastery. The figure does not correspond to the number of students in the 'Sheyda', as I studied the Bhutia population of upper Yangang only. None from the Phenpu Nadikpa clan, whose members mostly belonged to higher economic group, had sent their children to the monastic schools. Their children were studying in public schools and were availing of secular education in and outside Yangang. Thus the data on educational status indicates that the Bhutias were better placed, as compared to the Lepchas and the Nepalese of Lingmoo, in the field of education as well.

Community, association and interactions

The Bhutias of Yangang formed an association, *Ki-du*, for the well being of the community fellows. The word *Ki-du* is derived from the words *Ki* means happiness and *Du* means sorrow. Hence *Ki-du* is an association at times of need and prosperity. Although it was registered as a social welfare organization in 1973, the dissension among its members resulted in its dissolution. However, it was revived again in 1991. The membership fee was fixed at Rs. 5/- per member every year and every household covered by the association had to make an annual payment of Rs. 50/-. The *Ki-du* members were advanced loans out of the accumulated fund at the time of sudden crisis such as death. No interest is levied till finalization of death ceremony, *Shegu*, in forty-nine days. Thereafter, a nominal interest is charged, which normally was less than the interest charged by village moneylender. Thus *Ki-du* functions as an organization that binds the various members of Bhutia ethnic group and serves as a unifying bond for the community members. The association also marks the separateness of Bhutia identity.

In case of a death in a family in the Bhutia community, it is usually binding for every Bhutia family in the neighbourhood to help the bereaved family with *Ek-Pathi*, which is equivalent to 10 Kgs. of rice and Chiang and some cash as per their economic status of the helping family. It is customary for all members of the *Ki-du*, even those belonging to highest economic strata, to accept this offering during tragic incident like death, which is known as *Ten-Chuk*. However, such help during happy occasion such as marriage and inauguration of newly constructed house is termed as *Ba-da*.

Besides, Sikkim Tribal Association had some members in the village particularly from the educated and well-to-do Bhutia families.

Ethnic Boundary Maintenance

Normally, the interactions between the Bhutias and the Nepalese, who live side by side, pose no problem. The normative behaviour of the members of the communities is generally stress free, although there are occasions when they go across ethnic lines. The use of derogatory term like *Tshuk-Khyam*, which means someone 'who depends on others for food', to refer to the Nepalese and the term *Men-Khyam*, meaning the wanderer to Lepchas by the Bhutias speak for the suppressed hatred in the intercommunity relationship. The Bhutias also address the Nepalese as *Gyan-dey* means 'Nepalese ghost' and the Lepchas as *Membo-Naah*, meaning foolish Lepchas. They also make derogatory remarks to Lepchas like *Membo-Judum* means 'Tailless monkey' and *Membo Tagi Rojen Guisey* i.e. Lepchas are prey of Tiger.

There is a saying often used by the Bhutias to undermine the Sherpas.

Lau Shya-men
Sherpa-mi-men

(Translation: As lungs cannot be counted as meat, similarly the Sherpas cannot be counted as human beings).

The inter-ethnic antagonism does not normally find expression in ethnic conflict. But the growing economic inequality, on which information is spreading with the spread of education and with peoples larger access to mass media, is breeding a feeling of relative deprivation among the Lepcha-Bhutias. Their anger is directed against the Nepalese who constitute the migrants in the perception of the original inhabitants. The democratic politics that has been put into practice after the merger is also providing the seed bed on which ethnic mind can grow and find expression. A young Bhutia teacher in his late twenties, who by means of sheer handwork has studied and taken up job feels that "there is no question of discrimination between Bhutias and Nepalese, when they are economically equal. But when we discover ourselves in a lower economic strata, we feel discriminated against and sometimes get the feeling that we are not given due respect."

I did not do a detailed study of the panchayat system in Sikkim, which was still at its nascent stage. However, none of the seven elected members of Gram Panchayat was a Bhutia. All members belonged to different ethnic stocks of Nepali community. The administrative division of local units into revenue block and

predominance of Nepalese in rest of the hamlets partially explains the non-representation of Bhutia members to the village panchayat.

Ethnic Tension

I did not come across any case of ethnic conflict or ethnic tension during the period of my fieldwork. Nor was there any report of such things hapenning in the recent past. However, one of my respondants told me that although no open violence had occurred there was mutual suspicions in 1994, when Mr. Bhandari's Sikkim Sangram Parishad government broke down on the issue of Income Tax exemption. It may be recalled that the proposed income tax exempted to the Scheduled Tribes was withheld, when the Nepalese too demanded tax exemption. He told that Bhandari's provocative speech like 'Bhote Ko Chala Katnu' (peel of Bhutia's skin) had created a deep sense of hatred and suspicious towards Nepalese. This insecurity had a definite impact on the election to follow. Most of the Bhutias voted for the Congress (I) in that election, although the candidate contesting on Sikkim Democratic Front ticket was elected. Bhandari's Sikkim Sangram Parishad had to face a humiliating defeat.

Social Relationship

Under the normal circumstances, people of all communities in the neighbourhood and in the known circle are invited to the social occasions among the Bhutias. Besides, an institution of ceremonial friendship called *Mitari Saino*, which existed among the Nepalese for long, has now been broadened to include Bhutias and Lepchas as well. In this institution two persons, irrespective of caste or ethnic group, belonging to different households unrelated by blood ties, enter into a ceremonial bond of friendship i.e. *Mit Launu* in Nepali and *Thoku* in Bhutia. They enter into friendship in some ceremonies like the *pujas*. The gifts, *Chinah*, are exchanged. In this relationship of friendship the *mit* (male) or the *Mitini* (female) cannot talk openly or face the spouse of his or her counterpart directly. The inter-marriages between these two families and their descendants are strictly forbidden. Two Bhutias, the heads of household Nos. 23 and 27, Mr. Top Tshering Bhutia and Mr. Passang Bhutia had entered into *Mitari Saino* (friendship relationship) with their Nepali neighbours. Although wakening even among the Nepalese, this institution spreads fraternity across the ethnic boundaries. The bond of friendship is not confined to the persons getting into such relationship but it spreads out to the two communities.

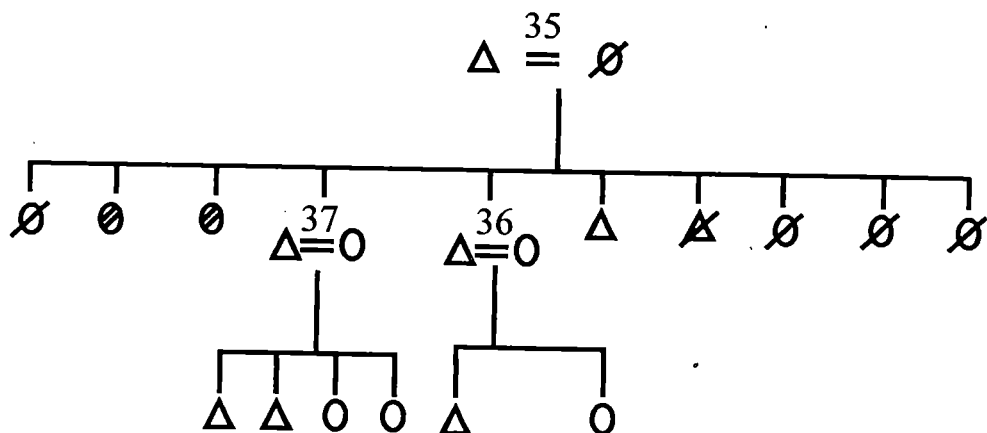
Summary

The purpose of fieldwork among the three ethnic communities was to know about how they maintain their distinct identities as social groups, how they maintain and cultivate their ethnic consciousness in their everyday life. An analysis of the economic background of the communities suggests that they are not having equal access to material and human resources. The study reveals that the Bhutias have greater access to land, education and income opportunities compared to the Nepali and Lepcha communities. The Lepchas, who have less control over land, are also backward in terms of education and organized sector employment. They do not have access to business either. The Nepalese, although not a homogeneous community, are the migrants and they struggle hard to establish themselves in all fields of economy, society and polity in the state of their adoption. They are making steady inroads in the field of education, agriculture, business, employment and politics. The fact that they being migrants are outscoring their Bhutia or Lepcha neighbours is the source of generation of a feeling of relative deprivation among the 'locals'. This feeling is however not always translated into inter-community hatred or ethnic tension.

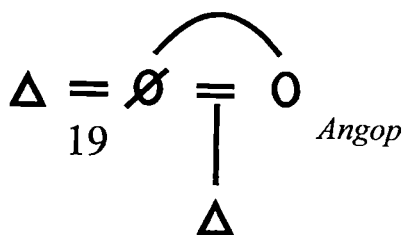
The study, however, brings to light that the three ethnic communities, the Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Nepalese, represent three distinct roots of history, three different cultural traditions and language, which they nurture very carefully in their everyday life. Although there is a lot of opportunities for intermixing, which are availed of by the members of all the three communities, the members interact by keeping their respective cultural traditions intact. Since the pace of modernization or industrialization in this hilly state is not noticeably fast, the ethnic communities have so far succeeded in holding on to their cultural traditions, although there were traces of change. Their efforts to cling to their respective cultural traditions had its expression in a feeling of difference. By cultivating this 'feeling of difference' the ethnic communities maintain their ethnic boundaries. This process also effectively thwarts the effort of the 'bigger culture' swallowing up the 'smaller cultures'. How this 'feeling of difference', or 'distinct cultural traditions' are cultivated in the arena of politics has been discussed in the previous chapter in this dissertation. Let me, however, suggest that culture provides a rich subject on which ethnic politics thrives in a state like Sikkim.

Genealogy of Lepchas of Lingmoo

1. a) Bongsongmu P'tsho Household No. 35/36/37

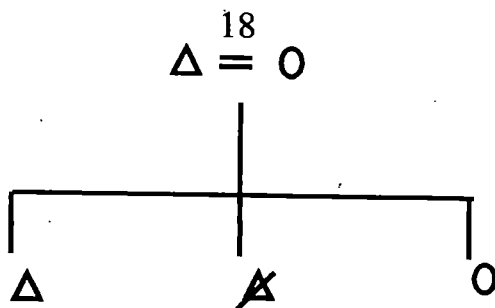


b) Household No. 19



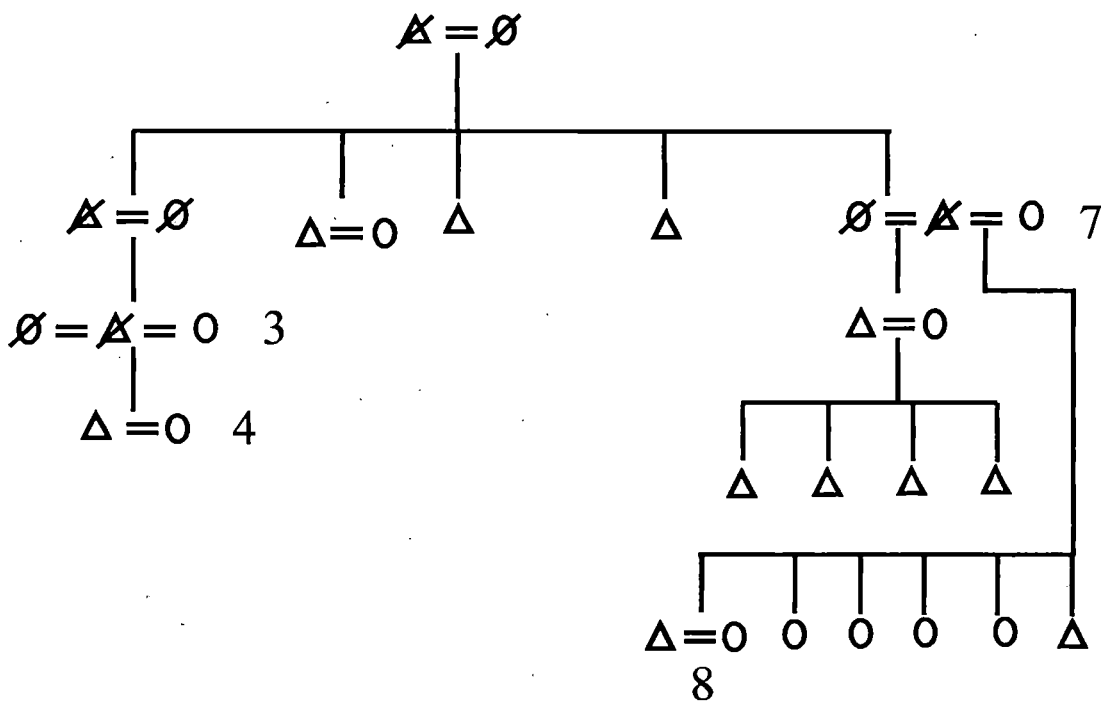
2. Taryang-mu P'tsho

Household No. 18



3. a) Tuknel-mu (Achan-mu) P'tsho

Household No. 3/4/7/8



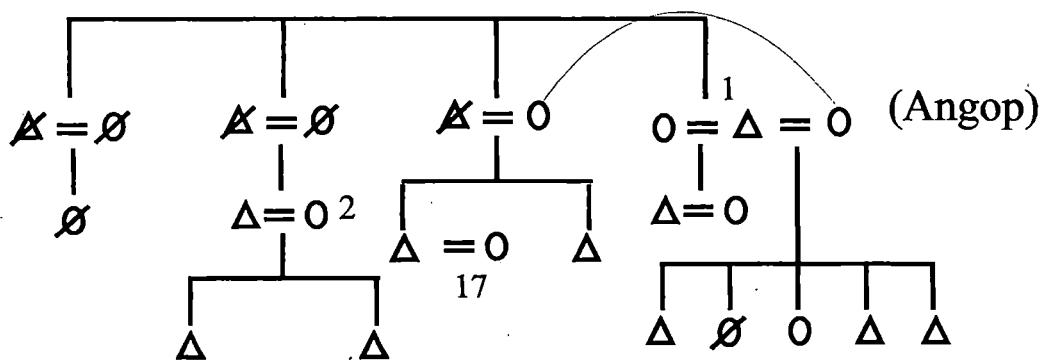
b) Household No. 1/2/17

Suthe Lepcha $\Delta = \emptyset$?

Kondup Lepcha $\Delta = \emptyset$?

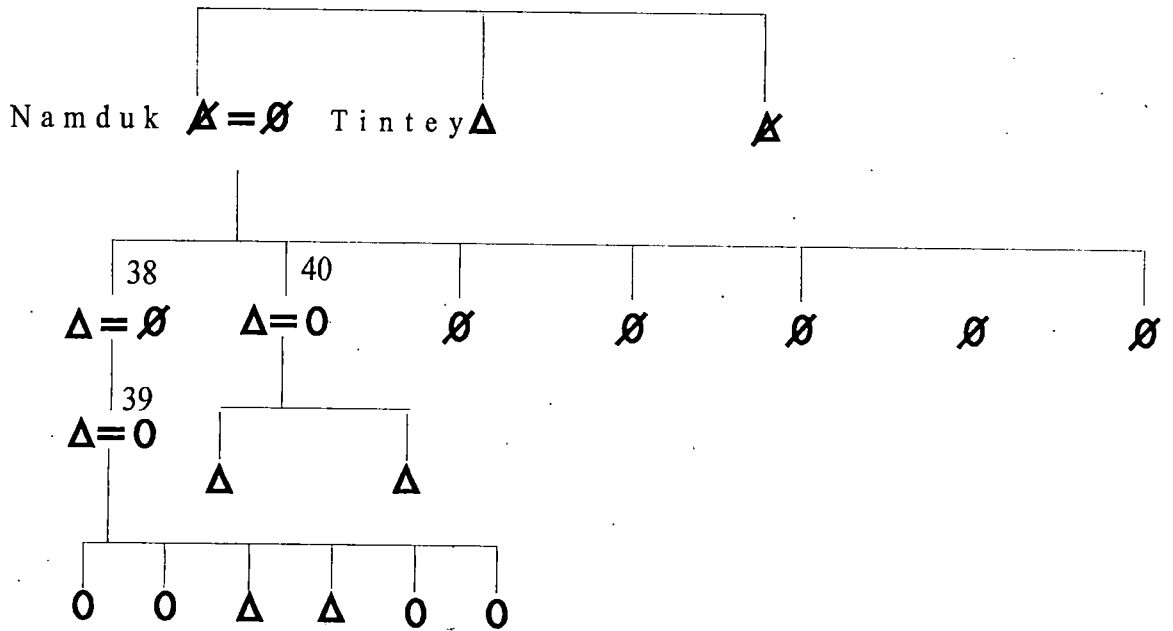
Gyathing Lepcha $\Delta = \emptyset$?

Kami Lepcha $\Delta = 0$?



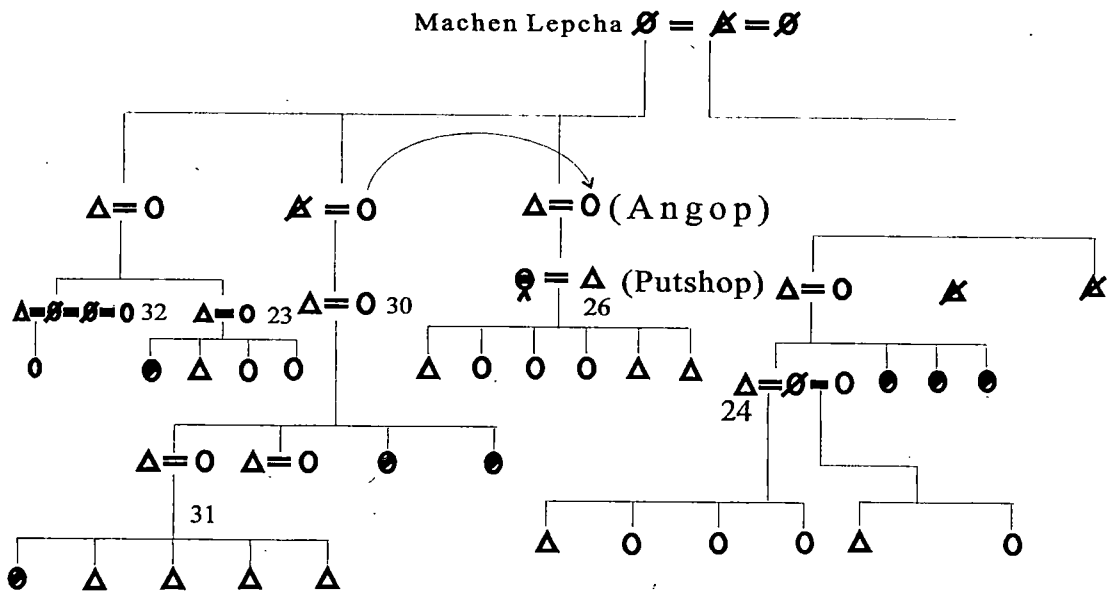
4. Tung-ter-mu P'tsho

Household No. 38/39/40



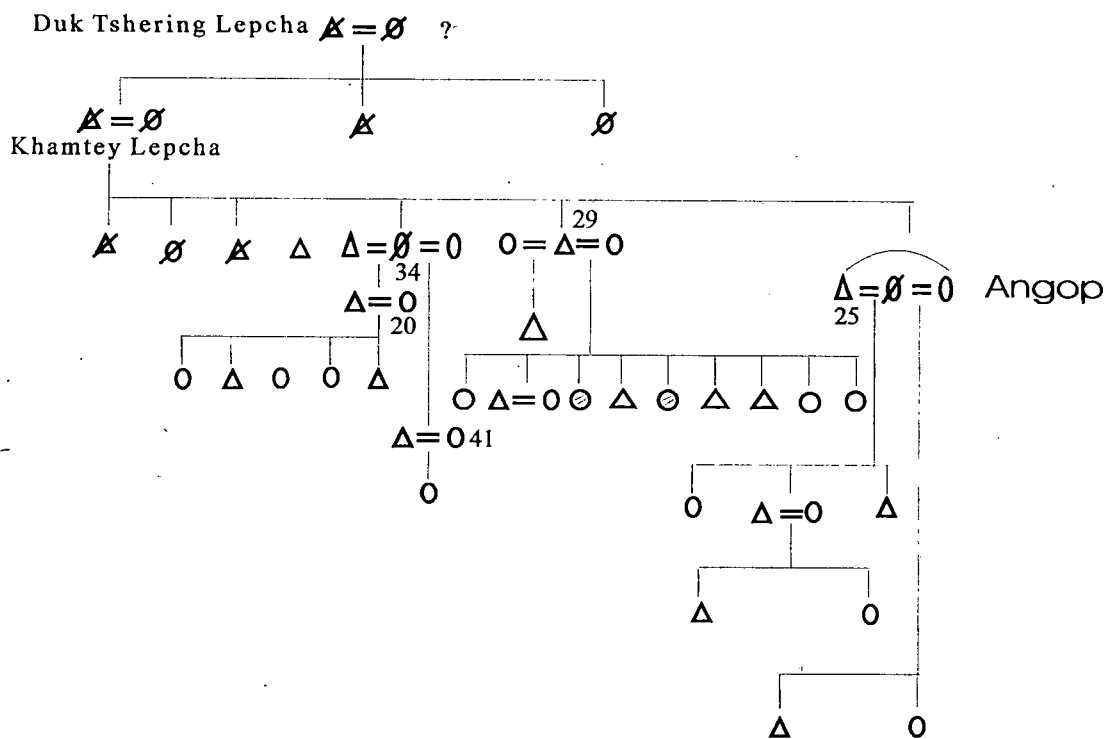
5. Namchu-mu P'tsho

Household No. 23/24/26/30/31/32



6. a) Samba-Tongden P'tsho

Household No. 20/25/29/34/41

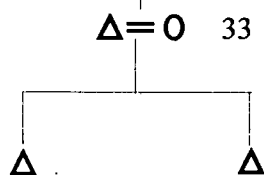


b) Household No. 33

Kinkyop Lepcha $\Delta = \emptyset$?

Karsing Lepcha $\Delta = \emptyset$?

Jyalo Lepcha $\Delta = \emptyset$ ∅ ∅



c) Household No. 22

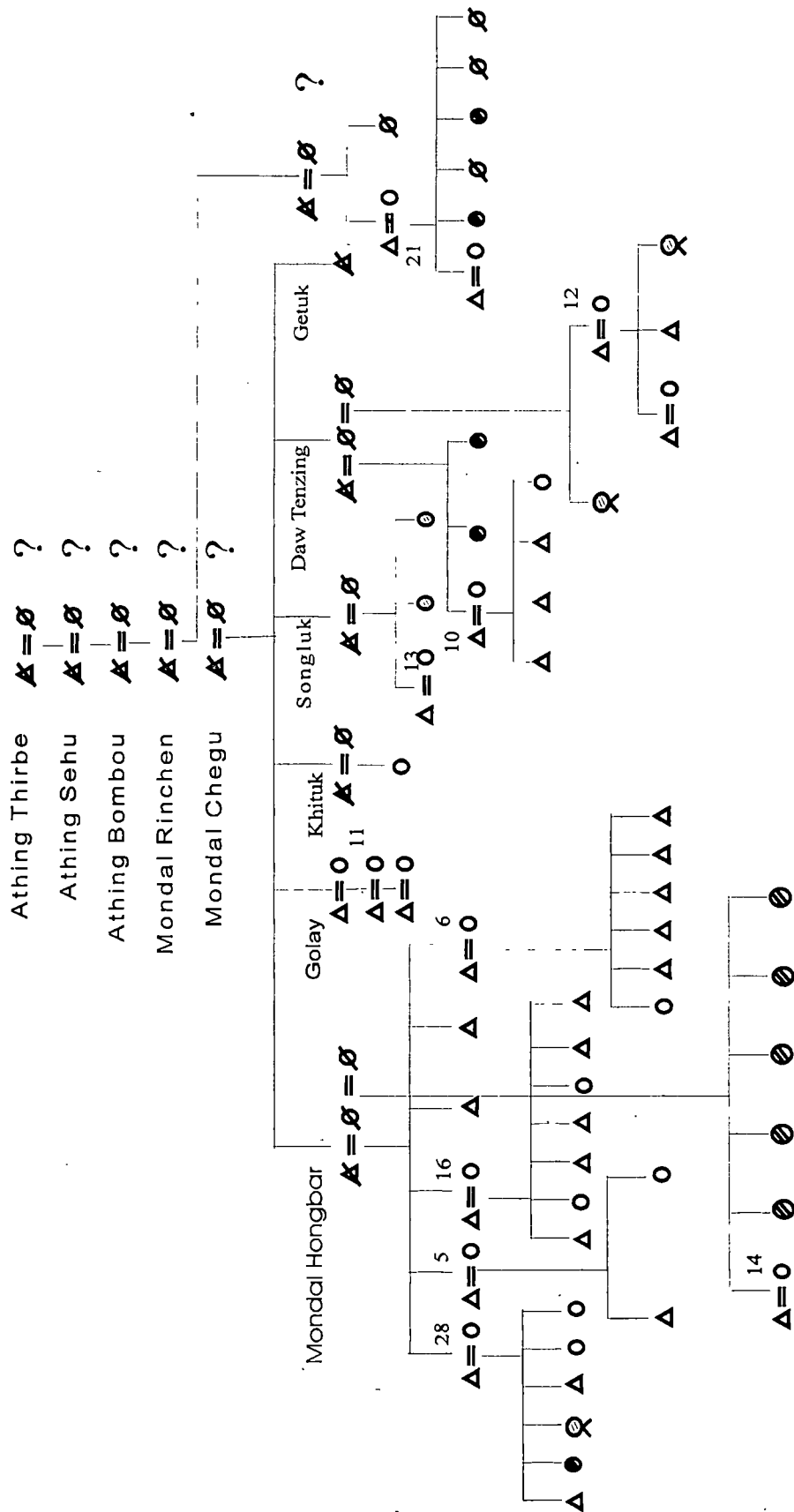
Burden Lepcha $\Delta = \emptyset$?

Mayok Lepcha $\Delta = \emptyset$?



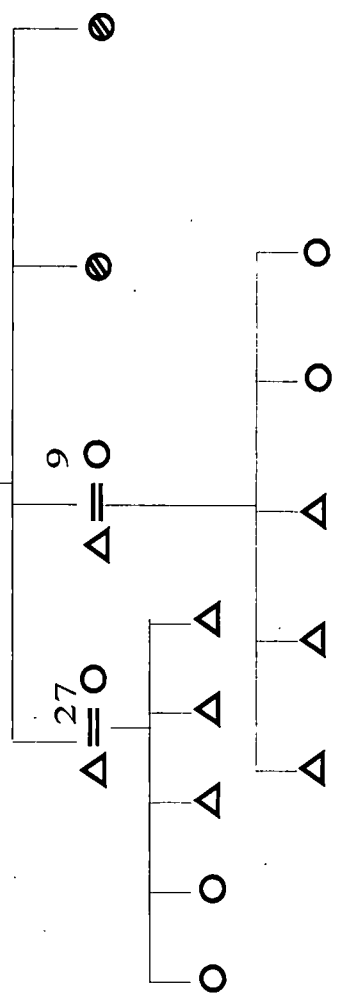
7. a) Log-bobo P'tsho

House hold no. 5/6/10/11/12/13/14/16/21/28



7. b) House hold no. 9/27

Fulange ~~A~~ = O ?
 Chanka ~~A~~ = Ø ?
 Tendup Δ = O ?



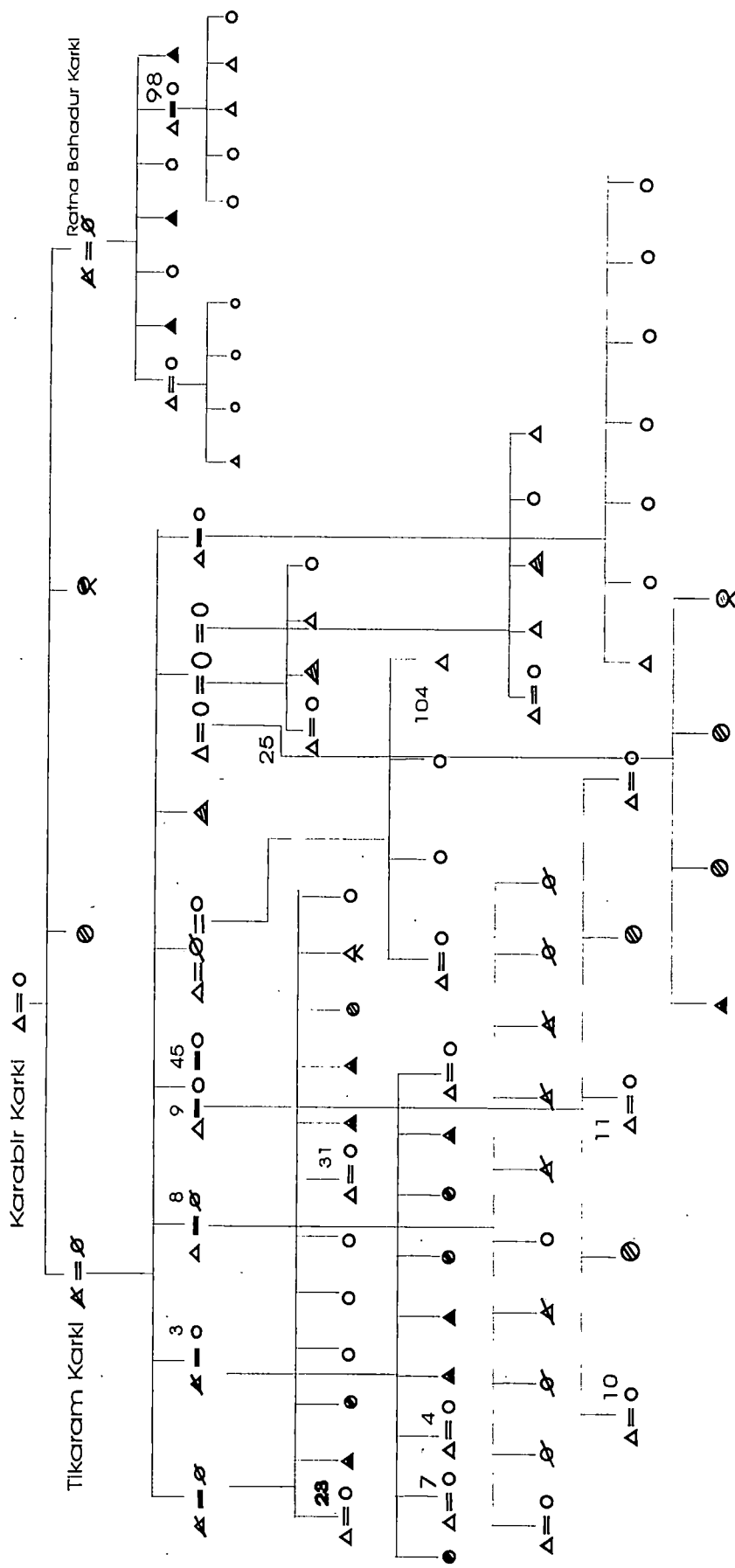
Index

- Δ Male
- O Female
- ⊗ Female who married out of Village
- ♀ Female who are married and settled in Village

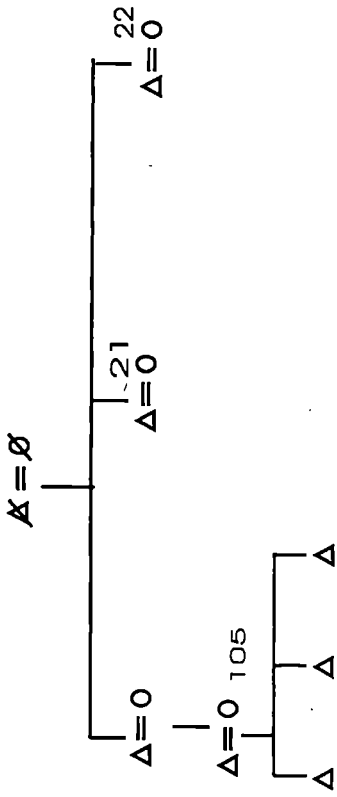
Source : Field Work, 1996

Genealogical relationship of Nepalese in Lingmoo Karki *Thar* (Clan)

1. House hold no. 3/4/7/8/9/10/11/23/25/31/45/98/104



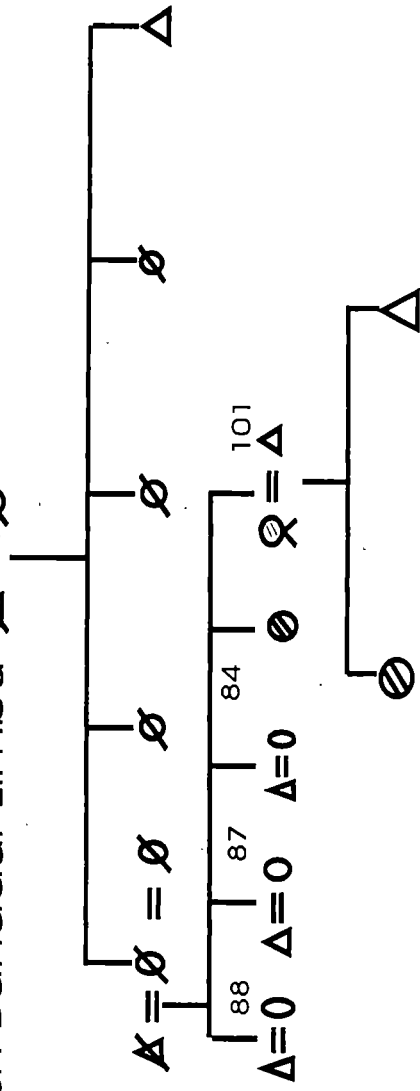
2 c) House hold no. 21/22/105



3. Limbus

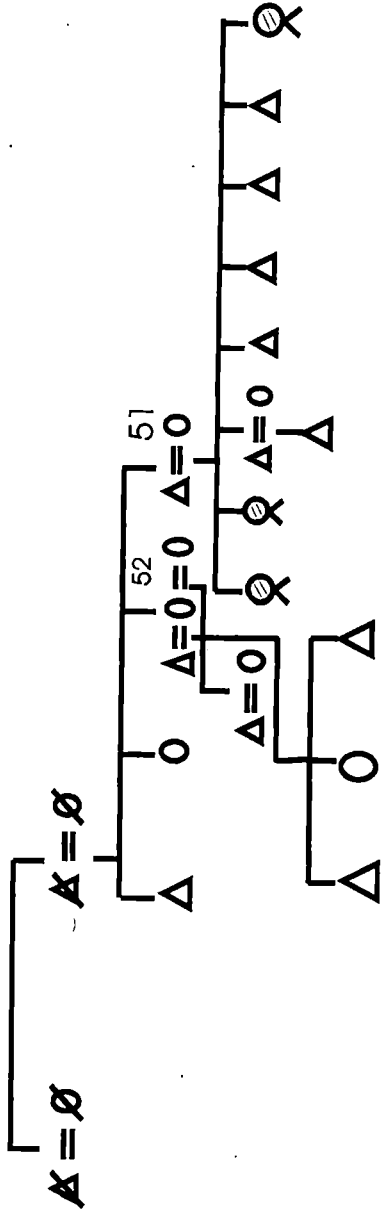
House hold no. 84/87/88/101

Ash Bahadur Limbu $A = \emptyset$



4. House hold no. 51/52

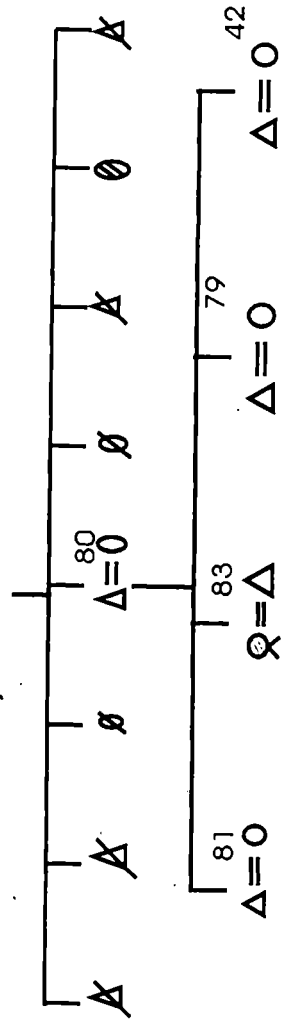
Basnet (Chhetri)



5. Kamar (Chhetri)

House hold no. 42/79/80/81/83

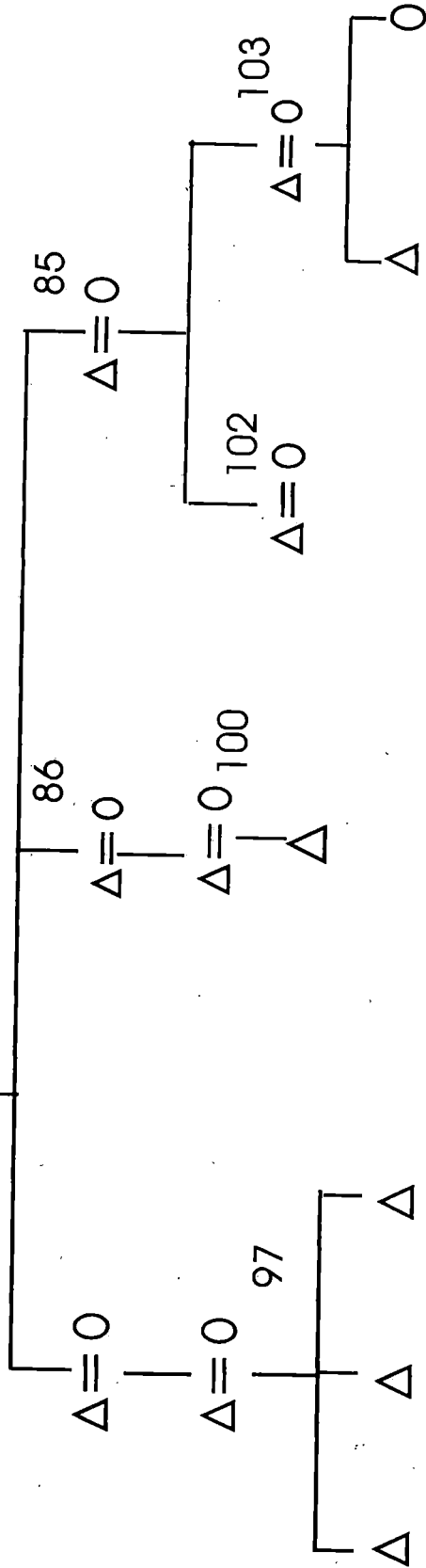
Randhoj A=Ø



6. Khulal (Chettri)

House hold no. 85/86/97/100/102/103

Abi Dal $\Delta = \emptyset$

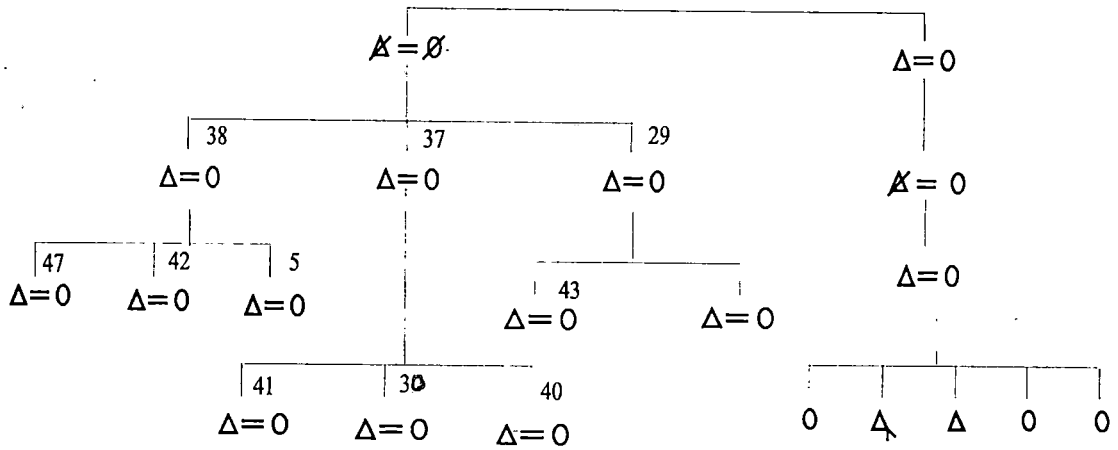


Source : Field Work 1996

Genealogical Relationship of Bhutias of Yangang

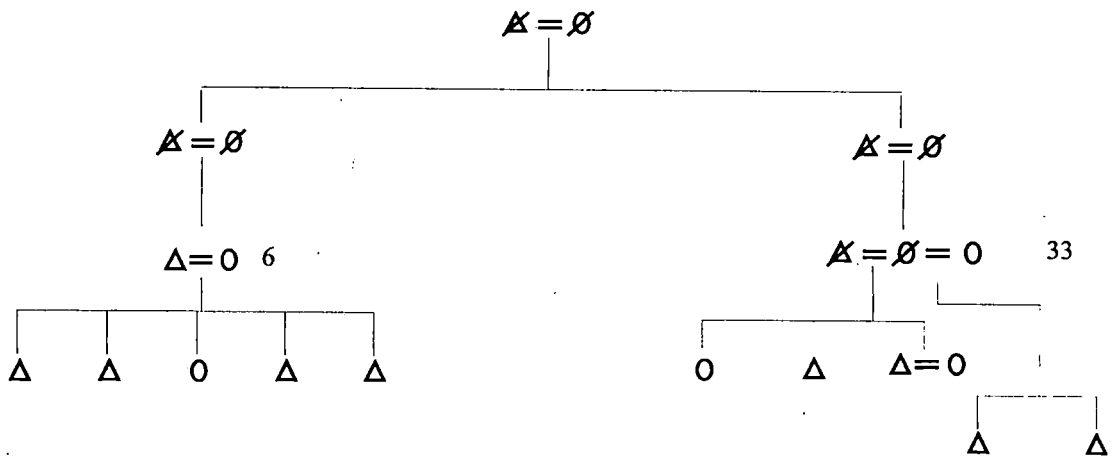
1. Phenpu-Nadipa Clan

House hold no. 5/29/30/37/38/ 40/41/42/43/47

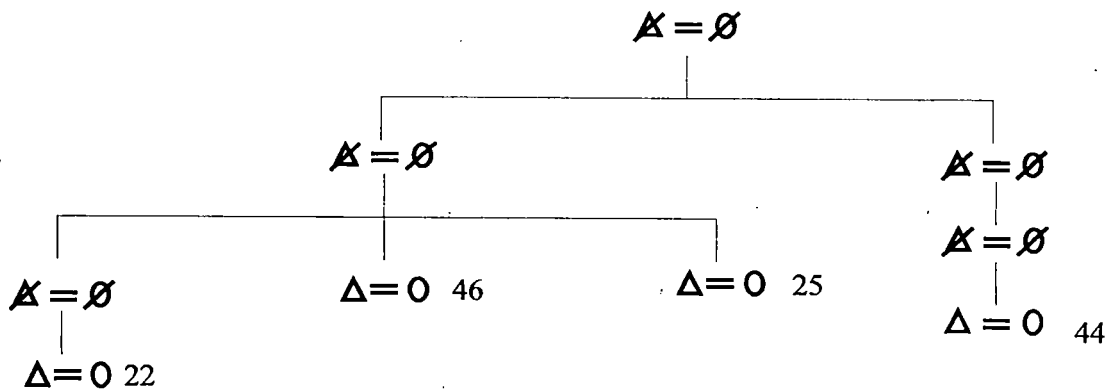


2. a) Gensapa Clan

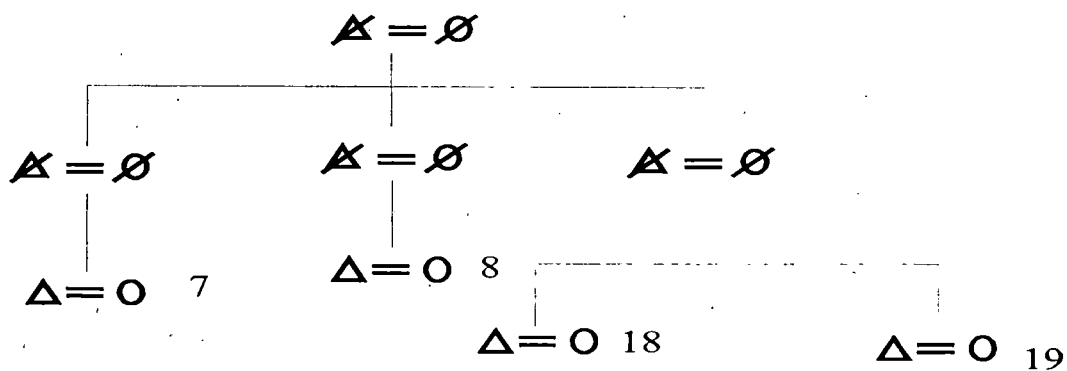
House hold no. 6/33



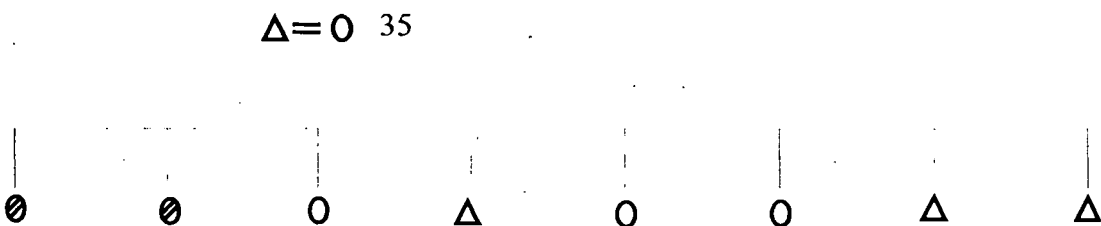
b) House hold no. 22/25/44/46



c) House hold no. 7/8/18/19

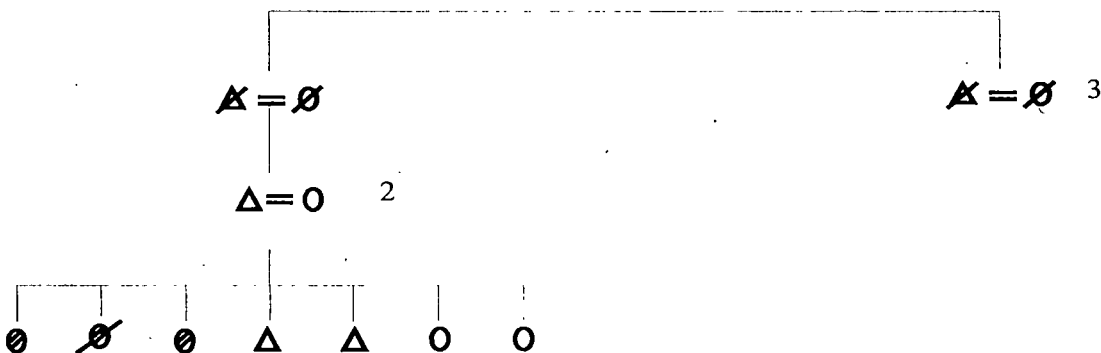


d) House hold no. 35

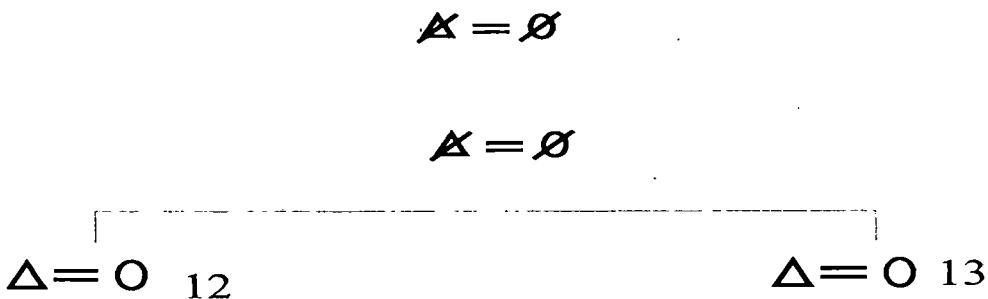


3. Nam Chang Kup Clan

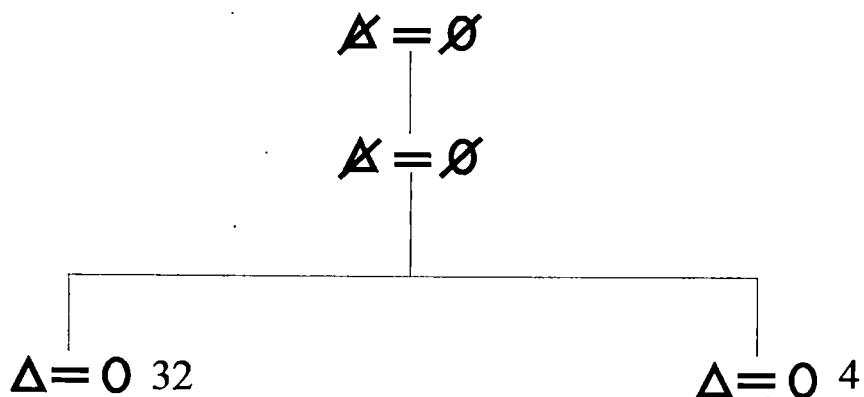
House hold no. 2/3/



b) House hold no, 12/13

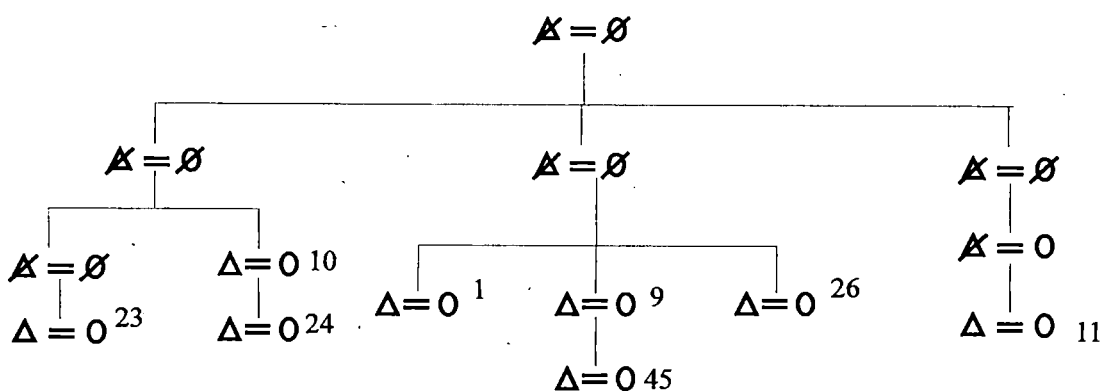


c) House hold no. 4/32



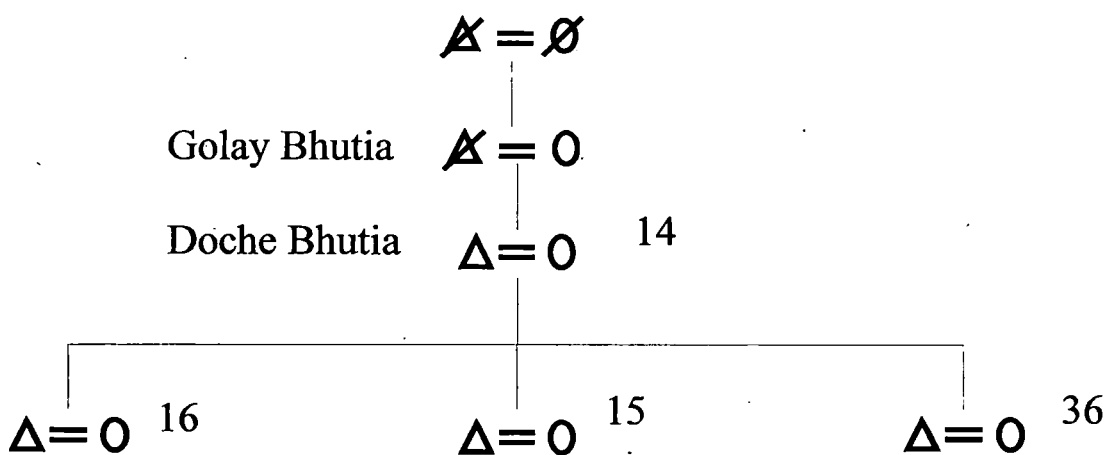
4. Chechu-Tharpa Clan

House hold no. 1/9/10/11/23/24/26/45



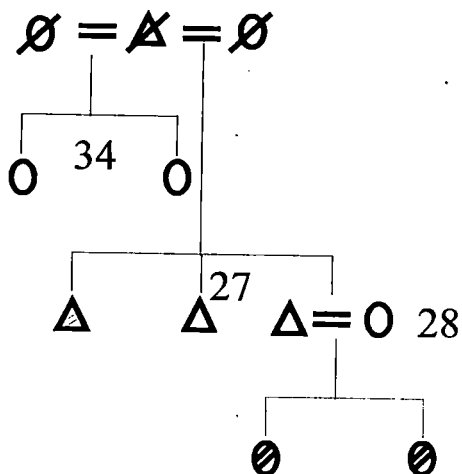
5. Phenpu-Lasungpa

House hold no. 14/15/16/36



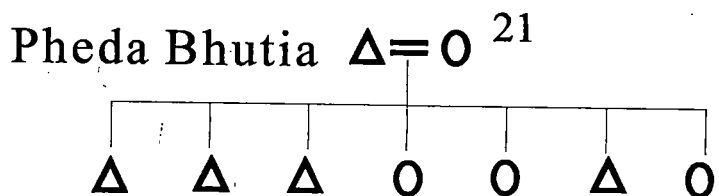
6. Sangdarpa Clan

House hold no. 27/28/34



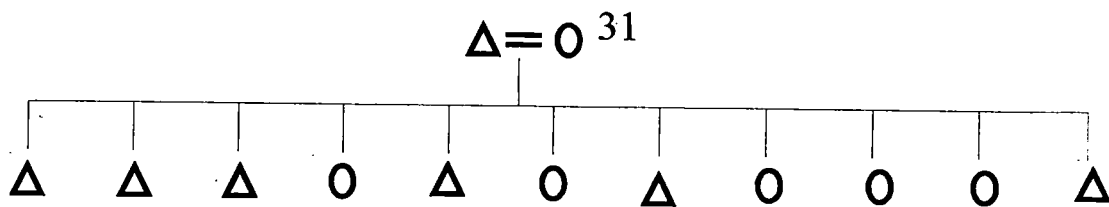
7. Ethenpa Clan

House hold no. 21



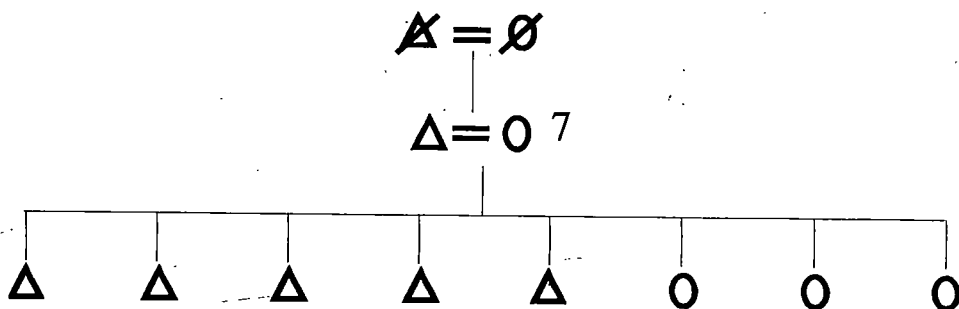
8. Assampa Clan

House hold no. 31

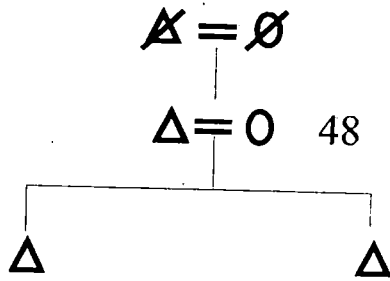


9. a) Labrang

House hold no. 7



b) House hold no. 48



Index

- ♂ Male
- ♀ Female
- ♀/ Female who married out of Village
- ♀/ Female who are married and settled in Village

Source : Field Work 1996

Notes and References

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2. Geoffrey Gorer, *Himalayan Village* (London, 1967), p.106.
3. Chie Nakane, 'A Plural Society in Sikkim – A Study of the Interrelationship of Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese' in C. Von. Furer Haimendorf (ed), *Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon*, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966) , p. 215.
4. Gorer, 1967 , op.cit., p. 25.
5. Ibid, P. 148.
6. Ibid, p. 105.
7. Ibid, p. 32.
8. Chie Nakane, 1966, op.cit., p. 251.
9. Ibid , p. 255.
10. Ibid , p. 256.
11. Ibid , p. 259.
12. Ibid, p. 237.
13. Risley, 1894, op.cit., p. 30
14. Chie Nakane, 1966, op.cit., p. 240.
15. Ibid, p. 222.
16. Ibid, p. 227.
17. Risley, 1894, op.cit., p. 27.
18. Chie Nakane, 1966, op.cit., p. 227.
19. Risley, 1894, op.cit., pp. 294-304.
20. Chie Nakane, 1966, op.cit., p. 229.
21. Ibid, p. 228.
22. Ibid, p. 245.

Chapter – VI

Resource Distribution and Ethnicity in Sikkim

The emergence of educated elite is normally viewed as a catalyst of change in society. Sikkim too is no exception. With the introduction of a democratic set up and its merger with India, the development process in the State has accelerated. There soon arose a distinguishable group of educated elite, eager to play a lead role in socio-economic and political domain. Representing the middle- and upper classes, this neo-elite does play the role of a sub-elite to use Mosca's terminology. But if we fall back on Marxian analysis, this neo-elite can either carry forward the ruling class ideology (thereby playing a reactionary role) or lead the society toward enlightenment through progressive movements. But the neo-elite in the three major ethnic groups may not be equally equipped to take advantage of the new opportunities. There may thus be an ethnic dimension to resource distribution and an unequal access to education, occupational opportunities and other developmental opportunities. Centering this, there may be a growing competition for resources as well as a sense of relative deprivation. Attempt has therefore been made to show the representation to the higher level of bureaucracy and material and human resources. The access to politics of the emerging class representing various ethnic groups has been discussed in chapter IV.

The continuous migration changes both the demographic and economic balance among the ethnic groups. Hence, the inter-ethnic relations in Sikkim have to be understood in terms of migration of people belonging to different ethnic groups. The Lepchas are indigenous people. But the immigration of Bhutias and the Nepalese had its own repercussions in the political, economic and social arena. Besides, the economic and territorial distribution of resources accentuates the ethnic competition. In this chapter, I would look into the relative control over the material resources by the ethnic communities and how the resulting feeling of deprivation breeds ethnic tension to influence Sikkim politics. Since land holds an important place in agrarian economy of Sikkim, a discussion of the control of land by the ethnic communities will be highly relevant here.

Land Distribution

Physically, an enclosed basin, the greater Himalayan region in the north is a snow desert, where highlanders graze their yak and other herds during summer and lead a nomadic-cum-pastoral life. While the cold northern slopes of the Inner Himalayan zones are used for pastorate, the southern slopes are marked by slash and burn type of rotational dry cultivation.¹

North Sikkim, with its pastoral and dairy economy is a Bhutia reserve. Happy with trade and commerce across the Himalayas, the inhabitants are highlanders of the cold and dry climate. The Lepchas are normally found in the inner Himalayan region, mostly on the southern slopes of the hills and are engaged in subsistence type of dry slash and burn type of rotational maize, millet and buckwheat cultivation,² with very little left for commercial transaction. With the penetration of other communities, the compact and exclusive Lepcha settlements are found only in the Lepcha reserves of Dzongu, the private estate of ex-Chogyal. This cardamom growing region is controlled mainly by the Kazi-aristocracy of both Bhutia-Lepcha stocks.³ The southern slope that produces rice, maize, potato and ginger in small terraced fields, along with some tropical and perishable fruits, is inhabited by the Nepalese.⁴

The Lepchas were the original inhabitants of the State and they controlled most of its land. After enthronement of Bhutia ruler, the landed property changed hands, the Lepchas got exposed to outside world and thus a primitive community got transformed into a peasant society. Since then the ownership of cultivable land had been transferred to the Bhutia ruler, who used to gift portions of it to his chattels, courtiers, Kazis etc. in return of their services.

The British rule in India revolutionized the entire land management system by introducing the land-lease system and consolidation of landlordism. Consequently, a three-tier land ownership⁵ pattern emerged: (i) the private estates, owned by the ruler and other members of the ruling house personally; (ii) monastery estates-land owned by five big monasteries; and (iii) public estates, in which lands were distributed to the leasee land-lords.

After 1951 land settlement programme, there were 108 estates in Sikkim, divided into three categories: (1) Government estates, numbering 90, which included the old leased land areas as well as the private estates of the Kazi and Thikadar families; (2)

Monastery estates, numbering 5; and (3) 13 Royal family estates. Thus, nearly 85 per cent of the total land was under the government estates, 11 per cent of the land was controlled by the Royal families and 4 per cent was under the monastic estates.⁶

To understand the pattern of land ownership, a peep in retrospect is necessary. The Kazis and the nobles, mainly drawn from the Bhutia ethnic group, were the landlords and higher officials in Sikkim. The cultivators were mostly the Lepchas,⁷ who had no title to the land they cultivated. As the Lepchas were mainly tenant-cultivators rather than traders or herdsman like the Bhutias, the monopoly over arable land had shifted from the hands of the Lepchas to the Bhutias.⁸

Due to availability of land in abundance, the question of tilling right of individual and settling on a certain plot of land permanently did not emerge as a crucial question earlier. The Lepchas enjoyed relative independence in tilling any plot of land by paying certain amount of tax.⁹ However, the emergence of lessee landlordism had added an important milestone on the question of land and ethnicity. A fixed amount of *khazna* (land tax) was collected from the cultivators through the village headman (Mandals). The lessee could settle as much revenue in the initial payment of *nazaranas*,¹⁰ known as *chardam*,¹¹ which literally means four *paise*, paid as a kind of *salami*. It refers to the grant of the right to serve on specific land as a *bustiwala*. Such practice was however abolished in 1950. All registrations of land transactions were accomplished through the lessee landlords, who were invested with magisterial power.¹² The tenants had no security of tenancy rights and were under the mercy of the lessee.

As the Nepalese were considered industrious and better cultivators, the Nepali Thikadars and pro-immigration Kazis promoted Nepali immigration and settlement in forest areas, for easy earning and to gain favour of the British government. With the land in abundance, acquiring wasteland for farming from the Lepchas and Bhutias was not a problem at the beginning. The Lepchas and the Bhutias had confined themselves to fertile lands and they had little interest in infertile waste lands.¹³ The continued influx resulted in significant change in population balance in favour of the Nepalese, which subsequently caused scarcity of cultivable land. Coupled with this, the newly introduced terracing technique of cultivation had also contributed in the claim of individual's right over a certain plot of land,¹⁴ which gradually emerged as a basic question in the traditional society of Sikkim.

By the time migration of the Nepalese had started the Bhutia-Lepcha combine emerged as a composite ethnic group,¹⁵ as the 'original inhabitants of Sikkim. It had become customary for the Chogyal to refer to Sikkim as a Bhutia-Lepcha homeland.'¹⁶ By virtue of being the original inhabitants of Sikkim they were identified as the 'Sikkimese'. A threat perception grown out of increasing Nepali population had brought the Bhutias and the Lepchas together. The combine also wanted to retain their hold over the land and the power in the State. However, the inter-tribal fusion of the Bhutias and the Lepchas, as one composite ethnic group could not be achieved at all levels. The degree of social distance between two ethnic groups appeared more strongly among the peasants. There were, however, increasing incidents of intermarriages in the educated professional circles.¹⁷ The Bhutia-Lepcha combine was not totally free of tension. The dominance of the Bhutias was so strong that the Lepchas in general remained the poorest and the most neglected of the peoples. Confined mostly to the Dzongu area, these Lepchas lived their life of indolence and negligence amidst exploitation by the Bhutias.¹⁸ Although, there were under-currents of political intrigues and fights at the beginning, the problems between these two ethnic groups disappeared in course of time and the Bhutias being dominant had the opportunity to include the Lepchas within one bracket of the 'Sikkimese'.

Sikkimese Vs. Non Sikkimese

There were fissures in the relationship between the Sikkimese and the Non-Sikkimese. Unlike the Bhutia-Lepchas, the Nepalese were not considered Sikkim subjects. This was expressed in the discriminatory policies followed by the Chogyal in matters of Land Revenue and Administration. During the period of lessee landlordism, the lease of land was given on ethnic basis; while the Kazi families were granted lease for a period of 15 years, a Nepali *thikadaar* was given for a period of 10 years.¹⁹ Such practice continued till the implementation of 1950 Land Reform Programme. The Revenue Order No.1, a law still in practice for long and renewed form time to time, prohibits land alienation by hereditary state subjects (Bhutia-Lepcha) in favour of non-hereditary subjects e.g. Nepalese.²⁰ The Bhutia-Lepcha combine also enjoyed the right of exclusive acquisition of land and residence in North Sikkim vide Royal proclamation of Sir Tashi Namgyal, dated 30th August 1956. Even

after the land reform programme, the ethnic basis continued in the revenue assessment imposed upon the cultivators, belonging to Bhutia-Lepcha and the Nepali communities. The Nepali cultivators in general were assessed at a higher rate than the Bhutia-Lepchas, for the same quantity and quality of land. This discriminatory practice continued till 1966, when the rate at which the Nepalese were assessed was imposed upon the Bhutia-Lepcha as well²¹ irrespective of ethnicity, but on the basis of quality of the plot.

The commencement of the decadal survey of land management in 1951 was an important step forward in maintaining land records in the State. It led to the registration of all landowners and were conferred the tilling right. The arable land, which was once with the Lepchas, shifted to the Bhutias and subsequently to the Nepali settlers, who attained the individual tilling right. The conferring of tilling right was viewed as crucial, since the Sikkimese identity and status particularly of the Nepalese was determined on the basis of such right subsequently.

The discriminatory treatment of the Nepalese had stopped with coming into effect of the Sikkim Subject Regulation of 1961, by which the Chogyal recognized all the earliest settlers as legal settlers and conferred the 'Sikkim subject status' on them. Initially, the attainment of such recognition of the Sikkimese (the original Sikkim subjects) was easier for the loyal Bhutia-Lepcha people, who were automatically recognized as Sikkimese by the regulations. But the Nepalese were recognized and granted this status in 1961, after the initial resistance by a group of anti-Nepali ruling elite.

The Sikkim Durbar had maintained a register of all such legal settlers who were the Sikkim subjects.²² The motive behind such recognition was to safeguard the economic and political interests of the ruling elite and to monopolize their grip over the limited resources, mostly the arable land and forest. As the ownership of individual tilling right was the basis and eligibility for Sikkim subject recognition, those Nepalese, whose names appeared in the individual proprietary rights registration were automatically bestowed the status of Sikkim subject by the Sikkim Subject Regulation Act, 1961. The question of land ownership became so important that the Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1965 conferred the voting right to those who owned landed property and paid land revenue or local tax to the government.²³ The right over a plot of land was necessary for enjoying certain privileges meant for the Sikkimese only. The notification No. 105 of Land Revenue Department, dated 25th February 1961,

stated that the 'Non-Sikkimese are not entitled to acquire any immovable properties in Sikkim' and the Nepalese or other non-Sikkimese cannot alienate property from the Lepcha-Bhutia community even by marrying their women.

After Sikkim's merger with Indian Union the legal cultivators, i.e. those with the tilling-cum-proprietary rights, automatically obtained the individual ownership rights over the arable land they cultivated for many decades.²⁴ The Sikkim Citizenship Order, 1975, issued by the Indian Union government, provided that 'Every person, who immediately before the 26th day of April, 1975, was a Sikkim subject, under the Sikkim Subject Regulation, 1961, shall be deemed to have become a citizen of India on that day'.²⁵ Accordingly, only those persons, whose names were entered in the earlier Sikkim Subject Register, 1961(now repealed) were deemed to have become Citizens of India.²⁶ Therefore, many who had domiciled in the territory of Sikkim, but whose names were not entered in the Sikkim Subject Register for various reasons like ignorance, administrative lapses and political consideration virtually became stateless overnight following the merger.²⁷ They were mainly the Nepalese. But a compromise-formula was worked by the ruling forces, on electoral considerations, which made it possible for many of them to acquire "Sikkim subject" status.²⁸ The land helped one to be declared 'Sikkim subject' which in turn qualified him to be an Indian Citizen too.

The Sikkimese identity, which was used to refer to the Bhutia-Lepchas only, has been broadened to include the Nepalese as well. The Sikkimese identity has now assumed an inclusive and accommodative connotation. It is now a socio-political identity, which synthesises the ethnic, cultural, social and political interests of the earliest settlers belonging to Lepcha-Bhutia and the Nepali communities. Thus, the legal recognition of the 'Sikkimese' has been aimed to protect the interest of the earliest settlers in this agriculture-based economy, where land holds an important place as a productive source of livelihood.

The Nepalese of Sikkim identified themselves as 'Sikkimese', as distinct from the Nepalese of neighbouring areas of Darjeeling District that falls within West Bengal. To check the continuous and overwhelming influx, the state government has formulated various rules for issuing Sikkimese identity from time to time. The Sikkim Government Gazette No. 198 dated 8th December, 1995, in compliance with the notification of the Home Department Vide 66/Home 195 dated 29.11.1995, has laid down the eligibility criteria for granting of local Sikkimese identification certificate.

Apart from those, whose names have been entered in Sikkim Subject Register and the holders of Indian Citizenship Certificate under the Sikkim (Citizenship) Order 1975, as amended in 1989, those who hold agricultural land in the rural areas are entitled to the identification certificate. The fourth group entitled to the certificate includes those, whose father/husband had been in government service on or before 31.12. 1969.

Land Reforms

The demand of land reforms in Sikkim began in the late forties with the establishment of democratic forces. The government, through a notification dated 20th August 1949, abolished the intermediaries in the land management system.²⁹ This revenue order, however, was not accompanied by tenancy reforms or imposition of ceiling on land held by those Zamindars and Thikadars in their respective areas in Sikkim.³⁰ The 15 private estates of the Maharaja of Sikkim and five estates under the monasteries continued to be managed directly by the Chogyal and monasteries.

As per the Survey and Settlement Report of 1958, 13% of the total i.e., 3658 out of 27,694 land holdings were within private estate. It was also found that out of 2,23,314 acres of agricultural land, 66727 acres were owned by 8% of the families,³¹ which being financially strong and socially influential were likely to influence the decision making process of the government. Hence, with the preponderance of political power, enjoyed by the land owning class of Sikkim, any drastic change in land management was not forthcoming.

A number of land reform legislation have been enacted by the Government of Sikkim since 1975, the most important being (a) The Sikkim Cultivators Protection Act, 1975/85; (b) The Sikkim Agricultural Land Ceiling and Reforms Act, 1978/85; (c) The Sikkim Land (Requisition and Acquisition) Act, 1978.

A scrutiny of all legislation would reveal that these Acts are passed to (a) eliminate intermediaries; (b) enforce ceiling on land holdings and to distribute surplus land; and (c) protect tenancy rights. In the same rhythm, 'The Sikkim Transfer of Land Regulation Bill of 1989, and 'The Sikkim Alienation of Land Regulation Bill' commonly known as Bill No. 5 of 1989 were introduced, prohibiting land alienation from Sikkimese-Nepalese and Bhutia-Lepchas. However, for an agrarian structure that had been under feudalism for centuries, change is not a simple and short process.

Reaction of Bhutia-Lepcha on the Legislations

Limiting the size of holdings and protecting the tenancy right have become issues of great concern for the Bhutia-Lepchas who had traditionally been the big landowners. The issue of land had become so important that it figured in the main agenda of various tribal organizations like Denzong-Lo-Men-Chodul, Rong Tarjum, and Denzong Yargay Chogpa (1984-85). The Joint Action Committee of Bhutia-Lepcha tribals feared that the imposition of the Sikkim Land Ceiling and Reforms Act 1978, that envisaged the distribution of excess lands above ceiling, would not only make them partial loser of the holdings but such lands would go to the non-tribals. The Sikkim Transfer of Land Regulation Bill 1989, which not only elaborates the Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917, but also incorporates certain provisions that were a matter of great concern for the tribal population. The tribals found the term 'competent authority' as vague and objectionable, as it had not been specified the authority and had given an over-riding power to allow alienation of land belonging to Bhutia-Lepcha in favour of other communities.³²

The Bhutias were to be the most affected by the land reform measures, as could be seen in the following Table- 6.1.

Table 6.1: Community-wise holdings and excess land likely to be acquired (in acres)

Community	No. of holdings	Excess land likely to be acquired (in acres)
Bhutia	187	2795.01
Lepcha	60	645.46
Nepalese	201	1352.83

Source: Dhamala and Bhaumik, 1985 p. 121.

As indicated in the Table 6.1, the implementation of Land Ceiling Act would affect the Bhutias most. Although the Nepalese had the largest number of holdings, the Bhutias had the excess land that was likely to be acquired. However, acquisition of such land had reportedly succeeded only partially.

The issue of land had come to the forefront in 1989, when a High Court judgement allowed Mr. L.D. Kazi, the first Chief Minister of democratic state, to 'gift' a piece of prime urban land to Mr. N.B. Khatiwada, a Nepali.³³ This was a clear departure from the Royal Proclamation of 1917 by the Chogyal, which prohibited such inter-community land transfer. The judgement drew adverse reaction from the Bhutia-Lepcha community and drew the tribals together to form a Joint Action Committee in their attempt to protect their interest. They pleaded that it would open the door for further alienation of their land in the guise of 'gift'.

The Land Politics

The issue of Sikkimese vs. Non-Sikkimese identities, the concept of the 'sons of the soil' has been so much embedded in Sikkim; it holds an important place in the election manifestos of various political parties, since the merger. In 1979 election manifesto, the Sikkim Janta Parishad promised 'to frame rules whereby no land would be given to non Sikkimese' and sought to protect the interest of the original inhabitants of Sikkim.³⁴ While implementation of 'sons of the soil' policy has become the pet slogan of all political parties these days. The present ruling government is committed to protect the 'Revenue Order No.1', that prohibits alienation of land of Lepcha-Bhutia communities to others. To a large extent, such an electoral promise stemmed out of the fact that the majority Nepalese community outscored the original Sikkimese i.e., Bhutia-Lepchas in respect of land ownership as indicated by the Settlement Report of 1958.

The settlement report, 1958, shows that the Nepalese controlled 66% of the total land, the Bhutias owned 20% and the Lepchas had only 14% of total cultivated areas (Table 6.2). But, as has already been indicated, although the Nepalese own the largest number of landholdings, the Bhutias had the highest amount of excess land. The present data on community-wise land distribution is not available. A tentative estimate by the Land Revenue Department in 1999 gives the following in formations about the community-wise holding of land. However, it is nesseeary to mention here that the data does not take into account of the total land area of Sikkim.

Table 6.2: Community-wise ownership of land (in acres)

Ethnic Groups	Private Estates	Monas-tery Estates	Regular Estates	In acres Total	Cultivated land (in hectare)			Total
					Private	Monas-tary	Regular	Perce-ntage
Bhutias	2927	2602	7140	12669	10527.12	.9242.62	24075.50	43852.24 (20%)
Lepchas	1551	1432	8471	11454	4498.48	4021.73	23185.29	31705.51 (14%)
Nepalese	8819	4024	65290	78133	16818.81	8723.76	122022.17	147564.74 (66%)

Source: Report on Sikkim by Yogamber Singh Bhandari, UPCD Settlement Officer, Sikkim. 1958, as quoted in Dhamala and Bhaumik, 1985 'Land Reforms in Sikkim,' p. 126 (Appendix).

Table 6.3: Community-wise areas of cultivated land owned by individual families (in hectares)

Ethnic	Total No. of holdings	Paddy Field	Dry Field	Waste Land	Cardamom Field	Total Cul-tivated Area	Total Reve-nuein (Rs)
Bhutia	7794 (17.6)	3180.6800 (27.3)	10444.0010 (16.2)	2837.4285 (24.37)	5886.5045 (27.4)	22348.6140 (20.45)	154084.07 (40.23)
Lepcha	6735 (15.2)	1755.8825 (15.07)	11960.8045 (18.5)	1574.6605 (13.5)	7121.4520 (33.2)	22412.7995 (20.5)	45707.96 (11.93)
Nepali	29632 (67.09)	6706.2170 (57.6)	42049.0006 (65.2)	7275.3145 (62.2)	8468.7835 (39.4)	64499.306 (59.03)	183204.38 (47.83)
TOTAL	44161 (100.00)	11642.7795 (100.00)	64453.8061 (100.00)	11687.4035 (100.00)	21476.7400 (100.00)	1029260.7291 (100.00)	382996.411 (100.00)

Source: Land Revenue Department, 1999 (Tentative Estimate)

Table 6.3 shows that the Nepalese control 59.03% of the cultivable land. The Bhutias and Lepchas control 20% each. One striking feature of the data is that although the Nepalese constitute 67.09% of land holding families, they only control 59.03% of total cultivated area. On the other hand, although the Bhutias and Lepchas own only 32.8% of the number of holdings, their share of land together is 41%. Classifying the land according to the major crop cultivated, the data shows that the highest share (57.6%) is that of the Nepalese, whereas the Bhutias and Lepchas together own nearly 43% of the paddy field. The same trend is noticed in terms of

control of dry field, where the Nepalese own the highest percentage of 65.2% of total area. The Bhutias and Lepchas together own 34%. A striking feature shown by the Table is that the Nepalese have the lowest percentage of lucrative cardamom field. They own 39.4% of such land, whereas the Bhutias and Lepchas together have a share of 60.6%. The column on the total revenue reveals an interesting picture. The Bhutias, with 20.45% of total cultivable land, contribute 40.23% of the total land revenue, whereas the Lepchas with almost the same areas contribute only 11.93%. This clearly indicates that the hold of the Bhutias over the quality land with prospects of lucrative production is much greater.

A comparative analysis of 1958 settlement report and the above Table (based on recent tentative figures) would indicate that the share of the Lepchas in the total cultivated areas has grown from 14% to 20.5%. This might be attributed to the stern and hard stand being taken by 'Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum' - The Sikkim Lepcha Association, which is vigilant against the alienation of Lepcha land. However, the share of quality land has not increased significantly for the Lepchas, since their share of land revenue has not grown much. The majority Nepalese constituting more than 60% of total population almost has an equal share of land revenue with the Bhutias, who constitutes 16% of the population in the state.

All these provided enough reasons and ground for growing ethnic consciousness among the young generation Lepchas. The Renjong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum has been demanding amendment of Land Revenue Order No.1 of 1917, which allows Bhutias and Lepchas for inter/community transfer of land. Since, its formation in early 90's, the organisation has been pressing for the amendment to limit the land transaction with Lepchas only, in order to check alienation of Lepcha land to Bhutias, who are economically, socially and politically better placed.

The discussion so far highlights the way land is related to the question of ethnicity in an industrially backward under-developed agrarian economy like Sikkim. The historical factor of large scale Nepali immigration had a lot to contribute to subtle tension, that exists between the majority Nepalese controlling the largest share of land and the indigenous Lepchas and the Bhutias. Coupled with this the new awakening among the Lepchas, the active functioning of Renjong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum in recent years has added another dimension making the question of land and ethnicity a triangular one.

Industries

Among the growing industrial units in Sikkim are the liquor industries, the fruit preservation units, tannery, paper pulp industry, mining and other small-scale industries. The work force in these enterprises is almost exclusively of Nepalese origin.³⁵ The following Table gives the community-wise ownership of small-scale industries in Sikkim.

Table: 6.4: Community-wise owners of small-scale industries in Sikkim

Ethnic Group	Districts (Number and Percentage)				
	North	East	South	West	Total
Nepalese	02 (33.3)	101 (44.88)	38 (71.6)	17 (58.62)	158 (50.47)
Bhutias	02 (33.3)	63 (28.00)	08 (15.09)	08 (27.05)	81 (25.87)
Lepchas	-	10 (12.4)	02 (3.77)	-	12 (3.83)
Others	01 (16.6)	29 (12.88)	05 (9.43)	04 (3.79)	39 (12.46)
Govt. of Sikkim Undertaking	01 (16.6)	02 (0.88)	-	-	03 (0.9)
Non-Identified	-	20 (8.88)	-	-	20 (6.70)
Total	06 (100.00)	225 (100.00)	53 (100.00)	29 (100.00)	313 (100.00)

Source: Based on the data collected from Industry Department, Gangtok, 1999

The Table-6.4 shows the exclusive monopoly of Nepalese and Bhutias in the field of small-scale industrial unit in Sikkim, comprising 50.47% and 25.87% respectively. The Lepcha enterprises constitute only 3.83% of the total industrial unit in Sikkim. Even in the industrially dominated east district, Lepcha comprises only 12.4% of total enterprises. While 0.9% of industrial units are government of Sikkim undertakings, 12.46% are owned by others i.e. the plainsman community. The ethnic group of 6.7% industrial entrepreneur could not be identified.

Besides, with the new developmental trend in post-merger era, dairy farming, piggery, poultry, experimental cash crop farms etc. in the modern scientific way are being carried out by the state government, where the Bhutias and Lepchas enterprises

are negligible, as compared to the Nepali farmhands and employees for animal husbandry. The road construction and transport operation is largely manned by the Nepalese,³⁶ whereas the Nepalese, who comes on work permit, exclusively holds manual transport.

Business Activities

To run the business in the urban and commercial centers as Mangan, Gangtok, Singtam, Rangpo, Namchi etc. is an exclusive domain of Marwari settlers, who trade between Indian plains and Sikkimese towns. Since the closing of Indo-China borders for commercial transaction, the Bhutia traders have taken to petty trade in woolen and dairy products in the urban centers. Lastly, there are Deswali or Madesia petty hawkers consisting of the males from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, who have migrated to Sikkim in search of a new market.³⁷

A Developmental Profile of the post-merger era

Since the merger with Union of India in 1975, large-scale developmental activities have taken place in Sikkim. The rapid growth of the economy, modernisation and expansion of administrative structure and social service have created new avenues of employment opportunities for the Sikkimese as well as the outsiders. The question is how are the ethnic communities in the state responding to new opportunities of development.

Table 6.5 is an indicator of the state economy, which shows a remarkable hike in the net state domestic production from Rs. 4898 lakh in 1980-81 to Rs. 25644 lakh in 1993-94. The extent of increase between 1980-81 and 1992-93 being 396.27%, which has again shown an increase of 5.50% in 1993-94. Similarly, the per capita income has shown a substantial rise from Rs. 1571 in 1980-81 to Rs. 5870 in 1993-94, indicating an increase of 264.23%, within a span of a decade between 1980-81 and 1992-93, which has again increased by 2.59% in 1993-94. The degree of emphasis

Table 6.5: Indicators of the State Economy

Particulars	Unit	1980-81	1992-93	1993-94
Net state domestic product (at current prices)	Rs. in Lakh	4898	24306 (P)	25644 (Q)
Extent of increase	Percentage	-	396.27	5.50
Per-Capita income (at current prices)	Rs. In Lakh	1571	5722 (P)	5870 (Q)
Extent of increase	Percentage	-	264.23	2.59
Per Capita income at current prices (1980-81)	Rupees	1571	-	-

P = Provisional
Q = Quick estimate

Source: Sikkim at a Glance – 1995, Bureau of Economic & Statistics, Gangtok

laid by the state government in the development and growth of the economy could be understood from the following Table-6.6.

Table 6.6: Sector-wise annual plan outlay (Rs. in Lakhs).

Particulars	1979-80	1994-95
Agriculture and allied services	409.20	1291.80
Rural Development	29.74	235.80
Irrigation and field control	90.74	216.00
Energy	208.74	2275.00
Industry and Minerals	143.68	430.00
Transport	466.70	1620.10
Science, Technology and Environment	-	68.50
General Economic Service	35.59	195.50
Social Services (Education, health and welfare)	366.72	3554.00
General Services	28.81	312.90
Non-plan account deficit	-	3300.00
Total	1779.72	13500.00

Source: (i) Sikkim - Statistical Profile (1979-80 and 1991-92).
(ii) Sikkim at a Glance 1995, Bureau of Economics & Statistics.

Table 6.6 gives us some idea about the initiative of the state government for the development of state economy. The annual plan outlay has increased from

Rs.1779 lakh in 1979-80 to 13,5000 lakh Rupees in 1994-95. The major emphasis being on modernization of agriculture and allied sectors, rural development, energy, transport and social service sectors like education, health, public welfare etc. which is indicative of the state government's efforts on rapid economic development.

Educational Infrastructure

Education has been viewed as an important vehicle of social transformation. Hence a major emphasis in the post-merger era was laid on educational development of the state.

Table 6.7: Educational Institutions in Sikkim 1975-199

Types of Institution	1975	1996
Primary	228	1263
Jr. High School	29	122
Secondary School	-	79
Higher Secondary School	07	32
Degree College	-	02
Law College	-	01
Teachers' Training Institute	-	01
State Institute of Education	-	01
B.Ed. College	-	01
Total	264	1502

Source: 1). An Economic Survey 1991-92, Bureau of Economics & Statistics.
2). Directorate of Education, 1996.

Table 6.8: Stage-wise enrolment and number of teachers

Stages	Particulars	1979-80	Teacher-Student Ratio	1994-95	Teacher-Student Ratio
Pre-Primary	Enrolment	2550	1 : 30	16232	1 : 22
	Teachers	85		723	
Primary	Enrolment	22081	1 : 19	79086	1 : 18
	Teachers	1106		4288	
Jr. High School	Enrolment	10202	1 : 21	21309	1 : 19
	Teachers	476		1129	
Secondary	Enrolment	10242	1 : 18	N.A.	-
	Teachers	566		739	
Sr. Secondary	Enrolment	5367	1 : 26	N.A.	-
	Teachers	1999		290	

Source: i) Sikkim – A Statistical Profile, P: 105
Sikkim – At a Glance, 1995, Bureau of Economics & Statistics.

Table 6.9: District-wise distribution of educational institutions

Particulars	1979-80					1994-95				
	N	E	S	W	Total	N	E	S	W	Total
Pre-Primary School	24	61	-	-	85	76	235	205	207	723
Primary School	32	112	84	81	309	60	162	144	159	525
Jr.High School	08	14	13	09	44	11	42	37	29	119
Secondary School	01	12	05	06	24	08	21	21	17	67
Sr. Secondary School	01	05	01	01	08	02	15	03	04	24
Total	66 (14.04)	204 (43.4)	103 (21.9)	97 (20.6)	470 (100)	157 (10.8)	475 (32.6)	410 (28.1)	416 (28.5)	1458 (100)

Source: i) Sikkim - A Statistical Profile, P. 105. ii) Sikkim - At a Glance 1995, Bureau of Economics & Statistics.

An analysis of the above information (Tables-6.7, 6.8,6.9) reveals that there has been a significant increase in the number of educational institutions as well as students. The number of teachers too has grown over the years. Table 6.7 indicates an enormous increase in the educational institutions of all types from a total number of 264 in 1975 to 1502 in 1996. There was no institution for higher education in 1975 but now there are two degree colleges, one law college and one B.Ed. college in Sikkim. The similar information could be found from Table 6.7. Besides, the Manipal University of Medical Science and Technology has been started in Sikkim. The Government also sends the meritorious students for higher professional and academic qualification in other parts of the country.

Although there is district-wise variation, the number of educational institutions has increased from 470 to 1458 within a span of fifteen years. Table 6.9 reveals that despite the largest concentration of educational institutions and increase in number of educational institutions, there has been a fall in the percentage share in north and east districts. The south and west districts have shown the increase both in terms of number and percentage.

Table 6.8 suggests that there has been an overall increase in enrolment of students at all stages and the number of teachers has also increased. This is indicative of the fact that the people are responding positively to government's efforts to universalisation of education, which is a necessity for keeping pace with economic development of the state.

Health Infrastructure

A major emphasis has been laid on the development of health infrastructure in the state. Table 6.10 gives the comparative figures between 1979-80 and 1984-95.

Table 6.10: Health Infrastructure

Particulars	Year	East	West	North	South	State
Primary Health	1979-80	4	1	1	-	6
Sub Centres	1994-95	47	40	19	19	144
Hospitals	1979-80	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	1994-95	1	2	1	1	05
Auxiliary	1979-80	-				109
Nurse Midwives	1994-95	169	87	48	104	408
Staff Nurse	1979-80	-	-	-	-	05 70
	1994-95	57	04	03	06	
Doctors	1979-80	-	-	-	-	35 140
	1994-95	92	18	10	20	
Population	1979-80	-	-	-	-	-
per Doctor	1994-95	2176	6118	3504	5531	3257

Source: 1) A Statistical Profile (1979-80 and 1991-92), P. 112.
2) Sikkim-At a Glance, 1995, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Gangtok.

Table 6.10 shows that there has been a substantial increase in the number of primary health sub-centres, the health centres and the number of doctors and nurses. The population ratio per doctor for the state stands as 3257. Hence there has been a massive increase in terms of health amenities. The improved health infrastructure has its reflection in the remarkable fall in the birth rate, infant mortality and death rate.

Table 6.11: Vital statistics on birth rate, infant mortality rate and death rate

Year	Birth Rate	Infant Mortality	Death Rate
1981-83	32.4 (33.8)	-	9.8 (12.1)
1983-85	33.1 (33.6)	-	10.6 (12.1)
1987-89	32.8 (31.5)	88	9.8 (10.7)
1988-90	30.4 (30.7)	71	8.8 (10.3)
1989-91	26.6	56	7.9
1990-92	23.6	46	6.9
1991-93	22.7	45	6.6

Source: 1) Sikkim – A Statistical Profile, Ibid, p. 8
 2) Sikkim - At a Glance – 1995, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Gangtok.

(Figures in Parenthesis indicate all India figures).

A careful analysis of Table 6.11 would show a notable improvement in the form of declining birth rate, infant mortality rate and the death rate, all indicative of improving health status. The improvements are particularly remarkable after 1988-90, the figures in the state present a better picture compared to all-India standard.

Agricultural Sector

In the post-merger period, a conscious attempt has been made by the state to develop the agriculture sector, which is the mainstay of state economy. Table 6.6 would show that there has been an increase in annual plan outlay from Rs. 409 lakhs to Rs. 1291 lakhs within a span of 15 years. The figures in the Table 6.12 would also be illustrative of state's efforts towards modernization of agriculture.

Table 6.12: High Yielding Variety Coverage (in Hectares)

Crops	1979-80	1991-92
Rice	32,000	70,670
Wheat	6,400	11,300
Maize	10,000	18,500
Total HYV Coverage	19,600	40,470

Source: Sikkim – A Statistical Profile, Ibid, p. 20

Table 6.12 shows the steady increase in the use of high yielding variety of seeds of rice, wheat and maize in the state. There has been an increase in areas from 19,600. hectares in 1979-80 to 40,470 hectares in 1991-92, covered by the high yielding crops. Another sector closely related to the agriculture is animal husbandry, which provides an important means of livelihood to many villagers. The state government has taken care in improving the infrastructure in this sector as well (Table 6.13).

Table 6.13: Veterinary Services

Particulars	1981	1994-95
Veterinary Hospitals	7	14
Veterinary Dispensary	35	23
Stockman Centers	-	60
Veterinary Doctors	24	57

Source: (a) Sikkim At a Glance, 1981

(b) Sikkim At a Glance, 1995

The Industrial Growth

An important indicator of economic growth is provided by the industrial growth. Due to the ecological constraints the expansion of large-scale industries is difficult in Sikkim. There is however scope for the growth of small-scale production units. Table 6.14 would show how the small-scale industries have grown in the state.

Table 6.14: Small-scale Industrial Units in Sikkim

Item	Unit	1979-80	1991-92	1994-95
Permanent small-scale industrial units (Registered)	No	22	220	289
Provisional registered small-scale units	No	N.A.	N.A.	1491

Source: i) Sikkim –A Statistical Profile, Ibid, p. 47.
Sikkim At a Glance – 1995.

The post-merger era has witnessed a rapid growth of small-scale industries in Sikkim from an insignificant number of 22 in 1979-80 to 289 in 1994-95, thus contributing to the state income and creating more employment opportunities for the citizens.

Power

Alongside the modernization and industrialization, the power resource and its consumption is also an indicator of economic growth. Table 6.15 would give us some idea about the state of the energy sector in the state.

Table 6.15 : Power Generation in Sikkim

District	1979-80		1994-95	
	Installed Capacity (M.W)	Power Generation (MKWH)	Installed Capacity (M.W)	Power Generation (MKWH)
North	-	-	4.30	6.18
East	14.5	22.54	25.00	50.55
South	-	-	-	-
West	0.6	0.57	1.60	1.81
Total	15.1	23.11	30.90	58.58

Source : 1) Sikkim – A Statistical Profile, Ibid, p. 58
2) Sikkim At a Glance, 1995.

The installed capacity has shown an increase from 15.1 M.W. to 30.9 M.W. between 1979-80 and 1994-95. Similarly, the power generation has gone up from 23.11 MKWH to 58.58 MKWH during the same period, thus laying the foundation for modern economy. A vital achievement in this regard is the rural electrification, which has covered 100% of all revenue blocks in 1994 as compared to 16.6% in 1981 (shown in Table 6.16).

Table 6.16: Electrified Towns and Revenue Blocks

Districts	Towns	In %	Revenue Blocks	In %
	1981	1994-95	1981	1994-95
North	100.00	100.00	13.3	100.00
East	100.00	100.00	27.1	100.00
South	100.00	100.00	7.5	100.00
West	100.00	100.00	18.0	100.00
Total	100.00	100.00	16.6%	100.00

Source: i) Sikkim At a Glance, 1981,1995,
Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Gangtok.

Transportation and Communication

Transportation is regarded as a lifeline of the modern economy. The importance of transportation and communication in the modernizing Sikkim cannot be overstressed in assessing its economic growth and development.

Table 6.17: Length of road by type (in Kilometers)

Types of Roads	1979-80	1991-92
National Highway	40	40
State Highway*	584	937
Major District-roads	347	446
Other District-roads	321	820

*Includes roads maintained by the GREF

Source: Sikkim: A Statistical Profile, (1979-80) and (1991-92), p. 59,
Bureau of Economics and Statistics.

The increase in the length of state highways, major district roads and other district roads indicates the expansion of transportation facilities and even to remote areas. Along with the improvement in the transportation, the simultaneous increase in the number of fleet and means of communication in post-merger Sikkim has virtually provided the backbone for modernization and economic growth.

Towards a new class – Educational Scenario

In the foregoing section, a brief profile of development in the post-merger era has been presented. It has been observed that after the merger the allocation of the state's resources and state created opportunities has begun to be carried out in new democratic way. As an obvious manifestation of this process a new class of educated officials, the bureaucrats, teachers and professionals has emerged. In the absence of modernised agriculture and not so significant industrial sector, the state government itself has been the main agency of employment for local educated people, whose number has increased tremendously in the post-merger era. There has been a competition among the ethnic communities to equip themselves educationally and make most of the new opportunities made available to them. This section, therefore, deals with how the three predominant ethnic communities of Sikkim have been able to accrue the real benefits of the educational development, which is directly related to the employment opportunity in Sikkim.

Before going into the educational scenario, it would be worthwhile to have a look at the population distribution. The Census of 1981 has given the categorization on the basis of the languages spoken.

Table 6.18: District-wise distribution of population by language mainly spoken in the household, 1981.

Languages	District-wise Percentage				Total in Sikkim
	North	East	South	West	
Lepcha	34.6	24.0	15.4	26.0	22,391 (7.2)
Bhutia	16.7	46.3	18.00	19.00	21,548 (6.9)
Gorkhali/Nepali	3.7	46.9	27.00	22.4	1,92,891 (62.6)
Limbu	10.00	7.1	11.00	71.9	17,922 (5.8)
Sherpa	10.1	25.5	35.00	29.4	10,726 (3.5)
Tibetan	12.7	57.7	18.6	11.00	4,149 (1.3)
Other Languages	11.5	42.2	27.9	18.6	18,899 (6.1)
Other Schedule VIII languages	-	-	-	-	19,570 (6.3)

Source: Census of India, 1981

Table 6.19: District-wise distribution of Scheduled Tribes in Sikkim,
1991 Census.

State/District	Total Population	S.T. Population	S.T.% to Total Population
Sikkim	4,06,457	90,901	22.36
North	31,240	17,301	55.38
East	17,845	37,632	21.09
South	98,604	16,671	16.91
West	98,161	19,297	19.66

Source: Sikkim At a Glance, 1995 Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Gangtok

Table 6.18 indicates that the Lepchas, as a linguistic group, constitute 7.2% of total population and the Bhutias constitute 6.9%. The Nepalese are numerically dominant with 62.6%, although for general analysis the Limbus are clubbed with the Nepalese. It is worthwhile to mention that according to the Sikkim Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order of 1978 the 'Scheduled Tribes' include the Lepchas, the Bhutias, including Chumbipa, Dophapa, Dukpa, Kagatey, Sherpa, Tibetan, Tromopo, Yolmo. Hence the Sherpas and Tibetans are incorporated in the Scheduled Tribes category. The Table also shows that North Sikkim has the highest concentration of the Lepchas (34.6% of the total) while the Bhutias are dominant in east district. The Nepalese are dominant in east, south and west districts.

Table 6.19 shows that 22.36 per cent of the total population is Scheduled Tribe population as per 1991 Census and a large majority (55.38 per cent) is concentrated in North district. The South district has the least tribal population.

Education Scenario

A look at the literacy rate and community-wise enrolment of students would give us a bird's eye view of the educational achievement of three different communities. The enrolment figure as provided by the planning section of Education Department puts the share of Scheduled Tribe students in government schools at 17.1% (Table 6.20).

At the Senior Secondary and Secondary educational levels the percentage of their enrolment is more (27.8 & 33.3 %) than their population ratio, which according to 1991 Census was 22.36%.

Table 6.20: Total enrolment of students and percentage of Scheduled Tribe students (1997) in Government Schools

Educational Level	Total No. of Students	Scheduled Tribes	% of S.T. students to total enrolments
Pre-Primary	23,538	5,329	22.6%
Primary	84,986	10,828	12.7
Middle-Level	23,949	5,093	21.3
Secondary	6,777	2,257	33.3
Sr.Secondary	3,331	926	27.8
Total	1,42,581	24,443	17.13

Source : Directorate of Education, Gangtok, 1997.

Table 6.21: District-wise Percentage of Literacy rate of General and Scheduled Tribe

State/District	General		Scheduled Tribe	
	1981	1991	1981	1991
Sikkim	34.05	56.94	33.13	48.40
North	29.73	53.57	30.30	44.48
East	41.38	65.13	40.18	55.64
South	32.48	54.08	31.23	44.29
West	23.61	45.62	23.25	41.35

Source : District Census Handbook, Census of India, Sikkim Series, 1981-1991.

Table 6.21 shows that literacy rate among all sections of population in the state has increased significantly between 1981 and 1991. In this decade the literacy rate in the state has recorded an increase from 34.05% to 56.94% against the national literacy rate of 52.11% during 1991 Census. The state thus occupies nineteenth position in respect of literacy. The literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes has also shown a considerable improvement from 33.13% to 48.40% during the period. The

highest literacy rate has been recorded in East district, 55.64%. The North district, which has the highest concentration of the Lepchas, records a literacy rate of 44.48%, not much behind the state average and ahead of West district. A comparative analysis of (Table 6.9) on district-wise distribution of educational institutions with the literacy rate (Table 6.21) would show that even the North district with least percentage (10.8 %) of educational institutions is not lagging behind in terms of literacy rate. In fact, it is ahead of West district, which has comparatively higher share of educational institutions.

The community-wise break up of student's enrolment was not available during my field survey. However such breakup for the year 1983 was available, which is cited here for reference and to understand the trend of ethnic-wise concentration in a particular district.

Table 6.22: Community-wise breakup of student's enrolment (From Class I to XII in Government Schools – 1983)

Ethnic Group	District (enrolment and Percentage)				Total and Percentage
	North	East	South	West	
Nepalese	1,160 (2.89)	18,697 (46.6)	11,308 (28.2)	8,882 (22.1)	40,047 (100.00)
Limboo	342 (6.63)	1,132 (21.96)	827 (16.04)	2,844 (55.18)	5,145 (100.00)
Bhutia	1115 (12.69)	5,093 (57.98)	1,394 (15.87)	1,181 (13.44)	8,783 (100.00)
Lepcha	1706 (32.26)	1,610 (30.44)	977 (18.47)	995 (18.81)	5,288 (100.00)
Sherpa	175 (6.45)	991 (36.55)	688 (25.37)	857 (31.64)	2,711 (100.00)
Scheduled Caste	170 (4.22)	2,183 (54.20)	978 (24.28)	696 (17.28)	4,027 (100.00)
Others	199 (4.94)	2,787 (69.25)	656 (16.30)	382 (9.49)	4,024 (100.00)
Total	4,867 (6.95)	32,493 (46.40)	16,828 (24.03)	15,837 (22.61)	70,025 (100.00)

Source: Planning Section, Education Department, Gangtok.

The Table 6.22 suggests that the highest concentration of Lepcha students could be found in North and East districts, whereas Bhutias predominate in East district with 57.98%. The Nepali students account for a mere 2.89% of the pupils in

the North district, although they predominate in East, South and West districts. The students belonging to Limbu community, who are generally counted among the Nepalese, are numerically dominant in West district. If we see the overall enrolment figures, the East district has the highest share with 46.40%, followed by South (24.03%), West (22.61%) and the North (6.95%).

The enrolment data in government schools a decade later also present the same trend.

Table 6.23 : District-wise Percentage of Educational Institutions and Enrolment as on 1992

Particulars	North	East	South	West	Total
Educational Institutions	10.5	32.5	28.00	29.00	100.00
Enrolment of Students	6.7	46.9	23.9	22.5	100.00

Source: Directorate of Education.

The analysis so far shows that the state government has accorded the highest priority in spreading mass literacy, which is generally considered as a vehicle of social reconstruction and economic resurgence. The figures cited above unequivocally suggest spread of literacy among all sections of state population, even among the Scheduled Tribes. The district level data on literacy rate shows that the North district (with highest Lepcha concentration) is not much behind the state level figures. Does the increase in literacy rate correspond to spread of higher education? Do the Lepchas – the indigenous, the Bhutias with the background of royal aristocracy and the numerically dominant Nepalese have equal access to higher education, which is the powerful means to entry into the service market? As a matter of fact despite high rate of literacy, Sikkim has the lowest proportion of literates in the non-technical diploma or certificate not equal to degree and above categories, according to 1981 Census comprising only 3% of national literacy level (Table 6.24).

Table 6.24: Distribution of Population by Level of Education

Educational Level	1981
	Persons/Percentage
Literacy Rate	1,07,738 (34.05%)
Literates (without educational level)	44,487 (41.62%)
Primary	37,457 (34.77%)
Middle	10,724 (9.95%)
Matric/Secondary	7,926 (7.36%)
H.S./Intermediate/Pre-University	3,532 (3.28%)
Non-technical degree or certificate not equal to degree	03 (0.00%)
Technical diploma or certificate equal to degree	269 (0.25%)
Graduates and above	2,973 (2.76%)

Source: Census, 1981

The low progress in higher education may be attributed to the lack of higher technical and professional institutions in Sikkim. However, things have changed a lot since the merger. For higher technical and professional qualification, the meritorious students are sent to other parts of the country.

Institutions of Higher Education

The Government Degree College at Gangtok, which was established in 1977 with Humanities, Science and Commerce faculties, is the oldest institution for higher education in the state. Another Degree College has recently been set up in South district headquarter, Namchi, in 1994. Besides, there are a Law College and one B.Ed. College. Manipal University of Medical Science and Technology has started functioning very recently. A glance at community-wise enrolment in the Government Degree College at Gangtok would help us to peep into the world of higher education and its trend among different ethnic communities:

Table 6.25: Total enrolment of students and percentage of S.T. students at Government College, Gangtok.

Particulars	1995			1996			1997		
	Total	S.T.	% of S.T.	Total	S.T.	% of S.T.	Total	S.T.	% of S.T.
B.A.	378 (69.3)	91 (87.5)	24.07	462 (72.00)	67 (65.0)	14.50	359 (62.9)	100 (71.9)	27.85
B.Sc.	116 (21.3)	11 (10.6)	9.48	121 (18.8)	23 (22.3)	19.00	153 (26.8)	27 (19.4)	17.64
B.Com.	51 (9.4)	02 (1.9)	3.92	59 (9.2)	13 (12.6)	22.03	59 (10.3)	12 (8.6)	20.33
Total	545 (100.00)	104 (100.00)		642 (100.00)	103 (100.00)		571 (100.00)	139 (100.00)	

Source: Government College, Gangtok

A notable feature is the steady increase of enrolment in all faculties, although a little fall in enrolment in Arts Faculty was recorded in 1997. The share of Scheduled Tribe students has also gone up over the years except in Faculty of Arts in 1996. The downward trend in Arts Faculty may be attributed to the opening of another Government Degree College at Namchi, the South district headquarter. In popularity the Arts stream ranks on top, followed by the Science and Commerce streams. This has been true in case of Scheduled Tribe students too. The marked improvement of Scheduled Tribe students in Science and Commerce stream is noticeable over the years. A pragmatic career planning and increasing demand for these subjects in the job market may have prompted the students of younger generation to opt for these subjects. The demand for technical education like medical science, engineering, agricultural science etc. is sharply on the rise. It is worthwhile to mention here that the education department, which is supposed to be the largest department in terms of employment potential in Sikkim, has now been saturated with local graduates in Arts stream, whereas there is still job potential for graduates with mathematics and science

subjects. At present one can see many unemployed local graduates in Sikkim, who were absent a few years back.

A community-wise distribution of students in B.Sc. Degree course would give us some idea about the access of three predominant communities to the most aspired stream.

Table 6.26: Community background of the students enrolled in B.Sc. Degree level at Government College, Gangtok

Communities	1996-97	1997-98
Lepcha	03 (2.5)	06 (3.9)
Bhutia	13 (10.7)	17 (11.1)
Nepalese	91 (75.0)	108 (70.6)
Sherpa	03 (2.5)	04 (2.6)
Others	11 (9.1)	18 (11.8)
Total	121 (100.00)	153 (100.00)

Source: Degree College, Gangtok.

The Table above shows that among the students enrolled for B.Sc. degree the Lepchas were only 2.5 per cent and 3.9 per cent in 1997 and 1998 respectively. The Bhutias had a much healthy share with 10.7 per cent and 11.1 per cent in the respective years. The Nepalese recorded the highest percentage in both the years with 75 per cent and 70.6 per cent respectively. The Government Degree College at Gangtok is the only college in the state that offers Honours Degree in a number of subjects. Honours degree provides the window to post graduate degree. A look at the community-wise break up of students enrolled in Honours course in science subjects like Botany, Zoology and Chemistry also reveals no different trend.

Table 6.27: Distribution of students enrolled in B.Sc. (Honours) according to community

Communities	1995	1996	1997
Lepcha	-	02 (5.4)	01 (2.6)
Bhutia	02 (6.7)	06 (16.2)	01 (2.6)
Nepalese	24 (80.00)	23 (62.2)	35 (89.7)
Others	04 (13.3)	06 (16.2)	02 (5.1)
Total	30 (100.00)	37 (100.00)	39 (100.00)

Source: Degree College, Gangtok.

The Table 6.27 shows that the share of Lepcha students among the students enrolled in Honours course in science subjects is very negligible. The percentage of Bhutia students had gone up to 16.2 per cent in 1996 but fell to 2.6 per cent in 1997. The Nepalese here predominate and their percentage went up to 89.7 per cent in 1997. 'Others' here represent the plainsmen.

However, the analysis so far gives only a partial story. Sikkim still has inadequate infrastructure for higher education. Hence, the meritorious students are being provided scholarships and seat reservation for higher educational and professional training in various parts of the country. Table 6.28 gives the community-wise breakup of students, who were awarded scholarship and seat reservation in the year 1996-97.

It is important to mention here that the quota provided by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for various courses like B.V.Sc, B.Sc.(Agriculture) and Horticulture, Agricultural Engineering has been stopped since 1997. Since then only those, who managed to get seat through open competition are being allotted scholarship by the State Government. This is the reason for non-allotment of students in these courses in 1997.

The norms for seat reservation for various courses for different communities are as follows:

- 23% for Scheduled Tribes,
- 6% for Scheduled Castes,
- 21% for Other Backward Classes,

(The bifurcation of Other Backward Classes and non-Backward Classes for seat allotment has been done since 1997. Hence the Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes are clubbed together as Nepalese for the study) and 15% for domicile holders from other communities, who have been residing and serving in Sikkim for long.

From Table 6.28, it is apparent that the indigenous Lepchas have not yet been able to accrue the real benefits of reservation meant for them for higher studies. Out of 180 students nominated in the year 1996 the Lepchas constituted an alarmingly low share of 5%, which is far below their population ratio. The year 1997 did not prove a blessing for them, with a marginal increase to 6.5% only. In the most highly aspired sphere of medical science, the Lepcha students accounted for only 3.8% in

Table 6.28 : Community-wise break-up of the students selected for scholarship and seat reservation for studies outside the state, 1996-1997

Sl. No.	Name of Courses	1996										1997				
		Lepcha	Bhutia	Sherpa	Scheduled Caste	General	Total	Lepcha	Bhutia	Sche- duled Castes	OBC	General	Total			
1.	MBBS & BDS	01 (3.8)	09(34.7)	-	01 (3.8)	15 (57.7)	26 (100.00)	--	09(42.9)	1 (4.8)	4(19.00)	21(100.00)				
2.	Bachelor of Engineering	04 (10.5)	09(23.7)	02 (2.6)	02 (5.3)	22 (59.9)	38 (100.00)	04 (9.1)	14(31.8)	5 (11.4)	15(34.1)	44(100.00)				
3.	B. V.Sc.	-	02(40.00)	-	-	03(60.00)	05 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
4.	B.Sc.(Forestry)	-	01(100.00)	-	-	-	01 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
5.	B.Sc.(Agril.)	-	-	-	-	02(100.00)	02 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
6.	B.Sc.(Horticulture)	-	01(100.00)	-	-	-	01 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
7.	Agril. Engineering	-	-	-	-	01(100.00)	01 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
8.	Hotel Management	-	01(25.00)	01(15.00)	-	02(50.00)	04 (100.00)	01(20.00)	01(20.00)	-	03(60.00)	05(100.00)				
9.	Printing Technology	-	-	-	-	02(100.00)	02 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
10.	Handloom Technology	-	01(100.00)	-	-	-	01 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
11.	B. Pharmacy	-	-	-	01(100.00)	-	01 (100.00)	-	-	-	01(100.00)	01(100.00)				
12.	Dairy Technology	-	-	-	-	01(100.00)	01 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
13.	B.A.	01 (4.8)	12 (57.1)	-	02 (9.5)	06 (28.6)	21 (100.00)	02(11.8)	12(70.6)	-	03(17.6)	17(100.00)				
14.	B.Com.	-	02 (33.3)	-	01 (16.7)	03 (50.00)	06 (100.00)	01(8.3)	07(58.4)	-	03(25.00)	12(100.00)				
15.	B.Sc.	-	02 (25.00)	-	01 (12.5)	05 (62.5)	08 (100.00)	-	02(33.3)	-	03(50.00)	06(100.00)				
16.	BA(LL.B)	01(16.7)	02 (33.3)	-	-	03 (50.00)	06 (100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
17.	BP.Ed.	01(5.6)	03 (16.6)	-	-	14 (77.8)	18 (100.00)	01(10.00)	03(10.00)	-	03(30.00)	10 (100.00)				
18.	C.P. Ed.	-	01 (33.3)	-	-	02 (66.7)	03(100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
19.	Diploma in Engineering	-	09 (30.00)	-	02 (6.7)	19 (63.3)	30 (100.00)	01 (2.7)	11 (29.7)	02 (5.4)	12 (32.5)	37 (100.00)				
20.	Sashtri	-	-	-	-	04(100.00)	04(100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
21.	M.Sc.	01(100.00)	-	-	-	-	01(100.00)	-	-	-	-	-				
22.	Total	09 (5.00)	55 (30.6)	02 (1.9)	10 (5.5)	104 (57.8)	180(100.00)	10(6.5)	59(38.6)	08(5.2)	29(19.00)	153(100.00)				

Source: Directorate of Education, Gangtok

1996 out of total 26 candidates nominated. The picture was more dismal in the year 1997 with no Lepcha nominee out of 21 students nominated for the MBBS.

Another highly aspired profession, engineering, also presents a grim scenario for the Lepchas, with only 10.5% in 1996 and 9.1% in 1997 of total students nominated. In the general courses like B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com also, the share of Lepcha students is not proportionate to their share of total population. In contrast the Bhutias, who are clubbed with the Lepchas as Scheduled Tribes, have the lions share of the reserved seats meant for the tribals. With a share of 30.6% in 1996 and 38.6% in 1997 of the total students nominated, the Bhutias apart from the reserved seats for Scheduled Tribes, have been able to corner a share of the seats meant for general categories too. They have dominant share of 34.7% and 42.9% respectively in 1996/97 in the M.B.B.S and BDS Courses and 23.7% and 31.8% in 1996/1997 of the nominated seats in Bachelor of Engineering courses. The Bhutia students have a high share of 70.6%, 58.4% and 33.3% in general courses like B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. respectively in 1997.

Another course, where the state government nominated the maximum number of candidates is Diploma in Engineering. Here too, the neglect of the Lepchas can well be gauged from the fact that out of 30 students nominated in 1996, the share of the Lepchas was nil and in 1997 they had the lowest share at 2.7% of 37 students nominated.

Apart from a very few plainmen, the general category comprises the Nepalese alone. Thus, taking the Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes together, the representation of Nepalese was also significant.

The reasons for Bhutias snatching most of the MBBS and Bachelor of Engineering seats as against the Lepchas are obvious. These professions demand merit as well as steady financial condition from the students. The Bhutias, most of whom occupy key positions in state bureaucracy have sound economic background, have their children educated in good public schools. Answering why small number of Lepchas are nominated- the Assistant Director of Scholarship Section, Education Department Mrs. A. Bhutia said, 'the selection is done on merit basis and normally they don't get the eligible Lepcha candidates'.

The analysis so far indicates that in the sphere of higher education, which is directly linked to the employment market, the indigenous Lepchas are trailing behind the Bhutias and the Nepalese. The Bhutias have made most of the reservation of quota

meant for the tribals in higher studies, leaving the Lepchas in the lurch. Because of their overall backwardness, lack of motivation and lack of competitive spirit, the Lepchas have not been able to make any significant headway in the sphere of education despite some special measures taken by the government. Universalization of education, which is provided free, is still a far cry inspite of significant development in educational infrastructure. The indigenous Lepchas have not succeeded in availing these incentives as compared to the Bhutias and the Nepalese. Although, interest for primary education has grown among all the communities, the momentum to avail the fruits of educational development does not seem to have taken a firm root among the Lepchas.

Employment and the People: A brief profile

Since ethnicity involves competition and conflict for political power, economic benefits and social status, an examination of the employment profile of the three ethnic communities would help to understand the inter-community relationship in the state. As state government is the biggest source of employment avenues, a general profile of employees in the government sector is presented here.

Table 6.29 : Total Number of Employees

Sex	1978		1994		Percentage Variation
	No.	%	No.	%	
Male	6205 86.18		15431	78.99	148.69
Female	995 13.82		4105	21.01	312.56
	7200 100.00		19536	100.00	171.33

Source: Census of Government Employees, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Gangtok.

Table 6.29 shows that the total number of employees in 1978 was 7,200, whereas the Census report of 1994 puts the figure at 19,536, i.e., an increase of 171.33% over the year. The percentage of women employees also increased from 13.82% to 21.01% of the total employees during the period. However the 1994 Census does not cover all the employees of Department of Education, Health and Family Welfare.³⁸ Had they been included the number of employees indicated should have been slightly more than what it is.

Table 6.30: The Percentage Distribution of Government Employees in the district
1978-1994

Class	East	North	South	West
	1978 1994	1978 1994	1978 1994	1978 1994
Gazetted	4.97 2.09	0.26 0.10	0.58 0.21	0.32 0.17
Non- Gazetted	60.64 52.55	7.67 7.80	11.33 17.56	13.75 15.11
Total	65.61 54.64	7.93 7.90	11.92 17.77	14.08 15.28

Source: Census of Government Employment, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Gangtok, 1995, p. 6.

Table 6.30 shows that in 1978 there was the highest (65.61%) concentration of government employees in East District followed by West (14.08%), South (11.92%) and North (7.93%). The picture has slightly changed in 1994, the East District's share has declined to 54.64%, whereas the South District has shown a considerable increase. The North and West have remained more or less static. Another significant trend noticed was a slight fall in the percentage of Gazetted class in all districts.

Community-wise Distribution of Government Jobs

The census of government employees, conducted by the Planning and Development Department in 1994 does not provide the community-wise break-up. The categorization has been done on the basis of social group like Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. However, 1978 Census of government employees provide the community-wise distribution.

Table 6.31: Distribution of State Government Employees according to community, 1978.

States	Community				Total & %
	Nepalese	Bhutias	Lepchas	Others	
Gazetted	179 (2.49)	92 (1.28)	34 (0.47)	140 (1.94)	445 (6.18)
Non-Gazetted	4128 (57.33)	1294 (17.94)	661 (9.18)	672 (9.33)	6755 (93.82)
	4307 (57.82)	1386 (19.25)	695 (9.65)	812 (11.28)	7200 (100.00)

'Others' means those who are treated as plains people

Source: Bureau of Economics and Statistics, 1985 as quoted in Amal Dutta, *Sikkim since Independence*, p. 14.

Table 6.32: Total Number and Percentage of SC/ST/Non-SC/ST Employees

Category	1978	Percentage	1994	Percentage
Scheduled Tribe	2093	29.06	5390	27.6
Scheduled Caste	435	6.04	1092	5.6
Non-SC/ST	4672	64.9	13054	66.8
Total	7200	100.00	19536	100.00

Source: Census of Government Employees – 1994 Bureau of Economics and Statistics, P. 5.

Table 6.31, based on the figures of state-government employees in 1978, shows that the Nepalese had the highest share of the employees at 57.82%. The Bhutias had a share of 19.25%, not low as compared to their population ratio, and the Lepchas constituted only 9.65%. The plainsmen, with 11.28 per cent of the employees had a larger share of the government jobs than the Lepchas. Another important feature to be noted is the lowest percentage of Lepchas in Gazetted category with an insignificant 0.47% only.

Table 6.32 on number and percentage of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe employees shows the increase in Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe employees in terms of number but in terms of percentage, there is a fall in 1994 as compared to 1978. The Scheduled Tribe employees who constituted 29.06% of the total employees in 1978 declined marginally to 27.6% in 1994. The same trend has been noticed in case of Scheduled Caste employees. However, there has been an increase in non-Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe employees.

The New Class and Hierarchy

The State Civil Service Commission came into being in 1981.³⁹ There is now State Civil Service, State police service and Forest Service, each having junior officers in junior scale and senior officers in senior scales and senior most officers in the selection grade. As such, the gazetted employees of the government may be categorized into two hierarchical categories of Grade A and Grade B by the Fourth Pay Commission, which has replaced the earlier categorization of Class I and II. Both groups include the higher officers and professionals in the occupational hierarchy. While Group C category means the non-gazetted employees with relatively lower position in occupational hierarchy, low rank professionals (like school teachers, junior engineers etc.) and white collar workers – clerks, assistants, technicians, kindered and inspectors.⁴⁰

The emerging new class in Sikkim is conceived as the most privileged class for whom pay is the prime index of prestige. The inter-class upward mobility is possible through promotion, open competition and possession of required skills, which may be through open selection, conducted by the State Public Service Commission. Hence judging from the above criteria, the bureaucracy includes a series of higher-level professionals and officers, arranged in a hierarchical order, who are regarded as the power behind the administration.

Representation of Ethnic Communities in State Bureaucracy

Table 6.33 gives the community-wise break up of officers belonging to grade A and B in various State Departments.

Table 6.33: Distribution of Group A and B Officers according to Community in 1997.

Scheduled Tribe	Scheduled Castes	Other Backward Castes	General	Total
325	43	232	449	1049
(31.00)	(4.7)	(22.1)	(42.8)	(100.00)

Source: Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms and Training, Tashiling Secretariat, Gangtok, December 1997.

The Table 6.33 puts the share of Scheduled Tribe officers at 31%, which is a satisfactory figure in terms of their population ratio. Clubbing Other Backward Castes (the OBCs), Scheduled Castes and the General Category together, the Nepalese are seen occupying a dominant position. Mention must be made of the plainsman community, which constitutes a part of the general category. Their share of government jobs could not be ascertained from the above Table but the general understanding is that their share has not been allowed to go up, since the state government has adopted the policy of preference for locals for all government services. The 'Bhumiputra' or 'the sons of the soil' policy has been the general consensus among all major political parties, which has been adopted by the state government.

Despite the commendable presence of Scheduled Tribes in the higher level of bureaucracy, the backwardness of the Lepchas is pronounced in their relatively low representation in the higher posts in state bureaucracy. The inaccessibility of the Lepchas or their poor representation can be judged from Table 6.34, which gives the community-wise distribution of the prestigious State Civil Services as on December, 1997.

Table 6.34: Community-wise breakup in State Civil Service Cadre (1997)

Community	Category and Percentage				Total	%
	Group A	%	Group B	%		
Lepchas	12	6.7	03	4.9	15	6.3
Bhutia	88	49.4	16	25.9	104	43.3
Nepalese	77	43.2	43	69.3	120	50.00
Others	01	0.6	-	-	01	0.4
Total	178	100.00	62	100.00	240	100.00

Source: Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms and Training, Gangtok, December 1997

Table 6.34, based on representation of the communities in State Civil Service, which is regarded as the most lucrative job in terms of salary, prestige, status and other privileges, provides an interesting insight. The Lepchas are poorly represented with 6.7% in Grade A and 4.9% in Grade B, thus constituting a mere 6.3% in total State Civil Service Cadre. The Bhutias, on the other hand, have the highest representation at 49.4% in Group A and 25.9% in Group B, thus constituting 43.3% of total State Civil Service Cadre. The Bhutias, with adequate representation, are the most dominant community in the state bureaucracy. The Nepalese, who are numerically the majority community, have the highest share in Group B with 69.3% share. They also constitute 50% of the total State Civil Service Cadre.

An important insight provided by the above information is the plainsmen have a share of 0.6% in Grade A and 0.4% in total. This shows a diminishing trend of this community in higher state level bureaucracy, as compared to Table 6.31, when it represented 1.94% of gazetted Officers and 9.33% of non-gazetted employees in 1978. The obvious reason is the 'policy of preference for the locals'. It is also a fact that in the post-merger period, the locals have come up to develop their human resources and have prepared themselves for higher jobs in state bureaucracy.

The higher representation of the Bhutias and the Nepalese in the highest level of state bureaucracy and very poor representation of the Lepchas can well be assessed from the following Table too.

Table 6.35: Community background of officers in National bureaucratic cadre.

Communities	Number of Officers and Percentage			
	I.A.S.	I.P.S.	I.F.S.	Total
Lepcha	-	-	-	-
Bhutias	12 (44.5%)	04 (17.4%)	05 (21.7%)	21 (28.8%)
Nepalese	06 (22.2%)	05 (21.7%)	06 (26.1%)	17 (23.3%)
Others	09 (33.3%)	14 (60.9%)	12 (52.2%)	35 (47.9%)
Total	27 (100.00%)	23 (100.00%)	23 (100.00%)	73 (100.00%)

Source: Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms and Training, Gangtok, December, 1999.

Table 6.35 shows that there is no Lepcha officer in the Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service and Indian Forest Service posted in the state. The Bhutias, in contrast have the lion's-share of the Indian Administrative Service category constituting 44.5% of the officers. They represent 17.4% and 21.7% in the Indian Police Service and Indian Forest Service category, respectively.

The Nepalese comprises 22.2% in the Indian Administrative Category followed by 21.7% in Indian Police Service and 26.1% in Indian Forest Service category, thus sharing 23.3% in the total officers belonging to all India level. Here, an interesting feature of the information is the largest percentage of 47.9% of plainsman community. Here they include those on deputation from the Center. They represent highest in the Indian Police Service (60.9%), followed by Indian Forest Service (52.2%) and Indian Administrative Service (33.3%) respectively. However, the Bhutias and the Nepalese representing nearly 52% of All India Service Category is indicative of the fact that the local Sikkimese are coming up to shoulder the responsibility of these high administrative posts.

A glance at the ethnic background of the top level administrative officers in the Indian Administrative Service category that consists of mostly the Secretaries of various Departments in the year 1992 would bring to light almost the same trend.

Table 6.36: Ethnic Composition of Top-Level Administrative Officers, 1992

Communities	Number	Percentage
Lepchas	02	7.1
Bhutias	13	46.5
Nepalese	11	39.3
Others	02	7.1
Total	28	100.00

Source: Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms and Training, Gangtok, 1992.

A few years back, in 1992 the Bhutias comprised 46.5% of the top administrative officers followed by Nepalese with 39.3%. The share of Lepchas was

the lowest at 7.1%, a percentage equivalent to that of the plainsmen. A comparative analysis of Table 6.35 and 6.36 would show a declining representation of the Lepchas in the higher posts in state bureaucracy; a fall from 7.1% in 1992 to no representation in 1997. The retirement of two Lepcha officers in the All India Administrative Service during this period has caused this decline.

Ethnic Composition of Employees in Education Department

The Census of Government Employees 1994 has shown that 6585 or 33.71% of the total state government employees are employed in the Education Department of the Government of Sikkim. It has also been revealed that the Education Department, the largest Department in terms of employment potential, has the highest number of post-graduates and graduates. In 1994 this Department had 77.09% of its employees with post-graduate degrees and 53.68% with graduate degree. From the Census Report, we could also know that there were 1670 Scheduled Tribe employees in Education Department, the highest in a single Department. Hence, a look into the community background of the school teachers, who constitute the largest number of employees in Education Department, would provide a valuable insight into how the ethnic communities are responding to the opportunities of employment thrown to them by the development activities in the post-merger period.

Table 6.37: Scheduled Tribe Teachers in Government Schools

Category of Teachers	Scheduled Tribes	Total
Pre-Primary Teachers	143 (18.8)	761 (100.00)
Primary Teachers	538 (19.8)	2721 (100.00)
Middle School Teachers	358 (21.5)	1662 (100.00)
Secondary School Teachers	330 ((21.7)	1523 (100.00)
Senior Secondary Teachers	180 (17.0)	1057 (100.00)
Total	1549 (20.05)	7724 (100.00)

Source: Directorate of Education, Gangtok (as on September 1997).

Table 6.37 shows that 20% of all school teachers in 1997 were from various Scheduled Tribes. They had relatively greater representation at middle school and secondary school level with 21% in each level.

It is important to mention that 'The Sikkim Official Languages Act, 1977', recognizes Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha languages as the official language.⁴¹ These subjects are being taught upto class XII levels in all schools recognized by the Central Board of Secondary Education as the vernacular subject of the respective communities. This may have been the cause of higher representation of the Scheduled Tribe teachers, who mostly constitute the language teachers teaching Lepcha and Bhutia languages.

Table 6.38: Lepcha/Bhutia Language Teachers as on March, 1998

Languages	Categories of Teachers			
	Primary Level	Secondary Level	Sr.Secondary Level	
Lepcha	400	40	05	445 (52.2%)
Bhutia	338	54	15	407 (47.8%)
Total	738	94	20	852(100.00%)

Source : Language Section, Education Department, Gangtok, March 1998

The Table 6.38 shows that there is good number of teachers teaching Bhutia and Lepcha languages at all levels of school education. Of the total Bhutia and Lepcha language teachers, 52.2 per cent are Lepchas and 47.8 per cent are Bhutias. Besides language teachers, the number of Lepcha teachers teaching other general subjects is insignificant compared to teachers belonging to Nepali and Bhutia communities. A further evidence of lower participation of Lepcha and Bhutia teachers in general subjects could be found from the Table 6.39.

I could not collect data on graduate and post-graduate teachers in the secondary and senior secondary schools of South and West districts, since those were under compilation. However, I had access to the data on two other districts, North and East, with highest Lepcha and Bhutia concentration. The Lepchas constituted 7% of total teachers in North and East districts. Although, they were 12.4% in North district, it still was low compared to the percentage share of the Bhutia and the Nepali teachers. The Bhutias constituted 16.2% in North and 17.1% in East district, thus comprising 16.9% of the total graduate and post - graduate teachers, taking two

Table 6.39: Ethnic Composition of Graduate and Post-Graduate Teachers including Heads of Schools in North and East Districts.

Ethnic Group	Districts		Total (%)
	North (No. and %)	East (No. and %)	
Lepcha	23 (12.4)	52 (5.8)	75 (7.0)
Bhutia	30 (16.2)	152 (17.1)	182 (16.9)
Nepalese	69 (37.2)	510 (57.3)	579 (53.9)
Others	63 (34.1)	175 (19.7)	238 (22.2)
Total	185 (100.00)	889 (100.00)	1074 (100.00)

Source: Planning Section, Education Department, July 1998.

districts together. The Nepali teachers were the largest in this category with a share of 53.9% of the teachers in two districts.

Another revealing feature of the above Table is that 34.1 per cent of the teachers in the North district and 19.7% in the East district were from among the plainsmen. The high presence of plainsmen in teaching profession is all the more significant particularly when the State Government is serious in pursuing the policy of “sons of the soil” in distribution of jobs. The situation therefore could be explained by the fact that although local graduates have come up to take the teaching assignment in Arts and Science subjects, there is still scope for outsiders for teaching subjects like mathematics and other science subjects. Teachers belonging to plainsmen community have the greater presence in North district, which has the shortage of educated manpower.

If we see the position of college teachers, where higher academic qualification is needed, the trend is not different. Table 6.40 indicates that only 23.6% of the college teachers are from Sikkim, while the remaining 76.4% are from other states. Although the Nepalese are numerically dominant with 63.7% of the total college teachers, only 20% are from Sikkim, the remaining teachers are from the neighbouring Darjeeling district and other states. The Bhutias constitute 3.6% of the

Table 6.40: Ethnic Composition of the Teachers of Sikkim Govt. College, March, 1998

Ethnic Groups	Teachers in Total	College Teachers from Sikkim			
		Male	Female	Total	Percentage
	-	-	-	-	-
Bhutia	02 (3.6)	01	01	02	3.6%
Nepalese	35 (63.7)	05	06	11	20.00%
Others	18 (32.7)	-	-	-	-
Total	55 (100.00)	06	07	13	23.6%

Source: Sikkim Degree College, Gangtok, 1998

teachers, whereas there is none representing the indigenous Lepcha Community of Sikkim.

Conclusion

The development process, which has been intensified in the state in the post-merger period, has opened up new opportunities for the indigeneous Bhutia-Lepchas as well as the Nepalese settled down in the state. The people from the plains too have migrated into the state to avail of the new employment opportunities. A new environment of competition for resources has also been created. People belonging to various ethnic communities and occupying differential social and economic status are preparing themselves to make use of the opportunities. Two distinct manifestations of the development process have been: (1) a new class of neo-elite has emerged, and (2) the competition for resources and opportunities have given birth to uneven competition among the three predominant communities of Sikkim.

Unequal control of resources and opportunities by the communities has resulted into a sense of relative deprivation particularly among the Lepchas.

The land, which forms the basis of agrarian economy, is no longer the monopolistic domain of the indigenous Lepchas. With the passage of time, it has changed hands from the Lepchas to the Bhutias and the Nepalese.

The ecological constraints have hindered the large-scale industrial growth in the state. But the small-scale industries, which have multiplied in the post-merger era, are in the hands of the Nepalese and the Bhutias. The Lepchas hardly control industries in the state.

Business in the urban and commercial centers is largely controlled by the Marwari settlers. The state has achieved all round development in all sectors of economy; the net domestic product has risen and the sector-wise annual plan outlay has increased. The government has invested more on development of educational infrastructure, health facilities, modernization of agriculture and veterinary services, industrial growth, power generation and transportation and communication. The new class has benefited the most from these developmental activities.

The adverse impact of the development process has been that the intercommunity inequality has grown and the resources have changed hands from one community to other. The Lepchas, the indigenous tribes of Sikkim, have not been able to take the fruits of development equally with the Bhutias and the Nepalese. Unequal control over human resources such as education, power, access to information by these communities may have been the reason. The Lepchas have a very low representation in all sectors like education, employment and in higher level of state bureaucracy as compared to the Bhutias, who forms the creamy layer in state bureaucracy, and the Nepalese, who by virtue of numerical strength have dominated the scene. The unequal distribution of opportunities, coupled with the social and cultural differences among the communities, has provided enough ground for ethnic group formation. With the emergence of new educated class, the scope for mass mobilization and politicization of issues on ethnic line has widened to give impetus to ethnic politics in Sikkim.

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Chapter – VII

The New Class and Ethnic Formation

A new class consisting of the educated bureaucrats, professionals, managerial class, teachers in schools and colleges and political elite has come up with the introduction of the democratic process and developmental activities after the merger of Sikkim with India in 1975. This class is more like a 'class in itself', occupying similar position in the production relations and having a comparable life style, but the constituents of the class show little sign of forming a 'class for itself' since they are a fragmented lot divided on ethnic line and hardly have a class objective in terms of their political actions. The new class, which can be termed as the middle class as well, could, theoretically speaking, come out of their primordial identities and consciousness and form a progressive modern, secular class to give political and social directions. A contrasting possibility could have been to work for ruling class hegemony in a 'bourgeois' social formation. A third possibility is that the members of the new class work as individuals with a self defined personalised agenda, which are not part of any class consciousness and whatever collective consciousness they adhere to is ethnic consciousness. The members of the new class belonging to a particular ethnic group show some degree of solidarity with the cause of their respective ethnic group.

In the previous chapter, the developmental profile and the process of emerging new educated class among three ethnic groups, in the post-merger Sikkim has been discussed. Also been discussed their access in various educational and occupational opportunities.

Since ethnic communities are created and transformed by particular elite in modernising societies, it is proposed to explore certain questions: who constitute the new class ? What makes them so ? The basic queries would also attempt to bring out the socio-economic background of the new class and their opinion on the major ethnic issues. Answer to these queries would highlight their contribution in functioning and formation of ethnic communities. However, the information presented here is based on a survey of 103 respondents belonging to three ethnic communities, with the help

of questionnaire. Although nearly 200 questionnaires were distributed, only 103 responded.

Personal Background of the Informants

Age: Dividing the respondents into four age-groups, i.e. 25-35 years, 35-40 years, 45-55 years and 55 +, we have found that the majority of the respondents i.e. 80% belonged to 25-45 age group. Nearly 1.9% of the respondents were above 45 years. It shows that the majority of the respondents were relatively young. Table 7.1 would give us the distribution of the respondents in various age groups.

Table 7.1: Age of respondents

Age (in years)	Number	Percentage
25-35	33	32.03
35-45	51	49.51
45-55	17	16.5
55 +	02	1.9
Total	103	100.00

Place of birth: A large majority i.e. 72.8% of the respondents were born in rural areas and 27.1% in urban areas (Table 7.2). Hence, there has been a shift from the place of birth to the place of work for the majority of the respondents.

Table 7.2: Place of birth of respondents

Place of birth	Number	Percentage
Rural	75	72.8
Urban	28	27.1
Total	103	100.00

House ownership: Almost 52% of the respondents still owned one house only at the place of birth. They live in the hired houses at the place of work. However, a significant section of the respondents, comprising 48.5%, owned two houses, one at the place of birth and another at the place of work (Table 7.3). It shows that while keeping relationship with the natal village, the new educated service class has established new houses in the place of work in urban areas too.

Table 7.3: House status of the respondents

No. of household	No. of respondent	Percentage
Dual household	50	48.5
Single household	53	51.4
Total	103	100.00

Length of service of respondents: A significant part i.e. 29.1% of the respondents have been working for more than 21 years whereas the rest, nearly 70%, were recruited in the post-merger era; 13.7% of whom were recruited in the last four years. The length of service of rest of the respondents ranges between 5 to 20 years. Table 7.4 shows the length of service of the respondents.

Table 7.4: Length of service of the respondents

Length of service	Number	Percentage
1 – 4 years	14	13.7
5 – 8 years	11	10.6
9 – 12 years	17	16.5
13 – 16 years	16	15.5
17 – 20 years	15	14.5
21+ years	30	29.1
Total	103	100.00

Ethnicity, Religion and Language: Ethnicity has always been a basis of resource distribution and access to political authority in Sikkim. Earlier, 'parity' system was followed and now the membership to the state legislative assembly is decided following a reservation policy on ethnic line. Hence, it would be highly useful to know the ethnic background of the respondents.

Table 7.5: Ethnic background of respondents

Ethnic group	Number	Percentage
Lepcha	19	18.4
Bhutia	27	26.12
Nepalese	57	55.3
Total	103	100.00

The largest group of respondents i.e. 55.3% was drawn from numerically dominant Nepali community, followed by the Bhutias (26.12%) and the Lepchas (18.4%). Representation of the Lepchas was low partly because they were shy of returning the schedule-cum-questionnaire. A look at the caste composition of the Nepali respondents would show that the Bahuns with 22.8% constituted the largest group, followed by Rai, Limboo and Tamang with 12.2% representation for each caste, while another 8.7% belonged to Chhetri and Newar castes. Other castes/ethnic-groups like Magar, Thakuri, Kami, Sherpa had a very small representation with 1.7% each. 7% of the respondents did not specify their ethnic sub-groups. Table 7.6 gives the caste break-up of the Nepali respondents.

Table 7.6: Caste break-up of Nepali respondents

Caste/ Ethnic sub-groups	Number	Percentage
Bahun	13	22.8
Rai	7	12.2
Limboo	7	12.2
Tamang	7	12.2
Chhetri	5	8.7
Newar	5	8.7
Gurung	4	7.0
Kami	2	3.5
Sherpa	1	1.7
Magar	1	1.7
Thakuri	1	1.7
Not specified	4	7.0
Total	57	100.00

Religion: Buddhism and Hinduism are two predominant religions in Sikkim comprising 27.1% and 68.4% respectively of the total population as per 1991 Census. Table 7.7 shows the ethnic and religious backgrounds of the respondents.

Table 7.7: Ethnicity and religion of respondents

Religion	Ethnic Group (Number and Percentage)			
	Nepalese	Bhutias	Lepchas	Total
Hinduism	43 (75.4)	-	-	43 (41.7)
Buddhism	08 (14.03)	26 (96.2)	14 (73.6)	48 (46.6)
Christians	01 (1.75)	01 (3.70)	05 (26.3)	07 (6.7)
Yamaism	05 (8.7)	-	-	05 (4.8)
Total	57 (100.00)	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

The Table reveals that of the Nepali respondents 75.4% were Hindu, 14.3% Buddhists and 1.75% Christians. 8.7% of the Nepalese belonging to Limboo community mentioned their religion as Yamaism. Most of the Bhutia respondents, more than 96%, were Buddhists and an insignificant minority (3.7%) were Christians. Among the Lepchas 73.6% were Buddhists. A significant part of the Lepcha respondents (26.3%) were Christians. Over all, the largest group among the respondents was Buddhist with a share of 46.7%, followed by Hindus with 41.7%; 6.7% and 4.8% of total respondents were Christians and Yamais respectively.

Language: Nepali language is the lingua franca and a means of communication for all the communities in Sikkim. Moreover, the state government has recognized Nepali, Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo as the official languages of the state. Recently, the Sikkim Democratic Front Government has recognised Newar, Rai, Gurung, Magar, Sherpa and Tamang languages as the official languages of the state following the provisions of the Sikkim Official Languages (Amendment) Act, 1995. Table 7.8 gives the distribution of the respondents according to their mother tongue.

Table 7.8: Mother Tongue of the Respondents

Mother Tongue	Number	Percentage
Nepali	50	48.5
Lepcha	19	18.4
Bhutia	27	26.2
Limboo	06	5.8
Sherpa	01	0.9
Total	103	100.00

It is important to mention here that although the Nepali sub-cultural stocks like the Gurung, Newar, Rai, Magar, Tamang etc. have their own dialect, the respondents have recorded their mother tongue as Nepali the language commonly used. Table 7.8 shows that 48.5% of the respondents were Nepali speaking, 26.2% spoke Bhutia and 18.4% spoke Lepcha. The Limboo speaking section of the respondents accounted for 5.8% while 0.9% spoke Sherpa.

Being educated all the respondents were multilingual and could communicate in English and Hindi besides their mother tongue. A section of the respondents studied in various states of India and could speak Marathi, Tamil, Kannad, Bengali

and other Indian languages too. Hence, this new educated class, although operates in a wider social space and in a wider communication network, has been able to maintain its own social boundary by adopting a common life style.

Occupational Status: The new class hierarchy comprises internally stratified groups, which are differentiated according to range of skills, function, education, authority-cum- responsibility etc. As such, the higher occupational categories comprise those officials and professionals, who occupy senior gazetted ranks. The members belonging to gazetted ranks are again classified into Group A and Group B. The group B officers are relatively junior to those of group A, but are differentiated from group C, who are non-gazetted officials. As such, majority of the respondents, i.e. 48.54%, were of group B category, followed by group A officers comprising 29.12%, while 19.4% belonged to group C non-gazetted category (Table 7.9).

Table 7.9: Ethnicity & Occupational Status

Occupational Status	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Group A	14 (51.8)	01 (5.26)	15 (26.3)	30 (29.12)
Group B	10 (37.03)	09 (47.36)	31 (54.38)	50 (48.54)
Group C	03 (11.11)	09 (47.36)	08 (14.03)	20 (19.4)
Not Specified	-	-	03 (5.26)	03 (2.9)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

The officers in group A includes senior doctors, engineers, administrators, departmental heads at state and district level, who occupy the highest position in the occupational hierarchy.

The Bhutias have the highest share (51.8%) of group A officers whereas the Nepalese have the highest representation (54.38%) in-group B category. The Lepchas have an equal representation comprising 47.36% in both B and C groups. The Bhutias, thus, are numerically dominant among the most powerful Group A officers of state bureaucracy.

Occupation of the respondent's father: With the merger of Sikkim with the Union of India, large-scale developmental activities have been introduced. This has diversified the occupational structure and opened up new employment avenues for the Sikkimese. In order to understand the inter-generational occupational mobility it is

vital to see the occupational status of respondent's father. Table 7.10 gives the community-wise break-up of respondents' fathers and their occupations.

Table 7.10: Occupation of respondent's father

Occupational Category	Ethnic Groups (No. & Percentage)			
	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Government Service	11 (40.74)	02 (10.52)	15 (26.3)	28 (27.18)
Farmer	15 (55.55)	08 (42.10)	29 (50.87)	52 (55.04)
Priesthood	01 (3.70)	02 (10.52)	02 (3.50)	05 (4.85)
Contractor	-	-	04 (7.0)	04 (3.8)
Business	-	-	03 (5.26)	03 (2.9)
Politician	-	-	01 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
Mondal	-	01 (5.26)	-	01 (0.9)
Not mentioned	-	06 (31.5)	03 (5.26)	09 (8.7)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103(100.00)

Table 7.10 shows that 55.04% of the respondents' fathers were farmers and 27.18% were in government service. Among the rest were priests (4.85 %), contractors (3.8%), businessmen (2.9%), politicians (0.9%) and Mondals (0.9%). Nine respondents did not specify their fathers' occupation. A simultaneous look at the respondents' and their fathers' occupational status substantiates the fact that there has been an occupational mobility and shift in the occupational structure from farming, priesthood etc. to emerging new occupational categories like administrators, professionals, technicians and other white collar jobs requiring higher qualifications. With high salary, status and privileges the neo-elite professionals and government officials constitute a new class with exclusive life style and status. This class moves around with enormous power in everyday life. It deserves special mention that the majority of the respondents are first generation employees.

Educational Status: Education is the vehicle of social transformation and the main instrument to modernization of a backward society like Sikkim. Since modern education can provide the resource for entry into the new class, it is necessary to see the educational background of the respondents.

An analysis of the educational status of the respondents (Table 7.11) shows that 65.04% had Bachelor degree in various discipline like Medicine, Engineering, Veterinary Science, Agricultural Science, Technology, Science, Arts, Commerce and Law, 23.3% had Masters Degree and only 9.70% studied at the under-graduate level.

Among the respondents 1.94% had Ph.D. as well. The largest share of the respondents (37.5%) with Masters Degree in various disciplines was from the Bhutia

Table 7.11: Education level of the respondents

Level of Education	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total		
<i>Batchelor Degree:</i>						
Medical Science	02	02	02	06		
Engineering Science	-	-	02	02		
Veterinary Science	01	-	05	06		
Agricultural Science	-	01	08	09		
B. Technology	02	01	01	04		
B.A., B.Sc., B.Com. & LL.B.	10	09	21	40		
Total	15 (55.5)	13 (68.42)	39 (68.42)	67 (65.04)		
<i>Master Degree :</i>						
Medical Science	02	-	03	05		
Veterinary Science	02	-	01	03		
Agricultural Science	03	-	01	04		
M.A./M.Sc./M.Com.	03	-	09	12		
Total	10 (37.5)	-	14 (24.56)	24 (23.3)		
Ph.D.	01 (3.7)	-	01 (1.75)	02 (1.94)		
Diploma in Hotel Management	-	-	02	5.26	02	9.70
Higher Secondary	01 (3.7)	06 (31.5)	01		08	
Grand Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)		

community, 24.56% from the Nepali community. None of the Lepcha respondents had Masters degree. Among the Lepcha respondents 68.42% had Bachelor degree. The educational background of the respondents shows that most of the respondents have studied outside state of Sikkim in various professional, technical colleges and other centres of higher studies.

Educational status of respondent's father: To understand inter-generational mobility in education, it is necessary to see the educational background of the respondent's father.

A comparative analysis of respondents' and their fathers' educational status would show (Table 7.12) that there is an apparent gap in terms of their educational achievement. Almost 48.53% of the respondents' fathers were illiterate or 'literate upto primary level', who could just read and write, and 24.27% had studied between

Table 7.12: Educational status of respondent's father

Level of Education	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Illiterate	06 (22.22)	03 (15.78)	10 (17.54)	19 (18.44)
Literate upto Primary Level	09 (33.33)	05 (26.31)	17 (29.82)	31 (30.09)
Middle School Level	-	01 (5.26)	03 (5.26)	04 (3.88)
Matric/Higher Secondary	07 (25.92)	03 (15.78)	15 (26.3)	25 (24.27)
Graduate	04 (14.81)	01 (5.26)	03 (5.26)	08 (7.76)
Lamaist/Priesthood	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	02 (3.50)	04 (3.88)
Not Specified	-	05 (26.31)	7 (12.28)	12 (11.65)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

class X to XII. A small percentage of 7.76% were graduates and another 3.88% had religious or priestly education. 11.65% of the respondents did not specify the educational status of their father.

An ethnic break-up of the respondents' fathers and their education would reveal the same trend as that of the respondents. The Bhutia respondents had the highest percentage of graduates (i.e.14.81%); the percentage of graduates among the Nepalese and Lepchas was much less at 5.26% among each group (Table 7.12). This substantiates the fact that there has been an upward mobility in terms of educational status from the fathers' - to the respondents' generation.

Social position of the family: The members of the new educated class had relatively simple family status in the past generation. As high as 80% of the respondents had origin in average family of commoners. Only 8.7% of the respondents were of aristocratic origin. Among others, 4.85% were drawn from priestly families, 2.9 % from business families and 0.9% from traditional artisan families (Table 7.13).

An ethnic breakup of the respondents' social position would show more or less a similar picture; most respondents having an average family background. The Bhutias had the largest share (22.22 %) of families with aristocratic background. The Nepalese with 85.96% and Lepchas with 78.94% had the highest number of respondents with average family background. Thus, despite having non-aristocratic

Table 7.13: Social position of respondent's family

Details	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Commoners	19 (70.3)	15 (78.94)	49 (85.96)	83 (80.58)
Aristocratic/Local ruling Family	06 (22.22)	02 (7.40)	01 (1.75)	09 (8.7)
Priestly	01 (3.70)	02 (7.40)	02 (3.50)	05 (4.85)
Business Community	-	-	03 (5.26)	03 (2.9)
Traditional Artisan	-	-	01 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
Not Mentioned	01 (3.70)	-	01 (1.75)	02 (1.94)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

background most of the respondents have succeeded in raising their social position remarkably by means of education, personal initiative and hard work

Land holding and income level: Since it is difficult to collect reliable information on total income, the salary of the incumbents has been taken into account to measure their income. The members of the new service class of Sikkim have a secure source of income, which varies according to the position in the occupational structure.

Table 7.14: Monthly income of the respondents

Income	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total and Percentage
Upto Rs. 7,000/-	02	06	06	14 (13.59)
Rs. 7,000 – Rs. 10,000	03	07	11	21 (20.38)
Rs. 10,000 – Rs. 12,000	03	03	15	21 (20.38)
Rs. 12,000 – Rs. 14,000	08	01	10	19 (18.44)
Rs. 14,000 +	10	01	11	22 (21.35)
Not Specified	01	01	04	06 (5.82)
Total	27	19	57	103 (100.00)

Table 7.14 shows how the income of the respondents varies with their occupational status. The junior non-gazetted officers, who had a monthly income of less than Rs. 7,000 (as basic pay), constituted 13.59% of the respondents. The highest income group, with a monthly income of more than Rs. 14,000/-, constituted 21.35% of the respondents; the rest fell in the middle income groups with a monthly income between Rs. 7,000 and Rs. 14,000.

Land: Another factor that should be taken into consideration is access to landed property. Sikkim being an agrarian economy, land still holds a prominent place in people's priorities. However, the respondents were hesitant in disclosing information about the amount of land they held. Table 7.15 shows the amount of land held by the

informants. Some of the informants do not own land and have specified the land owned by their parents.

Table 7.15: Land held by the respondent

Land (in acres)	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total and Percentage
Landless	-	-	04	4 (3.8)
1 – 5	4	5	14	23 (22.3)
6 –10	4	4	6	14 (13.8)
11-15	2	-	1	03 (2.9)
15 +	3	-	3	06 (5.8)
Not Specified	14	10	29	53 (51.4)
Total	27	19	57	103 (100.00)

A large majority i.e. 51.4% of the respondents did not specify the land they held. Hence they are not represented. 3.8% of respondents all belonging to Nepalese ethnic stock were landless. A high percentage (i.e. 22.3%) of the respondents had small holdings between 1 and 5 acres, 13.8% owned land in between 6 and 10 acres, 2.9% had land between 11 and 15 acres and 5.8% held more than 15 acres of land. There was none among the Lepchas, who could be termed as big landowner but among the Bhutias and Nepalese there were 3 big landowners in each group.

Table 7.16: Length of Residence in Sikkim

Length of residence (in years)	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total (Percentage)
Since birth	27	19	52	98 (95.14)
30 years	-	-	05	05 (4.85)
Total	27	19	57	103 (100.00)

Table 7.16 shows that 95% of the respondents are staying in Sikkim since birth. However, small minority of 4.85% belonging to Nepali community lived in Sikkim for the last 30 years and were first generation migrants. The majority was in Sikkim for generations.

Organizational affiliations: Although not all but a significant part of all three ethnic communities were found associated with some caste or religious associations.

Table 7.17: Organizational affiliations of the respondents

Name of organisation	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total Percentage
Sikkim Tribal Association	03	-	-	03
Sikkimese Survival	01	-	-	01
Ronzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum	-	7	-	07
Religious Organisations	09	7 8	17	33
Sikkim Yakthung Sapsok Sangjumbo	-	-	06	06
Sikkim Kirat Rai Sangh	-	-	05	05
Newar Guthi	-	-	02	02
Scheduled Caste Association	-	-	02	02
Sherpa Associations	-	-	01	01
Not Specified	14 (51.85)	05 (26.31)	24 (42.10)	43 (41.47)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

On the whole, 58.25% of the respondents belonging to three ethnic groups were members of some kind of caste or religious associations. A significant percentage of 41.47% of the respondents did not specify the associations they were associated with. Among the Bhutias 48.14% were members of Sikkim Tribal Association, Sikkimese Survival and other religious organizations. 74% of the Lepcha respondents were members of 'Ronzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum' (Sikkimese Lepcha Progressive Association) and religious associations like Buddhist Associations, members of Churches and Kyong Tarjum (Village Level Lepcha Association). A significant 51.85 % of Bhutias and 26.31% of Lepchas respondents did not specify (Table 7.17) the names of their associations.

Among the Nepalese, the members of different sub-cultural stocks were members of caste associations like 'Akhil Limboo Kirat Chumlong', 'Sikkim Yakthung Sabsok Sangjumbo' (Sikkim Limboo Literary Association), 'Akhil Kirat Rai Sangha', 'Newar Guthi', 'Scheduled Caste Association', Sherpa Associations and other religious associations like Chinmaya Mission, Sri Sai Samity, Buddhist Associations, Church Members and Pranami Mandir etc. It appears one-fourth of the respondents were organisationally active in various capacities. The organisation may be put into two broad categories – Religious and Caste Associations. The increasing number of the members of various associations shows the increasing ethnic consciousness among the new class too. The growing awareness and tendency of new educated class to be the member of caste association, obviously plays an important role in ethnic group formation.

Affiliation to Political Party: Living in a small state the intellectuals and professionals know each other personally and people hesitate to express their political opinion and their political affiliations in fear of being identified. It often works in the mind of the people in government service that if their association with an opposition party is disclosed, they may be victimized and discriminated against. Hence, 18.4% of the total respondents preferred not to disclose their political preferences or affiliations (Table 7.18).

To the questions "which political party are you ideologically sympathetic to? Why do you support? a wide range of responses was available: 17.4% of the respondents had shown preference for the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front, 26.2 % did not show any preference to any political party. Not showing any sympathy to any political party, a fifty years old Nepali Group A officer commented – 'Instead of being a medium of higher social achievement, modern political parties have degenerated into a profession. I do not have any sentimental and emotional attachment to any political party. It is only a compulsion that you have to choose a lesser evil'. Another Group B Officer commented ' All Political Parties make false

Table 7.18: Preference for Political Party

Political Party	Ethnic Groups (Number and Percentage)			
	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Sikkim Democratic Front	3 (11.11)	1 (5.26)	14 (25.56)	18 (17.4)
Sikkim Sangram Parisad	-	2 (10.52)	1 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
Indian National Congress (I)	2 (7.40)	1 (5.26)	2 (3.50)	05 (4.8)
Regional Party	4 (14.8)	2 (10.52)	20 (35.08)	26 (25.2)
National Party	1 (3.70)	1 (5.26)	01 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
Leftist	1 (3.70)	-	01 (1.75)	02 (1.9)
None	11 (40.74)	10 (52.6)	06 (10.5)	27 (26.2)
No Comment	05 (18.51)	02 (10.52)	12 (21.05)	19 (18.4)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

promises'. A Bhutia Officer said – 'All political parties are thugs'. Not supporting any political party, 33 years old Karma Loday, a Group B officer belonging to Lepcha community, who was also the General Secretary of 'Renjong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum' (Sikkim Lepcha Progressive Association) commented 'No political party has come out openly to support the cause of Lepcha community'. Voicing in the same tone Mr. Ugen Shipmoo, another Lepcha Officer, opined – 'I do not have any faith in any political party. Since the advent of democracy in Sikkim, no government (even opposition) has voiced any concern and interest for Lepcha community. Since we are in minority, I do not expect that our community will ever have a favourable government in future too'. The same feeling of apprehension was noticed when a 40 years old Lepcha teacher denied any sympathy to any political party, since no party thinks about the upliftment of the minority community.

Showing preference for the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front a young 28 years old non-gazetted government servant belonging to Nepali Rai community commented, "S.D.F's manifesto are excellent. Moreover, the president i.e. present Chief Minister is our "Rai Raja". Another Nepali officer had shown preference for the ruling party for its pro-poor policy. Another officer opined that 'the present Sikkim Democratic Front has implemented Other Backward Commission's bill in Sikkim'.

Instead of specifying any particular political party, 25% of the respondents had indicated preference for a regional party, whereas those supporting National Party were only 2.9 %. Justifying preference for a regional party, a 41year old Bhutia-Officer commented, ‘A regional party is more concerned about the local issues and it does understand and safeguard the regional interest and aspiration of the Sikkimese people much more than a National party’. Another 40 years old Nepali officer answered in the same vein, “if we support the national party there will be more influx of the people from other states, which would affect our economy badly”. Another officer justified his support for regional party saying ‘it would safeguard article 371(f)’.

The respondents supporting Sikkim Sangram Parisad and Leftist were 2.9% and 1.9% respectively.

Relationship with the people of own community holding high posts: We received varied responses to the query, if the respondent knew the people from own community holding high posts. If so, who are they? Table 7.19 lists down the diverse views and responses.

Table 7.19: Members of community holding high posts

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Yes, I know my relatives	20 (70.07)	05 (26.31)	32 (56.14)	57 (55.3)
They are many to name	02 (7.40)	01 (5.26)	02 (3.50)	05 (4.8)
They keep aloof	-	01 (5.26)	01 (1.75)	02 (1.9)
I can't bother	01 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
I don't know	04 (14.8)	03 (15.78)	12 (21.05)	19 (18.44)
They are very few	-	8 (42.10)	03 (5.26)	11 (0.6)
All Sikkimese are my Community	-	-	01 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
No Comment	-	1 (5.26)	06 (10.52)	07 (6.7)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103(100.00)

About 70.07% of the Bhutia respondents maintained in the affirmative that ‘they were their relatives’, whereas those with similar response among the Lepchas and Nepalese were 26.31% and 56.14% respectively. A large section of the Lepcha respondents, comprising 42.10%, considered that people of their community holding

high posts were few, whereas 5.26% of the Nepali respondents gave similar response. 7.40% of the Bhutia respondents maintained that ‘there were many to name from their community who were holding high administrative posts’. The Lepcha and Nepali respondents airing similar response accounted for 5.26% and 3.50% of the respondents respectively. 14.8 % of Bhutias respondents held that ‘they didn’t know others in administration from their community. The Lepchas and Nepalese in the same response category were 15.78% and 21.05% respectively. One Nepali respondent reported that ‘all Sikkimese are my community’. 1.9% considered that ‘they keep aloof from the mass’. A Nepali respondent held, “I know many but they are of little help for the development of my community”, whereas another Nepali Officer affirmed, ‘High posts are represented by almost all communities’. 5.26% of the Lepcha and 10.52% of Nepali respondents refrained from commenting.

Problems of development of fellow community people: To the query, ‘what are the major problems of development of the fellow people of your community?’ wide range of responses was found.

Table 7.20: Problems of development of fellow people

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Poverty				
Lack of education and awareness	19 (70.0)	16 (84.21)	46(80.70)	81 (78.6)
Indifferent government’s policies and improper planning	7 (3.70)	2 (10.52)	3 (5.26)	06 (5.82)
Division in religion	-	01 (5.26)	-	01 (0.9)
Loss of Sikkimese identity	1 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
Lack of social cohesion	2 (7.40)	-	03 (5.26)	05 (4.85)
Reservation for others	-	-	4 (7.01)	04 (3.88)
Unemployment	-	-	1 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
Not Aware	1 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
No Problem	2 (7.40)	-	-	02 (1.94)
No Comment	1 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

Table 7.20 shows that a significant majority (78.6%) of the respondents considered poverty and lack of education as the main barriers in the way to development of the fellow people of their community. Among the ethnic communities

84.21% of the Lepcha respondents, 70% of the Bhutia and 80.70 % of the Nepali respondents singled out education and poverty as the major problems of development. 10.52% of the Lepcha-, 5.26% of the Nepali- and 3.70% of the Bhutia respondents identified 'indifferent government policies and improper planning' as the main barrier of development. One Bhutia respondent felt 'the loss of Sikkimese identity' as the problem of development of their fellow community. Another 7.4% Bhutia- and 5.26% Nepali respondents felt that 'lack of social cohesion' among the community members was hindering their development. 1.75 % of the Nepali respondents maintained 'unemployment' as the major problem. While 3.7% of the Bhutia respondents were not aware of problem, 7.4% of this community held the view that there was no problem at all. One Bhutia respondent abstained from commenting. 7.01% of the Nepali respondents felt 'reservation for others' as the major problem of development of the fellow people of their community.

Helping the community fellows to come up: Various opinions to the question 'How do you help the fellow people to come up?' have been presented in Table 7.21.

Table 7.21: How to help community fellows?

Response	Number and Percentage
Educative advice	61 (59.22)
Social Work	01 (0.97)
Through writ-up, songs and display drama	01 (0.97)
Guiding agriculture and animal husbandry in scientific way	06 (5.82)
Implementing economic development schemes	02 (1.96)
Extending all possible help	05 (4.85)
Making aware of rights and privileges	01 (0.97)
Helping through community association	08 (7.76)
Career guidance	04 (3.88)
Free health check-up	01 (0.97)
Not particularly personnel	07 (6.79)
No Comment	06 (5.82)
Total	103 (100.00)

Among the respondents 59.22% opined that fellow community men could be helped by extending 'educative advice', only 0.97% were in favour of helping 'through social work' and another 0.97%, thought that fellow community men could

be helped by raising an awareness through writings, songs and plays. Another 5.82% opined that guiding scientific methods in agriculture and animal husbandry could lead to development of the community and 1.96% thought that development is possible through implementation of economic development schemes. 4.85% of the respondents suggested extension of all possible help to the members of their community and 0.97% thought that development is possible by making them aware of their rights and privileges. Among other devices 7.76% were in favour of helping through community associations, 3.88% thought of helping through career guidance, 6.79% thought that there was no need for any special favour for their community fellows and 5.82% did not comment.

Feelings for other communities: Being asked about their feelings for other communities, the respondents came forward with a wide range of answers. The answers have been presented in the following Table.

Table 7.22: Feelings about other Community

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
Positive or Cordial	15 (55.55)	12 (68.42)	38 (66.00)
Should live in harmony	2 (7.40)	-	11 (19.2)
Depends on individual	1 (3.7)	-	-
Neutral	2 (7.40)	-	-
Except few rest are on equal footing	1 (3.7)	01 (5.26)	02 (3.50)
They out-numbered local	1 (3.7)	01 (5.26)	-
They don't understand Minority	1 (3.7)	02 (10.52)	-
Drag own community towards others	-	02 (10.52)	-
They are opportunists	-	-	02 (3.50)
Not friendly	-	-	02 (3.50)
No Comment	4 (14.8)	-	02 (3.50)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

As Table 7.22 would suggest, 55.55% of the Bhutia-, 68.42% Lepcha- and 66% of the Nepali respondents felt that the intercommunity relationship was cordial. 7.4% of the Bhutia- and 19.2% of the Nepali respondents felt that they should live in harmony. Among other Bhutia respondents 3.7% felt that the relationship would depend on individuals concerned, and another 3.7% opined, 'except few, rest are on

equal footing' This opinion has been shared by 5.26% of the Lepcha and 3.5% Nepali respondents. 3.7% of the Bhutia and 5.26% of the Lepcha respondents felt that the Nepalese, who have out-numbered the locals, do not understand the feelings of the minority. 3.5% of the Nepali respondents felt that other communities are opportunists and do not want them to prosper, and another 3.5% of the Nepali respondents admitted that the relationship with the members of other communities is not friendly. 14.8% of the Bhutia and 3.5% of the Nepali respondents did not comment.

Expressing his opinion about the Bhutias, a Nepali officer belonging to Group B said, 'the Bhutias of Gangtok with aristocratic background are communal'. Expressing similar sentiment, another Group A Nepali officer commented 'too much importance is being given to Bhutias though they don't deserve it'. A twenty eight years old non-gazetted government employee opined 'all communities except the Bhutias and Tibetans are friendly'. Replying the same question a Lepcha non-gazetted employee opined, 'the members of other communities always create trouble by resorting to violence.'

Respondents' Attitude Towards Other Communities: Related to the earlier question another question was asked: How do the people of your community express their attitudes towards other communities? The responses are arranged in Table 7.23.

Table 7.23: Attitude towards members of other communities

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
Positive/Sympathetic	17 (62.9)	10 (52.63)	33 (57.8)
Mixed	06 (22.2)	03 (15.78)	05 (8.77)
Negative	-	02 (10.5)	01 (1.75)
No Idea	3 (11.11)	01 (5.26)	05 (8.77)
Depends on Individuals & situation	-	01 (5.26)	07 (12.28)
Shows no Concern	-	-	02 (3.50)
No Comment	01 (3.70)	02 (10.5)	04 (7.0)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

Majority of respondents belonging to all three communities have expressed positive/sympathetic attitude towards the members of other communities. I could identify 62.9% of the Bhutia-, 52.63% of Lepcha- and 57.8% of the Nepali respondents who had this kind of attitude. Those who had expressed indifferent attitudes comprised 22.2% of the Bhutia-, 15.78% of the Lepcha- and 8.77% of the

Nepali respondents. 10.5% of the Lepcha- and 1.75% of the Nepali respondents expressed negative attitude towards the members of other communities. While a certain percentage of all three communities maintained that they had no idea, 5.26% of the Lepcha- and 12.28% of the Nepali respondents felt that it depends on individuals and the situation. A small minority of all the three ethnic communities did not comment.

Views on Some Major Issues

An attempt was made to know the positions of the respondents on a number of current issues, which had political and ethnic undertones. The sub-sections to follow would deal with the views of the new class on various such issues.

Exemption of Central Income Tax: The exemption of central income tax was one of the main issues in the 1994 Assembly election. It was on this issue that Mr. Bhandari's fourteen years old rule ended. The problem arose when exemption of central income tax to Scheduled Tribes was withdrawn by the Parliament, when the majority Nepali community too demanded similar tax exemption. A query was made on the question: to whom the central income tax exemption be given – the Scheduled Tribes or the whole of Sikkimese? It is to be noted that the Lepchas and Bhutias have been enlisted as Scheduled Tribes by Scheduled Tribe Order of 1978. The responses received are presented in Table 7.24.

Table 7.24: Who to exempt central income tax?

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
Scheduled Tribes to be exempted	06 (22.22)	04 (21.0)	-
Exempted to all	13 (48.14)	06 (31.5)	25 (43.85)
Sikkim should follow own income tax rule	01 (3.70)	-	01 (1.75)
Should be based on economic criteria to all	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	04 (7.01)
Should be extended to all communities	02 (7.40)	02 (10.5)	21 (36.84)
Must for business communities	-	-	01 (1.75)
No Comment	04 (14.8)	6 (31.5)	05 (8.77)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

The response (Table 7.24) shows that 22.22% Bhutias and 21.% Lepchas regarded that only Scheduled Tribes should be exempted from central income tax. While 48.14% - a considerable majority of Bhutias with 31.5% Lepchas and 43.85%

of Nepalese regarded that it should be exempted to all three ethnic communities of Sikkim. While 3.70% of the Bhutias felt that Sikkim should follow its own income tax rule. Another 3.70% of the Bhutias, 5.26% of the Lepchas and 7.01% of the Nepalese held that income tax policy should be based on economic criteria alone. A significant section of the Nepalese (36.84%), 10.5% of the Lepchas and 7.40% of the Bhutias maintained that tax should be extended to all communities. One Nepali respondent opined that it should be imposed to the business communities only. A certain percentage from all three communities abstained from commenting on the issue.

Restoration of seats for Nepalese in Sikkim Legislative Assembly: The Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance, 1979, has reserved 12 seats for the 'Bhutia-Lepcha' ethnic stocks, one seat for the 'Sangha' and two seats for the Scheduled Castes. The Ordinance also scrapped the provision of reservation of seats for the Sikkimese of Nepali origin and made the rest of the seats 'general' or unreserved. Since then, restoration of reserved seats for the Nepalese in the State Legislative Assembly, which was existing before the promulgation of Ordinance, has been an important political issue. Probing their reaction on the contentious issue of 'restoration of reserved seats for Nepalese in State Legislative Assembly,' the following responses from the respondents of three ethnic communities were received.

Table 7.25: Response to the question of restoration of seats for the Nepalese in State Legislative Assembly

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
For Sikkimese Nepalese only	13 (48.14)	09 (47.36)	50 (87.7)	72 (69.9)
No Need	05 (18.5)	06 (31.57)	-	11 (10.6)
Upto to the government to decide	02 (7.40)	02 (10.52)	01 (1.75)	05 (4.85)
No reservation for any community	-	-	01 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
Representations to all ethnic group as per population ratio	-	-	03 (5.26)	03 (2.91)
No Comment	07 (25.92)	02 (10.52)	02 (3.50)	11 (10.6)
Total	27(100.0)	19(100.0)	57(100.0)	103(100.0)

Table 7.25 shows that almost 70% of the respondents of all communities maintained that reservation of seats for the Sikkimese Nepalese should be restored. This includes 48.14% of the Bhutias, 47.36% Lepchas and 87.7% Nepalese respondents. A certain section, comprising 18.5% of the Bhutia, 31.57% of the Lepcha respondents, felt that there is no need of restoration of seats for the Nepalese.

A small percentage, i.e. 4.85% of the total respondents of all communities felt, 'it is upto the government to decide', while 1.75% of the Nepali respondent held that 'there should be no reservation for any community.' Another 5.26% of Nepali respondents held the view that reservation should be given to all ethnic groups as per population ratio. 10.6% of the respondents were silent on the issue.

Inclusion of Bahun-Chhetri-Newar in the list of Other Backward Classes: Since the implementation of Mandal Commission report in the early 1990s for the reservation of seats in employment for the Other Backward Classes, inclusion of left-out Nepalese Bahun-Chhetri-Newar - the higher caste Nepalese into the list of other Backward Class has always been an issue in Sikkim. On the question 'how do you react on inclusion of higher caste Nepalese into the list of Other Backward Class?' divergent opinions were expressed. The Table below shows the opinions of the respondents.

Table 7.26: Should the Bahun-Chhetri-Newar Castes be enlisted as Other Backward Class?

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Not Necessary	8 (29.62)	05 (26.31)	11 (19.29)	24 (23.3)
They should be included	07 (25.92)	08 (42.10)	35 (61.40)	50 (48.54)
Let government decide	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	-	02 (1.94%)
On economic basis	01 (3.70)	-	06 (10.5)	07 (6.79%)
No Comment	10 (37.03)	05 (26.3)	05 (8.77)	20 (19.41)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

Table 7.26 shows that 23.3% of the total respondents (representing all communities) answered in the negative and held that it is not necessary. This comprised 29.62% of the Bhutia-, 26.31% of the Lepcha- and 19.29% of the Nepali respondents. Another 48.54% of the respondents, which included 25.92% Bhutia, 42.10% Lepcha and 61.40% Nepali respondents, held that 'they should be included'. A significant 19.41% of the total respondents (representing all three communities) did not express any opinion on the issue. A small section, i.e. 6.79%, that included

Bhutia- and Nepali respondents, held the view that it should be on economic basis, while 1.94% felt that it is a matter to be decided by the government.

Inclusion of Limboo, Tamang, and Gurung into the list of Scheduled Tribe:

Closely related to the above issue is the demand for inclusion of Limboos, Tamangs and Gurungs in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Since the inclusion of these communities into the list of Scheduled Tribes means sharing of the available resources meant for Scheduled Tribes, division of opinions surfaced among the respondents and in the general people of the state.

Table 7.27: Should the Limboo-Tamangs and Gurungs be enlisted as Scheduled Tribes?

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
Strongly support	05 (18.5)	04 (21.05)	29 (50.8)
Not necessary	04 (14.8)	07 (36.84)	11 (19.29)
Provided reservation quota is increased	10 (37.03)	02 (10.52)	-
Let government decide	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	04 (7.01)
Reservation of Scheduled Tribe to be abolished	-	-	01 (1.75)
No hamper to my community, if included	-	-	01 (1.75)
Limboo only should be included	-	01 (5.26)	01 (1.75)
Sikkim to be declared a tribal state	-	-	02 (3.50)
No comment	07 (25.92)	04 (21.05)	08 (14.03)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

The response Table (7.27) indicates that 50.8% Nepalese strongly supported the issue. This percentage among Bhutias and Lepchas, supporting the issue, was 18.5% and 21.05% respectively. 'Not necessary' was the answer of 36.84% of Lepcha-, 14.8% of Bhutia- and 19.29% of Nepali respondents. 37.03% Bhutia and 10.52% Lepcha respondents opined that 'they can be included provided reservation quota of Scheduled Tribe is enhanced.' The answer to this question was thus prompted by each community's concern for their share of resources; no community was prepared to accept that their share is further reduced because of changes in the reservation policy. The Bhutias and Lepchas, the Scheduled Tribes in the state were

not prepared to share their share of resources with new groups of people demanding inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Significantly, 3.5% of the Nepalese respondents maintained that 'Sikkim should be declared as Tribal State'. It is worth mentioning that 25.92% of the Bhutias, 21.05% Lepchas and 14.03% Nepalese did not comment. One Bhutia respondent opined that the term 'Scheduled Tribe' needs proper definition in Sikkim.

Granting citizenship to the stateless: The issue of citizenship has arisen out of Sikkim Citizenship Order 1975 issued by the Union Government following the merger. The Order says, "Every person who immediately before 26th day of April, 1975 was a Sikkim subject under the Sikkim Subject Regulation 1961, shall be deemed to have become a citizen of India". However, many people, who had domiciled in Sikkim but were left out in Sikkim Subject Register due to ignorance, administrative lapses and political consideration, became virtually stateless. Since then granting citizenship to the stateless has been an important political issue. In probing the respondents' reaction on the issue, we have come across divergent opinions, which have been listed in Table 7.28.

Table 7.28: Granting citizenship to the stateless

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Yes, to be granted	5 (18.5)	4 (21.05)	17 (29.8)	26 (25.2)
Not to be granted	4 (14.8)	4 (21.05)	07 (12.2)	15 (14.5)
For bonafide Sikkimese with proper identification	9 (33.3)	7 (36.8)	26 (45.6)	42 (50.4)
Let leaders decide as per Constitution	8 (29.6)	1 (5.26)	03 (5.26)	12 (11.6)
No Comment	1 (3.70)	03 (15.7)	04 (7.01)	08 (7.76)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

As Table 7.28 would suggest, 25.2 % of the respondents were in favour of granting citizenship to the stateless. Supporting the issue, one Lepcha respondent said, 'This category of people are found mostly in indigenous Lepcha community and their citizenship status is yet to be defined'. One Nepali respondent was of the view that "with proper scrutiny citizenship should be granted to the stateless as it would benefit many Nepalese as well". Almost 51% felt that 'it should be granted to genuine Sikkimese only with proper identification'. Commenting in the negative 14.5 % held

the view that 'it should not be granted to the stateless'. Expressing his opinion against the issue, one Bhutia officer opined 'No, it should not be granted. Where does it end?' Another Bhutia respondent expressed his anger by saying 'nobody was left out during merger; those who got citizenship later were foreigners'. Voicing concern in the same tone, one Lepcha officer held, 'it will add another 75,000 to the state population and any further influx would affect not only the tribals but also non-tribals'. One Bhutia respondent maintained that 'the availability of land should be identified before citizenship is granted'. Another informant felt, 'it should be granted to those who had settled down in Sikkim before 1960'.

Representation of Scheduled Tribes in the government: Under the 'parity' system equal number State Council seats were allotted to both Bhutia-Lepcha combine and the Nepalese. With the merger, however, the parity system has been abolished and according to the arrangement made by the People's Representation Act of 1979, twelve seats of thirty two members Legislative Assembly have been reserved for Bhutia-Lepcha, one for Sangha and two for Scheduled Caste. However, in one form or other, an ethnic balance has always been maintained in the formation of ministry. Reservation of seats to the State Assembly for the ethnic communities and composition of the ministry have created more problems than solving them.

Table 7.29: Scheduled Tribes' representation in the government

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
50% of B.L. seats to Lepchas	-	06 (31.57)	-
60% of seat to be reserved for Scheduled Tribe	05 (18.51)	-	-
It should be according to population ratio	-	-	20 (35.08)
More than adequate	06 (22.22)	01 (5.26)	18 (31.57)
Equal for tribes and non-tribes	-	01 (5.26)	01 (1.75)
Not tribal but B.L.	3 (11.11)	-	-
Equal from each community	-	-	01 (1.75)
Not enough for Lepchas	-	06 (31.57)	-
No Comment	13 (48.14)	05 (26.31)	17 (29.82)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

Table 7.29 indicates that there were divergent opinions on the issue of 'representation of tribals in the government'. 31.57% of the Lepcha respondents felt

that 50% of the seats reserved for the tribes should be allotted to the Lepchas. Whereas 18.51% of the Bhutias maintained that 60% of the seats of the State Legislative Assembly should be reserved for Scheduled Tribes. 35.08% of the Nepali respondents held that 'reservations for Scheduled Tribes should be according to population ratio'. A significant percentage of the Bhutias (22.22%), Lepchas (5.26%) and Nepalese (31.57%) believed that the number of seats already reserved for the tribes is adequate. 11.11% of the Bhutia respondents believed that reservation should be not for Scheduled Tribes but for the Bhutia-Lepchas. 31.57% of the Lepchas considered that reservation was not enough for Lepchas. Other opinions were 'it should be equal for tribes and non-tribes or it should be equal for each community'

Hence, the opinion expressed here substantiates that each community tries to maintain its hold over the limited opportunities and resources.

Sikkim's Merger: The merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union has always been an issue debated with anger by the average Sikkimese. The merger bore different implications for different peoples. Thus, diverse opinions surfaced on the issue of Sikkim's merger. The responses have been listed in the Table below.

Table 7.30: Reaction on Sikkim's Merger

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Unfortunate step	07 (25.9)	07 (36.8)	14 (24.56)	28 (27.18)
Good step	08 (29.6)	08 (42.10)	23 (40.35)	39 (37.86)
Too early	01 (3.70)	-	02 (3.50)	03 (2.91)
Technique of merger not appropriate	-	01 (5.2)	-	01 (0.9)
Closed chapter	1 (3.70)	-	02 (3.50)	03 (2.91)
Too early to comment	-	01 (5.2)	-	01 (0.9)
No Comment	10 (37.03)	02 (10.5)	16 (28.07)	28 (27.18)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

Table 7.30 indicates that 27.18 % of total respondents considered the merger of Sikkim as the 'most unfortunate step'. The respondents sharing this view include 25.9% Bhutias, 36.8% Lepchas and 24.56% Nepalese. A Bhutia officer commented – 'It was the saddest moment and most illegal and unfortunate for tribals'. Another Lepcha officer felt 'It was illegal and undemocratic. I feel really sorry for losing

sovereignty?' Voicing the same tone one Nepali official, held 'I hate L.D. K. Kazi, the merger veteran'. Another respondent commented 'leaders of that time should be killed'. A Lepcha officer wrote 'merger was deceitful and great loss of Sikkim's identity'. Ugen Shimpoo, a 34 years old Assistant Director of Lepcha language in Education Department, held 'merger has not benefited the Lepchas. The Leaders could have made more important provisions to safeguard the interests of the Sikkimese, the Lepcha/Bhutia/Nepalese, during the time of merger. It has brought more outsiders'. A Nepali officer added 'merger was not appropriate; it would have been better to have our own kingdom'.

However, 37.86% of the respondents (community break-up being 29.6% Bhutias, 42.10% Lepchas and 40.35% Nepalese) regarded merger as a positive step for the development of the state. Supporting the merger, one Nepali officer opined, 'it was an appropriate step for dynamic development'. Another 28 years old Anil Raj Rai said, 'this was a big boon to the people of Sikkim belonging to lower strata. Probably, I would be carrying a *Kalo bhari* had Sikkim remained a kingdom. Only those close to king like the Kazis would have had a good life'. A Bhutia officer supported the merger and opined 'it was a good change for the poor. The poor have benefited'. A Lepcha officer maintained 'people saw new hopes and aspiration. The people got liberated from the bondage, suppression and discrimination. It was a blessing for the weaker and backward communities'. A Nepali officer justified the merger by saying 'it was a noble task since the people of Sikkim got an opportunity to get exposed to the world outside'.

2.91% of the respondents felt that the 'merger was too early', while 0.9% felt 'the technique of merger was not appropriate and time allotted for referendum was not enough'. Another 2.9% held that 'It is now a closed chapter' and 0.9% felt, 'it is too early to comment. Mr. R.K. Tamang, a 39 years old Group A officer, held 'It is still to see whether there would be dilution of article 371 (F) in the long run'. A considerable section of the respondents, 27.18%, did not comment on the subject. Taking a neutral stand, a Nepali officer maintained 'Our Sikkim should have been a democratic kingdom like Nepal'.

Ethnic Tension: A question was asked: 'Could you give details of any case of ethnic tension that you have heard or experienced in your life?' The responses received are presented in Table 7.31.

Table 7.31: Information about Ethnic Tension

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Not heard	15 (55.5)	06 (31.57)	26 (45.61)	47 (45.63)
In 1973 - during democratic agitation	8 (29.62)	03 (15.7)	14 (24.56)	25 (24.27)
1994 – Income Tax Issue	3 (11.11)	03 (15.7)	11 (19.29)	17 (16.50)
Lepchas protest against reservation	-	01 (5.26)	-	01 (0.97)
Historically	-	01 (5.26)	-	01 (0.97)
No Comment	1 (3.70)	05 (26.03)	06 (10.52)	12 (11.65)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

On the issue of ethnic tension, 45.63% of the respondents (comprising 55.5% Bhutias, 31.57% Lepchas and 45.61% Nepalese) said that they did not hear of ethnic tension in Sikkim. 24.27% of the respondents (29.62% Bhutia, 15.7% Lepcha and 24.56% Nepali) said that ethnic tension took place in 1973 during democratic agitation. 16.50% reported that in 1994 the Income Tax Issue gave birth to ethnic tension' while 5.26 % of the Lepchas respondents felt that their protest against reservation system in 1996 created a situation of ethnic tension. Another 5.26% of Lepcha respondents held that they heard of ethnic tension only historically. 11.65% did not comment.

Talking historically Mr. Ugen Shipmoo, a Lepcha officer, remarked "in regard to ethnic tension there were many cases when the Bhutia community had done atrocities on the Lepchas since 1742. Atrocities were committed in the field of Land and money transactions, keeping Lepcha boys and girls as their servant without any provision of payment". Another Lepcha non-gazetted official held that 'our community felt discriminated when our Lepcha boys had to protest against the government for non-allotment of reserved seats for higher studies in technical and non-technical college. We felt bad when most of the agitating Lepcha youths were arrested and sent to jail'.

Talking about ethnic tension in 1973 agitation a Nepali official remarked 'It was fuelled by the politicians, which nearly engulfed the entire population'.

Reasons for increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim: To know their analysis of increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim, a question was asked 'what do you think are the reasons for increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim?' There was wide range of responses, as usual.

Table 7.32: Reasons for increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Political motivating using community as a vote bank	13 (48.14)	7 (36.8)	24 (42.10)	44 (42.7)
Not aware of ethnic tension	05 (18.5)	01 (5.26)	07 (12.2)	13 (12.6)
Yearning for identity and division of community	01 (3.70)	02 (10.5)	03 (5.26)	07 (6.7)
Imbalance in population ratio	01 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
Social insecurity to minority	-	02 (10.5)	01 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
Reservation Policy	-	01 (5.26)	12 (21.05)	12 (11.6)
Discriminatory Policy	-	-	01 (1.75)	02 (1.94)
Influx	2 (7.40)	-	01 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
Favouratism	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	01 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
No Comments	04 (14.8)	05 (26.3)	7 (12.28)	15 (14.5)
Total	27(100.00)	19(100.0)	57(100.00)	103(100.00)

As Table 7.32 would show, a large section (42.7%) of the total respondents of all three ethnic communities felt 'politicization of ethnic issues for vote bank as the main reason for increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim. 12.6% of respondents, who include Bhutia (18.5%), Lepcha (5.26%), Nepali (12.2%) respondents, held that they are not aware of ethnic tension. A Bhutia officer felt 'political leaders with malicious attitude' are responsible for increasing tension in Sikkim. Another respondent remarked 'economic disparity due to immature politicians leads to corruption and then increasing ethnic tension'. A Nepali official voiced in the same tone that 'the foolish politicians are the casual organisms, who talk of son of soil and local protection act and later run for chair and cash'. Another Nepali officer remarked 'Foul play by some political leaders and some higher rank bureaucrats lead to ethnic tension'. Forty-one years old Yugal Nepal remarked 'it is due to match stick played by power hungry politicians'.

6.7% held the view that 'yearning for identity and division of community' as responsible factor, while 3.7% Bhutias felt 'imbalance in population ratio' is the cause of ethnic tension. Other small section of the respondents felt 'reservation for one community depriving other' is responsible for increasing ethnic tension. Anil Raj Rai, a twenty-eight years old officer, hinted 'Leaving out Bahun, Chhetri and Newar castes from the other backward class (OBC) list will be a major reason for increasing ethnic

tensions in Sikkim. This will be further aggravated by selfish motives of some political leaders'. Another officer viewed in the same tone that 'Reservation of seats in Legislative Assembly, panchayats, jobs in government departments for a certain section of people is making the Sikkimese more conscious about their caste/race/ethnic group'. Another respondent felt the reason being the 'Feeling of frustration and relative deprivation in socio- economic development'.

'Differential economic benefit to some communities like exemption of tribals and not others from direct taxes is the chief reason of ethnic tension in Sikkim' – a Nepali respondent added. Only 1.94% felt that "it is due to unequal treatment and discriminatory policy of ruling government; while others felt that 'increase in influx and favouritism' as the basic reason of increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim.

Ethnic situation in Sikkim – Role of Political Parties: A number of questions were asked informally during the course of interview regarding the course and cause of ethnic tension in Sikkim. The responses received would help people's perception on the issue. Here are some of the responses:

- (1) A Limboo official opined "the communities residing in the state should be treated equally in all aspects. For their narrow electoral interest political parties create division and disturb communal harmony in urban as well as rural areas. Left to themselves the rural people in particular do not have any communal feeling".
- (2) Another Nepali officer held "unequal opportunity leads to feeling of difference and deprivation and if government continues the policy of resource distribution in selective manner community-wise, this may lead to ethnic tension."
- (3) 'Political parties will have to stop creating vote banks on ethnic lines, as there is no end to this' was the opinion of another respondent.
- (4) Another Nepali officer maintained – "A feeling of difference crops up when reservation or jobs, assembly and panchayat seats, developmental schemes are done on the basis of caste. When a particular caste is deprived of social and economic rights because of reservation policy of the government, ethnic tension is bound to result. Reservation should be done on the basis of economic criteria and not on the basis of caste".

- (5) A Lepcha respondent remarked “ethnic situation in the state in the future would depend on the strategy of the political parties. The ignorant common people normally dance to their tune.”
- (6) Mr. M.K. Gurung, another respondent, remarked – ‘The present trend is toward political disintegration of the Nepali community. Political parties are selfish money makers and power mongers. They divide an ethnic group into sub groups to remain in power. The relative deprivation won’t create ethnic tension. The Bhutias are well off. Nepalese are passive, Lepchas don’t bother’.
- (7) Mr. A.D. Chhetri commented ‘Ethnic situation may take the course of bloody war. So privileges and facilities should be provided as per social and economic position of the people and not on caste basis. The government policies and programmes have contributed a lot to such ethnic tension. The policy of Income Tax exemption for Scheduled Tribes, who are leading frivolous life as compared to the Nepalese has resulted bad blood among the communities. Land Revenue Order No. 1 is also discriminatory as it doesn’t protect the land of Sherpas although they are Scheduled Tribes.’
- (8) Mr. Trilochan Sharma, a 41 years old Group A officer held ‘It is due to political exploitation of communal sentiment and not the diverse cultures of the communities that causes ethnic tension’.
- (9) Dr. P.K. Rai, a 41 years old medical practitioner, feels that ‘in future there will be unavoidable civil war. The solution lies in dissolving old and special rules protecting non-Nepali communities and treat everyone as equal citizen of Sikkim’. He further added, ‘when the rich are getting special facilities by virtue of their being tribes while the members of the non-tribal communities are deprived of same, no matter how poor he/she might be, it definitely affects communal harmony.’
- (10) Dr. H.P. Dhakal, another informant observed, ‘Brothers and sisters who were equal earlier to a great extent economically and educationally in pre-merger era are now divided into multiple factions politically. Sense of insecurity and underdevelopment with resultant bad feelings between the haves and have-nots is expected to weaken the social fabric and increase communal tension.’
- (11) Another Nepali officer maintained ‘the ethnic situation will get worsened if the political leaders misguide the people for their personal gain. The

responsibility of maintaining communal harmony lies on the educated lot, who must realize that the Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese are members of one family and no force can separate us or challenge our identity by virtue of article 371(F)'.

- (11) Anil Raj Rai said, 'Government policies and programmes are completely biased. It is the government that reproduces ethnic consciousness among the people by using and legitimizing the terms like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes in government documents and government policies thereby fuelling jealousy among left out classes'. He further refers to one of his Bahun colleague who often laments 'there is absolutely no future for our children in this state.'
- (12) Ajay Rai, another respondent said, 'The fact that the tribal communities get more than other communities in terms of seat and job reservation ultimately leads to ethnic tension.'
- (14)A Lepcha officer remarked 'the government policies and programmes have cultivated seeds of division between different communities in Sikkim. Discriminatory policy of government, disrespecting culture and heritage of the minority and backward communities especially the Lepchas, has created apprehensions.'
- (15) Dr. Pemba Tanyot said, 'The game of divide and rule played by the politicians has created casteism, which in turn, has created a sense of insecurity, terror and mistrust among three ethnic groups'.
- (16) A Bhutia respondent remarked 'Deprivation surely leads to ethnic tension. It leaves the ethnic minority in the museum for the tourists to see. If the ethnic minorities do not wake up, we will have to face worse situation than the present one.'
- (17)Dr. Kesang Chewang Bhutia explained, 'The feeling of differences and relative deprivation largely twisted by the leaders to their advantage by propagating the feelings of insecurity to a particular community is the principal reason for the lack of harmony among the ethnic communities.'
- (18) Tshering Bhutia held that 'the ethnic tension is never because of diverse culture or feeling of difference. It is the ill feeling created deliberately by political parties for political interest that destroys harmony in interethnic relations. The

government should follow a balanced programme of equal rights and developments by specially protecting the minorities’.

The Role of Community Associations

Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum (Sikkim Lepcha Progressive Association)

The Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum, an association of the Lepchas, has reportedly been created with an objective to community development in the backdrop of low representation of the Lepchas in all spheres of economy and polity. The movement for revival and development of Lepcha culture and heritage, social reforms and educating people about their rights and duties had started way back in 1960's during Chogyal's regime, when the Lepchas formed Shejum (Lepcha association) in Sikkim. But within a few years of its formation the Shejum became non-functional due to various reasons. Efforts have been made in the post-merger period by the Lepcha intellectuals to revive the association in keeping with the privileges and rights granted under the Constitution of India.

In the post merger period as well the government did not show much interest in addressing the problems of the Lepchas. In order to take stock of the conditions of the Lepchas a cultural club called 'Mayel Prongzum' toured all districts of Sikkim where they encountered with various problems of the members of this tribal community. The necessity of an association was strongly felt and the old 'Shejum' was revived with a new nomenclature. Derived from Lepcha language the term *Tar* means 'to move forward' and *Jum* means the 'collection of people'. So Sikkim Lepcha Progressive Association which was finally registered in 1982 was named 'Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum'. 'The Association could not make much headway in realising its objectives in the 1980s. It was revamped in 1994, when an ad-hoc body was formed. The election was conducted in April 1996 in a democratic manner and a seven member executive body was formed. Since then, RMRT has been playing a vital role in creating social awareness among indigenous Lepchas about their development, their rights and constitutional privileges.

Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum is a non-political and non-sectarian organisation. The members of the Executive Committee are mostly the employees being stationed in capital Gangtok although some are from all parts of Sikkim. They

represent the creamy layer or the intellectual group of the community on whom Lepcha brethren residing in villages and remote areas have rested hopes and aspirations. RMRT has its branches all over Sikkim and on behalf of Lepcha community it has been placing its various socio-economic and political demands to the state and central governments.

The Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum has a three tier organizational structure – (I) Central Executive Committee; (II) District Branches and (III) Block Level Branches. The district branches monitor the activities of block/village level Tarjums under their jurisdiction in consultation with the headquarter in Gangtok.

The head quarter office in Gangtok directly monitors the North and East district Tarjums. Block level branches (*Kyong Tanjum*) were opened in all villages of North district except Dzongu area, where a local registered club ‘Mutachi Lom Aal Shejum’ is functioning on the advice of Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum . Apart from the parent organisation Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum has other branches like ‘Renjyong Mutanchi Ringmom Kurmom’ (Sikkim Lepcha Literary Organisation), ‘Renjyong Mutachi Rong Ong Shejum’ (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association) and Sikkim Lepcha Women’s Forum ‘Mayel Amu Aachok’ associated with it.

The Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum is a common platform of the Lepcha intellectual class to unite the people for a common cause ‘to speak for the people, to awaken the Lepchas about their rights and demands.’ Table 7.33 would give us some idea of the social background of the Executive Committee members of the organization.

Working in various capacities in the state government offices, the members were born in various parts of Sikkim. One member, however, was born in Kalimpong. This shows that the new educated class, the relatively advanced section of the community, is providing leadership in raising ethnic consciousness among the Lepchas in the state by talking about protection of their rights and the privileges.

The ‘Renjyong Mutachi Rong Ong Shejum’, a registered body since 1992, has been working on various charters of demands and forwarding them to the state and central governments from time to time. The main demands being:

Table 7.33: Office bearers of RMRT in 1996-1998

Name	Education	Occupation	Religion	Age	Place of birth
Mr. Y.T. Lepcha (President)	B.A.	Retd.Suptd. of Police	Christian	61	Sombaray, West Sikkim
Mr. C.T. Lepcha (Vice-President)	Under- Matric	-	Buddhist	50	Pakyong, East
Karma Loday Lepcha (General Secretary)	B.A., LL.B.	Editor, IPR Deptt.	Buddhist	37	Phensang, North
Chusung Lepcha (Jt. Secretary)	B.Sc.	Assitant Education Officer	Buddhist	32	Khamdong, East
Sonam Wangdi Lepcha (Jt. Secretary II)	XII	Hotel Management	Christian	34	Namchi, South
Phurjang Lepcha (Treasurer)	XII	Accountant	Buddhist	35	Lindok, East
Ugen Lepcha (Publicity Secretary)	B.A.	Assist Director (Education)	Buddhist	38	Burtuk, East
Mrs. Ukee Lepcha (Jt. Treasurer)	XII	Lower Division Clerk	Buddhist	35	Gangtok
Dorjee Wangdi (Cultural Secretary)	H.S.	Lepcha Language Teacher	Buddhist	45	Kalimpong

- i) Special constitutional protection for Lepcha tribe
- ii) 50% of the jobs in public sector and government undertaking reserved for Scheduled Tribes should be earmarked for the Lepchas alone,
- iii) 50% of the seats in all technical and professional colleges from the Scheduled Tribe quota should go to the Lepchas,
- iv) Amendment of Land Revenue No. 1,
- v) 50% of fund from the tribal sub plan should be earmarked for the Lepchas.

The Rong Ong Shejum in a letter dated September 27, 1996 has drawn the attention of the Governor to the relative deprivation of Lepchas in the area of higher studies; the Lepcha youths were being denied seats from the tribe quota. When repeated requests for appointment with the Chief Minister and Education Minister were turned down, the Lepcha Youth Association resorted to poster campaign in the state. The government tried to suppress the campaign by taking 30 Lepcha youth into custody in various parts of Sikkim. The slogan of the campaign was approved by the executive members of Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association on 14th September, 1996 and the posters carrying the slogans were displayed in three districts head quarters viz. Mangan, Namchi, Gangtok and Jorethang and Ranipul. The slogans would indicate how Lepcha youth were enraged due to their deprivation as compared to Bhutias.

The slogans were:

- (a) 'Do the Lepchas have enough engineers, doctors, forest personnel and other officers? Where is our reservation quota?
- (b) We want justice from state government and administration. Why are our students denied of their rights to go for higher studies year after year?
- (c) Reservation for tribes?
'No Lepcha student gets admission in M.B.B.S., Engineering, Forestry Courses, Why?
- (d) Who gets the benefits meant for the tribes?
- (e) Bhutia Lepcha Bhai Bhai
Ha – Ha – Ha
Who is responsible? - Government or bureaucrats?
- (f) Give us our seats. We are exploited in our homeland!
- (g) Every field has its tale to tell
Lepcha are ignored and deprived as well
To whom do they turn is yet to see
With roving eyes, they look up to Thee.

The Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association resorted to hunger strike from 27th October, 1996 at Mangan, the North district headquarter to press for their following three fold demands and protesting against their exploitation :

- i) 50% of seats of the tribe quota should be made available to the Lepchas students in the field of higher studies;
- ii) Prohibition of sale of land owned by Lepchas in the wake of development projects undertaken by government of Sikkim.
- iii) Amendment of Land Revenue Order No. 1 of Sikkim.
(Gangtok Times, Vol. 3, No. 42, November 4-10, 1996).

Another important issue of protest was the setting up of Teesta Hydel Project by NHPC in the Dzongu area – a protected area under notification no. 3069, a Royal proclamation by Sir Tashi Namgyal. In Bulletin No. 3, published by Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association, it has been mentioned that the following land belonged to the Lepchas:

- i) Assam Rifle Camp in Chungthang (North);
- ii) Area of central school, government quarters in Syari (Gangtok);
- iii) The Army Cantonment in Bhusuk and Aritar (East Sikkim);
- iv) NHPC Project in Leksep;
- v) Area demarcated for helipad in Burtuk.

Hence, the Association gave several representations to the government demanding a formula of rehabilitation of the Lepchas, who had lost land as a result of these development projects and in other places where the government and NGOs might take over their land. It also condemned the meager cash that was offered in the form of compensation to those who were made 'landless' or 'Sukhum basis'.

Protest against land alienation: In some other areas also the Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum has been helping the ignorant and poor Lepchas living in villages. A poor and helpless Lepcha litigant from Khamdong Thasa Block (East) Shri Ongchuk Dorjee Lepcha is being extended help in the form of collection of documents – data, papers etc., in consulting lawyers and in attending court on dates. Although the petition has been dismissed in trial court an appeal has been made in the High Court. The aim in supporting such victims was to ensure that the Lepchas do not become *Sukumbasis* (land less) and *kutiyadaar* (tenant) in their own ancestral land. According to Chuksung Lepcha, the Joint Secretary of Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum from the village itself, Mr. Sonam Tshering Bhutia, a rich contractor, bought land from Ongchuk Lepcha. He was forced to sign the paper while intoxicated against a paltry sum of Rs. 20,000 for a plot of land worth much more. The son of Ongchuk Lepcha objected to the deed and he filed a case. The Lepchas under guidance of the organization wanted amicable solution and approached the buyer with a customary gift of slaughtered pig, silken scarf and few bottles of liquor requesting to take back money and restore the land back to the Lepcha owner but the contractor didn't agree. The case is now pending before the High Court. It is to be mentioned here that the Revenue No. 1 allows transaction of land within Bhutia-Lepcha communities only. But this legal provision has failed to stop alienation of land from the hands of the impoverished and ignorant Lepcha villagers. The Lepcha Association is firm in its demand for amendment of the said order so that land transaction is limited among the Lepchas only.

Appeal to boycott of state-legislature election 1999 by Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum : In a press release dated 9.9. 99, the Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum had expressed deep anguish over the Sikkim Sangram Parisad's design to overlook the demand of the Lepchas that 50% of Bhutia-Lepcha reserved seats in state legislative assembly should be allotted to the Lepcha candidates. It is to be noted that the Sikkim Sangram Parisad had talked about 50% of reserved B.L. seats to Lepchas in 1994 election. A similar press release was issued by the Sikkim Lepcha Women's Forum on 19.9.1999, appealing to all Lepcha candidates of all political parties to initiate steps in support of the demand. In the Assembly Election 1999, Mr. Tseten Lepcha, the candidate nominated by Sikkim Pradesh Congress(I) in Lachung Mangisla constituency had withdrawn his candidature in response to the appeal, since the party was not prepared to meet the demand raised by the Lepcha Association.

Reasons for backwardness of the Lepchas in Lepcha perception:

In order to understand how the Lepchas themselves understand and interpret the reasons of their backwardness some members of Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum were interviewed:

Francis Lepcha, aged 45 years and a Christian by religion, feels that the Lepchas knowingly or unknowingly suffered a lot under both monarchy and democracy. Even though they have faith in their own 'Namthar' their loyalty to monarchy was unquestionable. However the oppression of their culture, language and religion continued under the rule of the kings. Even after the merger commitment given by the democratic government to safeguard their interests through article 371(F) has remained unfulfilled. They feel, "Even Government of India has discarded us. While already overfed and healthy communities are granted special care and nourishment, the impoverished Lepchas languish in ignorance."

In response to a query about poor representation in bureaucracy, in leadership and in ministry he said that oppression of the Lepchas for 333 years under monarchy is the possible reason. Even after merger the Chief Minister's door was closed for the Lepchas; their frontal organisation RMRT was not allowed any discussion until the middle of the 1990s. While the Bhutias constituted the dominant layer of society during monarchy, it was the turn of the Nepalese in the post-merger period. The Lepchas never got the justice they deserved.

Talking about relationship between Lepcha and the government, and between Lepchas and the Tarjum he feels the relationship between Lepchas and Tarjum is better. Younger generation Lepchas have been greatly hurt by the new political set up. Even though they played a key role in bringing democracy, the continuous exploitation and deprivation of the Lepchas has led to a loss of faith in it. 'Lepchas vote just because of the fear that they might be out of voters' list and lose Sikkim subject status in case they don't'.

Historically speaking, the Bhutias got the patronage of the Chogyal in the form of land. In the long run the Nepali influx has alienated land from the hands of the Lepchas. He feels that laws may have been made and amended, but they have always benefited the stronger communities. The donation of land to the monastery paved the way for transfer of land controlled by the Lepchas to the hands of the Bhutias. Thus, he feels that in all periods of history the Lepchas have been suppressed.

Talking about the hurdles faced by the organisation, he observed that the political and bureaucratic circles were ruthless towards the organization at the beginning. The Lepchas were threatened that their leaders would be beheaded.

Karma Loday Lepcha, aged 37, was the General Secretary of the RMRT. He was a graduate in Arts and had a Law degree as well. The General Secretary feels that there are historical and political reasons behind the low representation of the Lepchas in the fields of government jobs and higher education. Even after the merger the spread of higher education among the Lepchas is not very encouraging, because they are being denied of adequate opportunity. The Bhutias and the Kazis who could avail of the opportunities of good education abroad are now dominating the state bureaucracy. The Lepcha students who have studied in a government schools cannot possibly compete with their Bhutia and Nepali counterparts who studied in good public schools.

About Amendment to Land Revenue No. 1 he feels that alienation of Lepcha land has been taking place at rapid pace. So the apprehension was ripe that the Lepchas might become landless 'Sukhumbasis' in their own ancestral land. Hence, he prefers land transaction within Lepchas only.

About the role of Lepcha political leaders, he says that although they have deep concern for community's cause, they can't come out openly in the fear of being branded as 'communal' and in the fear of losing vote of other communities.

While the historical and political factors have worked in keeping the Lepchas less enlightened, the situation seems to be changing gradually. The RMRT is encouraging the villagers to send their children to school and awakening them about the ill effects of alcoholism.

Commenting on the role of government in the post-merger era, he feels that the government of India wants their development but the development process comes via state government and administration, which are dominated by the stronger and healthy communities.

Chuksung Lepcha, a 32 years old science graduate, is the Joint Secretary of the RMRT. He is also working as an Assistant Education Officer of the Government of Sikkim. He has been playing a lead role in the formation of Block Level Tarjums. He says that branches of Tarjum were opened in villages/block level after proper scrutiny of the background of the members. The details of socio-economic background of individual family has been taken and recorded in a huge ledger separately maintained for each district and preserved at the head quarter.

Explaining the need of opening Tarjum in his village, he says the Bhutias and Lepchas have been living for decades in adjacent areas sharing the same source of water but when the Bhutia village could produce the Chief Secretary of Sikkim, Ministers and Session Judges, the Lepcha village has produced very few educated individuals. The village level Tarjum can look into this disparity and educate people to take initiative to bridge the gap.

Talking about land alienation, he cited one case of Kalu Lepcha, a widower of 60 years old, who is a servant in a Bhutia household. As he could not repay the debt, he gave his land and still serving in the Bhutia household. He says that 'they don't have grudge against stronger community, but simply want the stronger community to lend a helping hand to enable the Lepchas to walk as par with other communities'.

Asked whether he himself ever felt discriminated against as a Lepcha, he said that there was no such feelings when he was in school. But when he was exposed to outside world and had interacted with friends in college, he had realised about his Lepcha identity. He cited a case when he felt discriminated against being a Lepcha. After passing higher secondary he wanted to do engineering but his nomination for engineering stream was rejected. In his place a Bhutia student, although had lower

percentage of marks, was granted admission. He feels that since he could not do lobbying with the higher bureaucracy he was denied of the genuine opportunity.

He was of the opinion that Buddhism has been an imposed religion, which has affected their food-habits and dress code. The Lepcha monk also has to wear the Tibetan dress. He said, when he was a student, he was made to study Tibetan. It is a kind of religious imperialism. The conversion into Christianity has affected their language. Hence the religious invasion, either by Buddhism or Christianity, has hampered the development of the Lepchas. The elaborate rituals and materialistic culture of Buddhism has affected Lepchas economically.

Explaining their low representation in bureaucracy, jobs and education, he feels (i) poverty (ii) Bhutia domination (iv) conversion of Lepchas into Bhutias are the obvious reasons. He explains that during Chogyal's regime when a Lepcha achieved higher status and became Kazi, he was identified as a Bhutia.

The young RMRT leader is spearheading the task of encouraging the members of his community to prepare themselves to avail of the benefits and advantages being provided by the government and to be self reliant so that the Lepchas can live with their heads on alongside the members of other communities.

Mr. Sonam Lepcha, aged 38, a B.A., B.Ed., an active member of Mutachi Rom Al Shejum (Zongu), a cultural club, is presently working as an Assistant Director of Education, under the Government of Sikkim. The aim of the organisation is to raise, elevate and propagate the aspects of Lepcha culture and work for social, educational and economic development of the Lepchas of Dzongu area. Sonam observes that the dominant Nepali language has affected the growth of Lepcha language badly. The young generation feels embarrassed in wearing their traditional dress. Hence the organization aims to revive the dying aspects of Lepch culture. He further observes with dissatisfaction that after embracing Buddhism Lepchas in general have to follow the Bhutia rituals. No Lepcha monk can stick to their own dress code. Again, although the 'Sangha' seat is meant for Buddhist Lamas, no 'Lepcha Lama' has so far represented the Sangha seat.

Nima Lepcha, aged 45 years, studied upto higher secondary, is the President of NEBULA (Nepali Bhutia Lepcha Organisation) and the convenor of SIBLAC (Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee). Explaining the reasons for low

representation of Lepchas in bureaucracy and higher education, he cites the historical fact that the Lepchas had been subjects of the Bhutia kings for 333 years. He also feels that alcoholism and ignorance are other causes of backwardness.

In post-merger era as well the Lepchas, he feels, are not getting what they deserve. Even the Nepalese and Bhutias have never looked upon the Lepchas with brotherly concern but in turn have taken advantage of their relative ignorance and simplicity.

He lauds the pro-poor policy of present government but aggrieved at his community's claim for the Rajya Sabha Member Of Parliament being ignored by the ruling party. There has been the precedence that if the Member Of Parliament for the Lok Sabha is from numerically dominant Nepali community the Rajya Sabha Member Of Parliament should be from the minority Bhutia-Lepcha communities. The Lepcha representative Soloman Sharing served two terms as a Rajya Sabha Member Of Parliament and then Koma Topden, a Bhutia, served another two terms. This time it was the turn of a Lepcha candidate. By nominating a Bhutia candidate, the ruling party has deviated from the established practice. He feels that the Lepchas are being ignored since they do not have any lobby in the Mintokgang (Chief-Minister's residence). He further feels that the central government has done great injustice by clubbing the Lepchas and Bhutias together as Scheduled Tribes. It is like putting a tiger and a goat in the same cage where the tiger uses the goat whenever requires.

Summary

A brief study of the educated new class helps us grasp how class, ethnicity and polity are shaping in Sikkim. It is this intellectual class, which also constitutes most of the middle class that dictates and reflects the thought process or the collective consciousness on major social, economic and political issues concerning the state. A study of the thought process of the new class would suggest that an educated, modernized, secular neo-class free of primordial ties and parochialism is nowhere in sight. A progressive intellectual class ready to spearhead the class-line mobilization is absent as well. With the emergence of this new class what one can, at the most notice, is the emergence of an urban middle class with a living standard and way of life significantly different from its rural counterpart. This class, sharply divided along ethnic line, has greater exposure to the outside world and is distinctly conscious about self-interest and the interest of the community. This advanced section of each

community is ready to usurp the opportunities for development and to make their community fellows aware of their rights and privileges. The Lepchas, the most deprived of the three communities, show signs of ethnic mobilization and the new class of the community is spearheading this mobilization process. In this small state the political setup that we see in the name of democratic polity is tuned in such a way that ethnic differences and ethnic consciousness draw impetus for reproducing themselves. Most of the members of the neo-class who have been interviewed tend to explain issues, in some way or the other, in the light of ethnic consciousness.

Chapter – VIII

Conclusion

I

The present study on *Ethnicity, Class and Politics in Sikkim* has been an attempt to look into the patterns of participation of three leading ethnic groups and emergent class in Sikkim politics. It was designed to see how the class and ethnic factors influence the political process in Sikkim and how the identities of three major communities are maintained and reproduced in the cultural, social and political spheres. The study sought to explore the nature of inter-ethnic relationships at socio-cultural, economic and political levels, both at macro and micro situations, in order to trace out the areas of conflicts between the ethnic communities. Another objective was to examine the nature of ethnic dimension of resource distribution in order to see if the sense of relative deprivation in terms of developmental activities in the post-merger Sikkim has precipitated ethnic group formation. The study was set out to analyze how the modern, powerful democratic state has generated new forces and categories to rearrange the elements of civil society and how do the people respond to such forces. The identification of the emerging class and their role in mobilizing respective ethnic groups in the political process forms one of the core objectives of the present study. The study has provided us with opportunities to assess the relative strength of ethnic- and class models of mobilization of people and to examine whether both these models are losing their erstwhile effectiveness.

The data for the present report have been drawn from historical sources and from primary as well as secondary sources. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been made use of. Collection of information started with consultation of the historical materials from secondary sources, Census Reports, documents, Government Reports, government office records, published materials and the manuscripts. The settlements of ethnic communities were studied through anthropological technique of fieldwork, which included house-to-house survey, interview, observation, case studies and informal conversations. The idea was to draw a first hand understanding of the interrelationships between three major ethnic communities, the Nepalese, Bhutias and the Lepchas, in their everyday life in their natural rural habitat and to understand the

process of developing ethnic consciousness through social, economic and cultural practices. The next part of the fieldwork was undertaken to elicit information on the neo-class through a structured questionnaire-cum-schedule. It was also supplemented with informal interviews, collection of case studies and opinions of the respondents. The objective behind this part of study was to understand the nature of the emerging new urban educated professional class in each of the ethnic groups and its role in class or ethnic formation in the state.

II

The term 'ethnicity,' which is derived from the word 'ethnic', is used both in an objective or subjective sense. It is manifested when a group makes use of objective criteria like racial, linguistic and cultural ties to secure the interest of its group members. Hence, it is generally understood as the use of primordial bases as symbols and referents for identification of its group, in the competition and conflict for political power, economic benefits and for social status. In other words, the prospect of social mobility and economic advancement by political means encourages ethnicity. Hence, ethnicity is often guarded by various ethnic groups to defend its privileges and to overcome barriers in the way to development of the community. In the process, as Glazer and Moynihan pointed out, the government also often legitimizes ethnicity by framing development or distribution policies along ethnic lines.

In all modern democratic societies, as observed by Zygmunt Bauman, "politics of inequality³⁹ and hence redistribution⁴⁰" has been by far the most dominant type of political conflict and conflict management.¹ In the pre-industrial social formations the traditional social categories like caste, language or religion are often used for drawing the redistribution policy of the state. Once legitimized by the state these categories are reconstituted in public imagination and taken as the generalized categories of agents' self-construction. The Relative Deprivation Theory contends that inequality in the distribution of available resources, social benefits and opportunities between distinct ethnic groups encourages ethnicity i.e. a feeling of frustration or relative deprivation among the ethnic communities precipitates nationalism. Although the primordial affinities, common language and culture prepare the ground for ethnic group-

formation the whole process revolves around politics. An examination of the divergent perspectives and approaches of ethnicity, which has been done in the introductory chapter, would suggest that the problem of ethnicity may be approached from three major angles: (a) Primordialist approach, which suggests that efforts to strengthen and preserve the culture are natural to the 'given communities', (b) the Instrumentalist approach emphasizes on the use of cultural symbols by the elite for instrumental advantage of the group, and (c) the third approach focuses on the use of ethnicity for a greater share of state power. All these diverse purposes behind ethnic politics may not necessarily be exclusive in character but the activists in ethnic politics, as we find in the present study, are often motivated by a combination of all these objectives. However, it seems that the instrumentalist approach holds the key to our main line of interpretation of ethnic situation in Sikkim.

The study of class has been done from the Weberian approach, which stresses on the occupation, prestige, consumption and the life styles as the criteria of class stratification. For Max Weber, the term 'class' refers to any group of people that is found in the same 'class situation', which in turn refers to common life chances that represents economic interest in terms of possession of goods and opportunities for income and under the conditions of commodity or labour markets. Hence, to Weber class are differentiated along occupational lines. Sorokin, Mills, Lockwood have also viewed class from the same angle. The term 'new class', which has been used by John Kenneth Galbraith, includes college professors, schoolteachers, surgeons etc., with focus on the qualification of education. To Djilas, the 'new class' refers to those having special privileges and economic preferences because of its monopoly over administration. However, instead of studying the detailed class character, the scope of the study has been limited to identification of emerging class and their role in mobilizing respective ethnic groups in the process of making the political force. The Marxian concept of class, which speaks of total mobilization along class line, may not be of much relevance in interpreting the class relations in Sikkim since in the absence of a Left Party with Marxist ideology, and in the absence of the industrial proletariat and trade union activities the class-consciousness and class activities are not much visible. The new class that we have studied is more like a status group and their political thinking and political behaviour speak more for their ethnic identities than class identity.

III

The emergence of the major ethnic groups in Sikkim has been traced in the political, economic and social history of the state. The Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese are generally accepted as three dominant ethnic communities, who came and settled down in Sikkim in different phases of history. The Lepchas, the original inhabitants with their distinctive language and culture, were reportedly ruled by the Lepcha Punus before the immigration of the Bhutias. However, the consecration of the first Bhutia ruler in 1642 along with the imposition of established religion of Buddhism brought the Pagan Lepchas under the domination of the Bhutias. The establishment of matrimonial ties between the two communities paved the way for social and cultural assimilation. The first ruler was able to win the confidence of the Lepchas by appointing twelve Lepcha chiefs as the Dzongpens. He also tactfully courted the loyalty of the existing tribes by making a common-wealth called 'Lho-Mon-Tsong Sum', representing the three tribes – the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Limboos as a family. Such a calculated approach of cooperation and patronage brought the Lepchas under complete domination of the Bhutias in the later years. However, in spite of large degree of cultural assimilation, the two communities have been able to retain their distinct socio-cultural identities.

The migration of the Nepalese in the beginning of the eighteenth century marked the next phase of Sikkim's history. Following the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890, Sikkim was recognized as a British protectorate. As a consequence of the British policy, the ethnic scenario changed dramatically. The population trend for the last hundred years indicates a tremendous multiplication of population figures, which has tilted in favour of the Nepalese. Thus, the Nepalese have emerged as the largest social group comprising more than 75% of the total population turning the Lepcha and Bhutia, the original inhabitants into minority. The change in the demographic scenario had great social, economic and political consequences, which had wide repercussions on the inter-ethnic relationships.

By the time migration of the Nepalese had started, the Bhutia-Lepcha combine emerged as a composite ethnic group as the original inhabitants of Sikkim. By virtue of being the original inhabitants they were identified as the 'Sikkimese'. A threat

perception grown out of uncontrolled inflow of the Nepalese had brought the Bhutia-Lepcha together. However, in spite of emerging as a composite ethnic group, the inter-ethnic relationship was not always cordial. A careful scrutiny of the course of events bring to light the under currents of the tension behind the apparent cordial relationship between the two groups, the 'locals' and the migrants. The history of the state is full of such cases of strained relationships. The history bears the testimony of hundred of Lepchas migrating to Illam (Nepal) as a consequence of quarrel between the ruler and the Lepcha chief minister, which resulted in latter's assassination in 1826. Although the Lepchas and the Bhutias were united in opposing the Nepali domination over economy and polity their unity was not deep rooted. Despite there being cases of inter-marriages between the Lepchas and the Bhutias the social assimilation was nowhere in sight. The degree of social distance appeared stronger among the peasants. The dominance of Bhutias was so strongly felt that the Lepchas remained the most neglected group amidst the Bhutia domination. However, the under currents of political intrigues and fights of earlier years between the two communities disappeared in course of time and the Bhutias being dominant had opportunity to include the Lepchas within one bracket of 'Sikkimese'.

There were fissures in the relationship between the 'Sikkimese' and the 'Non-Sikkimese'. By virtue of being the 'Sikkimese', the Bhutia-Lepcha combine was entitled to certain privileges, which were denied to the Nepalese, who were not the 'Sikkim Subjects'. The latter were not allowed to hold the office of the village Headman or any other position of political significance. The Chogyal adopted some discriminatory policies in matters of land revenue, land acquisition and administration. The Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917 prohibited alienation of Lepcha-Bhutia land by the Nepalese. The "sons of the soil" also enjoyed exclusive right to acquisition of land and residence in North Sikkim. During the feudal era, the Bhutia-Lepcha Kazis were granted land lease for 15 years whereas the Nepali Thikadars were given lease for only 10 years. There was protective discrimination in matter of land revenue assessment as well. The Nepali cultivators were assessed at a higher rate than their Bhutia-Lepcha counterparts for the same quantity and quality of land. However, this discriminatory treatment to the Nepalese had stopped after the promulgation of Sikkim Subject Regulation Act of 1961, when the earliest Nepali settlers were granted the status of Sikkim subjects.

There were great economic and ethnic imbalances. While the Bhutias retained the dominant position the Lepchas, barring a few who moved up by marrying in Bhutia aristocratic families, generally remained in utter poverty and the most neglected group. Mostly confined to the Dzongu area of North Sikkim the Lepchas lived their life of indolence and negligence, hardly raising a voice of protest against the aggressive exploitation by the Bhutias of the riches in land and forest. Barring a few the average Nepalese were in the lower stratum with a second-class political status.

A look into the political structure of theocratic Sikkim reveals the reasons for huge gap between the positions of the Bhutias and the Lepchas. The political structure consisted of the clergy, the aristocracy and the commoners. The Buddhist monks constituted the intellectual elite of Bhutia society and education was the sole preserve of the monasteries. Hence, besides the religious duties the Buddhist monks were influential in administration and in overall politics. The secular life of the state centered round the royal family and the nobles called Kazis. Although some Lepcha families were admitted to the nobility the Kazis were mostly of Bhutia or pure Tibetan origin. The Bhutias, thus, dominated the central administration since the beginning. The Kazis were also the regional landlords. They constituted the top echelon of the bureaucracy and wielded considerable authority and acquired the great economic and social powers. This overwhelming influence of the Bhutia Kazis in the bureaucracy during Chogyal's time had its repercussion on the present political scenario as well.

With the end of British rule, Sikkim did not remain outside the influence of great political events taking place in India. The period witnessed the emergence of democratic forces in Sikkim. The democratic aspirations of the Sikkimese culminated into the formation of Sikkim State Congress. To counter this, the loyalist Bhutias formed the National Party to preserve the theocratic feudalism as the dominant ruling ideology of Sikkim. Hence, polarization of political forces along ethnic lines began. Ethnicization of politics rose to its culmination point with the introduction of 'Parity System' by the Royal Proclamation of January 1952 and March 1953. This system equated the minority Bhutia-Lepcha combine with the majority Nepalese in the distribution of seats in the State Council. Hence, the theocratic monarchy under Chogyal began to develop cracks with communal divisions and with the demands of the Nepalese, the majority community, for equal treatment and democratization of administration. There was a race for greater access to political power between the

minority Bhutia-Lepchas, who had near complete hegemony over Sikkim's political map so far, and the majority Nepalese, eager to rise to prominence in all walks of life and very much in politics. Such a guided social and political arrangement aroused the inner urge for freedom and the democratic movement, which resulted into a general upheaval in 1973 and its subsequent merger with India.

IV

The trend is not much different in the democratic Sikkim after the merger in 1975. Now, the Bhutia-Lepchas nurse a genuine feeling of deprivation and a fear of losing their old status and importance. The controversial Parity system has been abolished but the ethnic minority still retains the substantive share in the State Legislative Assembly, by means of reservation of seats for the Bhutia-Lepcha minority. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance of 1979 imposed a new formula of seat reservation, where the Bhutia-Lepcha communities have 12 reserved seats and an additional 'Sangha' seat for monastery. While 2 seats are reserved for the Scheduled Castes, the remaining 17 seats are unreserved. The scrapping of seat reservation for the Nepalese by the Ordinance created a sense of insecurity among the Nepalese. The wave of apprehension was so much that it even led to a split of the then ruling Janata Party of Sikkim on the eve of 1979 election. If the Bhutia-Lepchas were afraid of being dominated by the Nepalese, the latter were apprehensive of losing control of state power.

In the late eighties, the nostalgia over lost political dominance and the fear of cultural extinction brought the tribes closer and consequently several organizations like The Denzong Tribal Yargay Chogpa, The Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association, Denzong Lho-Mon-Chodrul etc. were formed. These ethnicity based organizations aimed to campaign actively for tribal unity and give vent to their grievances regarding electoral system and the administration of the state.

The proposal of implementation of Mandal Commission Report gave a new twist to the ethnicity-based politics in Sikkim during the early nineties. Various Nepali sub-cultural stocks began to come up with new identities and demands for recognition to reap the benefit of the recommendations, of the Mandal Commission

Report. The backward castes among the Nepalese began to see caste as the new basis for job reservation and other economic opportunities. These developments provided strength to already existing caste- and ethnic consciousness. With the formation of many caste and community organizations the Sikkim politics once again fell pray to primordial ties.

The early nineties also witnessed a growth of ethnic consciousness among the Lepchas with the formation of Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum. It started placing various socio-economic and political demands. It demanded 50% of the seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas and other tribal benefits for the Lepchas alone. In the meantime, by virtue of the Scheduled Tribe status as per The Scheduled Tribe Order of 1978, the Sherpas too started demanding its share of the 12 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas. The Bhutia-Lepcha combine was not prepared to give any share of seats to the Sherpas on the plea that Article 371 (F) of the Indian Constitution provides exclusive safeguard to the Bhutia-Lepcha communities only. With an objective to find out a solution to the contentious issue of seat allotment among the Bhutias, Lepchas and the Sherpas in the Legislative Assembly Election 1999, the Sikkim-Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee was formed in September 1999. Hence, even in the changed democratic set-up, the ethnic issues like reservation of State Assembly seats and jobs for different ethnic groups and sub-groups, the preferential policy to safeguard the interest of local Sikkimese or that of the “sons of the soil” have always dominated the political scene in Sikkim.

From our study of the political developments in the post-merger period we could observe that the democratic electoral politics in Sikkim thrives on the primordial identities like caste and ethnicity and instead of making an effort to transition to a modern, secular, rational civil society based on mass culture the polity provides the space where the primordialities or ‘nativism’ gets reproduced. In other words the electoral politics and the policy of protective discrimination have undoubtedly prepared the ground for ethnic formation in the state. When we say ‘ethnic formation’ we mean that the ethnic consciousness reflects itself in all major spheres like social, economic, and political spheres. The ruling forces in the state are aware of this ground realities and they take a conscious approach to exploit peoples’ ethnic and caste identities both for capturing power and for holding on to power. The political mobilization of the people in the state, thus, often takes the ethnic route.

V

The inter-ethnic relationships and the normative behaviour of the members of various linguistic groups are apparently stress free. In every day life, in work place, market, social gatherings etc. there is enough opportunities for interaction among the members of the ethnic communities. It does not appear that under the normal circumstances the interpersonal relations are, in any way, affected by any feeling of inter-ethnic animosity or hatred. However, there are occasions when the members belonging to one community feel that they are deprived and backward in comparison to the members of another community living side by side, the feeling of difference or the ethnic consciousness come to the surface to affect the inter-community relationship. Passing of derogatory remarks by the members of one community on the members of another community speaks of the ethnic mind of the people. Such terms are representative of the collective consciousness shared by members of a community about the members of another community and shape the interaction pattern among the members across the communities. However, the inter-ethnic antagonism does not often find expression in ethnic conflict. The occasional outburst of inter-ethnic encounter like the one that appeared during 1973 agitation or the one that was witnessed in the form of agitation on the income tax exemption issue in 1994 shows that such cases are only episodic and are variable in respect to situation and circumstances.

With the onset of developmental activities after Sikkim's merger with India, the allocation of state resources and state created opportunities began to be carried out in new democratic way. As an obvious manifestation of this a distinguishable group of new educated class, consisting of educated bureaucrats, professionals, managerial class, teachers and the political elite, has come up. This new class plays a lead role in socio-economic and political domains. The participation of educated individuals in administration and politics in larger number articulates that Sikkim politics is out to have its leadership from the neo-elite that represents the advanced section of the different ethnic groups.

However, the three communities were not equally equipped to take advantage of new opportunities and the development process because of long course of

subordination of one community by the other and also because of the resultant inequalities. Hence, there has been a competition among the ethnic communities to equip themselves educationally and make most of the new opportunity available to them. An analysis of the ethnic dimension of the resource distribution shows the unequal control and competition over material and human resources. This has obviously resulted in the feeling of relative deprivation among the communities that has influenced the Sikkim politics.

The question of land acquisition is related to the question of ethnicity in Sikkim. Perhaps, without an ethnic strategy and protective legislation the situation in a small state like Sikkim would have deteriorated for the Lepchas in particular and the Sikkimese in general. In spite of these strategies land is no longer in the monopolistic domain of the Lepchas. Originally the Lepchas controlled most of its land. However, after enthronement of Bhutia ruler, the ownership of cultivable land had shifted to the Bhutia ruler, who used to gift portions of it to his chattels, courtiers, and the Kazis in return of their services. Hence, with the passage of time, the land changed hands from the Lepchas to the Bhutias and later to the Nepali immigrants, who came to the state with greater control over economic and human resources or greater control over competitive resources. The influx in the post-merger period could have led to an aggravation of the situation. In such grim scenario, Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum is pressing for an amendment of Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917, so as to arrest the alienation of land from the hands of the Lepchas by the members of other tribal communities.

In the new democratic setup the state has recorded some developments in all sectors of the economy. But here also the Lepchas lag behind the other two communities in taking advantage of the development activities and as a result they have relatively less control over human and material resources. Lesser control over human and material resources could very well be the reasons for their continued backwardness. The Bhutias and the Nepalese largely control the small-scale industries, which have been multiplied in the post-merger period. The Marwari settlers and other Madesia traders mostly control the business and trade sectors.

In the sphere of higher education, which is the criteria for entering into the new class, the Bhutias have made use of most of the reservation quota available. It has also been found that in all institutions such as education, service, administration, politics, and higher level of bureaucracy the Lepchas do not find proper representation

and are trailing behind the Bhutias and the Nepalese. Hence, benefits and privileges meant for ethnic minority, for safeguarding its members, have largely been cornered by the Bhutias, who form the creamy layer of the society. Because of their overall backwardness, lack of motivation and lack of competitive spirit the Lepchas have not been able to make any significant headway in controlling the economic resources despite some measures taken by the government. By virtue of their numerical strength and greater control over economic resources the Nepalese have a dominant presence in all walks of life.

The development process has widened the inter-ethnic inequality resulting into unequal control over resources. The Lepchas – the indigeneous tribe of Sikkim have not been able to take the fruits of development equally with two other communities. Lack of control over human resources such as education, power, and access to information may be the reasons for low representation of the Lepchas in all these spheres. The historical fact of Lepcha subservience and Bhutia dominance also partially explains the reason for the huge gap that has been created in the democratic setup. The tribes in the state also do not present a homogeneous and un-classified category. The ever-growing number of various organizations and associations shows how much the different groups and sub-groups express their dissatisfaction (real or strategic) over the growing social and economic disparities. Thus, the unequal distribution of opportunities and resources coupled with their social and cultural differences have provided enough ground for ethnic group formation in Sikkim, which prevents the class line mobilization.

The present study suggests that ethnicity has always been a rallying point of political forces operating in democratic Sikkim and has been the predominant form of political mobilization. Strong primordial ties and commitment to religious faith might have prepared the ground for ethnic-based political culture. Such kind of politics prevents class line mobilization. The ethnic identity based on primordial attachment is strong enough to obstruct the class line mobilization in Sikkim. A brief study of the educated new class highlights that the intellectual class constitutes the new class that reflects and dictates the collective consciousness on major social, economic and political issues concerning the state. However, a progressive intellectual class ready to spearhead the class line mobilization is almost absent in Sikkim. The absence of a strong Left party partially answers why there has not been any concerted effort to politically mobilize the working class, the middle class professionals and the peasants.

The Lepchas – the most deprived of the three communities shows signs of ethnic mobilization and the new class of the community is spearheading this mobilization process. The same is true about the other two communities; the advanced section in each community mostly looks within the community. Hence, in a small state like Sikkim, the democratic polity is tuned in such a way that ethnic differences and ethnic consciousness draw impetus for reproducing themselves.

VI

The micro level study also reveals that the three communities are not having equal access to material and human resources. The Bhutias have relatively greater access to land, education and income opportunities as compared to the Lepchas, who are backward in terms of education and organized sector of employment. The Lepchas do not have control over business either. The Nepalese, the later migrants, initially struggled hard to establish themselves in the fields of economy, society, and polity but gradually they have made steady progress in the fields of education, agriculture, business, employment and politics. The study highlights that the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese represent three distinct roots in history, different cultural traditions and languages, which they carefully nurture in their daily life. Although, there is enough scope for intermixing, the members interact by keeping their cultural traditions intact. The three communities have been able to maintain their distinct identities as separate groups by retaining their respective languages, sticking to their dress code and restricting themselves to intra-community marriages. The three communities have so far been succeeded in holding on to their cultural traditions and the barrier between Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese is still maintained, although there are traces of change. In spite of the basic similarities in terms of their customs and high degree of religious and cultural similarity, the inter-marriage between the Lepchas and the Bhutias was not found very common. The tendency to cling to their respective cultural traditions is expressed in a subjective 'feeling of difference'. By cultivating this feeling of difference they maintain their ethnic boundaries. And this is cultivated in the arena of politics as well.

The problem of Sikkim in general is that the people in the state are late in responding to the call of modernization. People are late in coming out of their traditional, community-like, kinship based social, cultural and mental frame. Moreover, there has not been any major social reform movement to free the Sikkimese (particularly the Bhutias and Lepchas) from the shackles of traditional mind-set. Community consciousness thus has been a part of their existence, which finds expression in social, cultural, economic and political fields. When, after the merger, there were scopes for greater exposure to the forces of modernization, the ethnic politics (in the mould of democratic politics) has put them in ethnic shell once again. After the merger and with the launching of developmental activities a new class has emerged, which could have led the process of modernization. But the present study demonstrates that even this relatively advanced section of ethnic communities has not done anything visible to free the community fellows from ethnic consciousness.

The theoretical proposition at the beginning of my study contends that ethnicity is a social and political construction of elite, who uses the primordial attributes to gain political and economic advantage for their group. It was also proposed that a sense of relative deprivation and competition for material benefits precipitates ethnicity. In Sikkim, the elite in each community are clever enough to use the objective criteria of their distinct history, cultural traditions, and languages and foster the subjective sense of difference for considerable economic and material privileges. Although all Sikkimese declare their support for a democratic political system without reference to their ethnic consideration, the competitions for limited resources in Sikkim has generated a sense of inequality and relative deprivation. In spite of the growth of Sikkimese identity in recent years, which safeguards the interest of the earliest settlers among the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese of Sikkim against the outsiders, it is not sufficient in breaking down the ethnic boundaries which separate the ethnic communities. The growing demand of Lepchas for recognition as the only indigenous tribe of Sikkim, demand for 50 per cent of the seats reserved for the tribes, the demand of the Bhutias to exclude other communities from the Bhutia category, the demand of the Sherpas for a share of the seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas, the increasing demand of the Limboos, Tamangs and the Gurungs for recognition as Scheduled Tribe, the demand of higher caste Nepalese for inclusion into the 'Other Backward Castes' category, restoration of reserved seats for Nepalese,

and many other demands of the communities are directed to retaining the existing privileges or expanding the sphere of privileges.

The study reveals that the process of economic modernization has not contributed to weakening the primordial ties or kinship close group relations in the state. The slow pace of urbanization and industrialization and a common tendency to fall back upon the traditional social bases for support and security may have facilitated the continuation of the primordial ties. This too has helped creation of enough scope for the emergence of ethnic cleavages and ethnic mobilizations. The general presumption that ethnicity reflects the condition of traditional society and the spread of education and modernization would undermine the ethnic attachment does not hold a place in Sikkim. Hence, the primordial ties still provide a fertile space where ethnic politics thrives in the state of Sikkim.

The problem of ethnic discontent is not peculiar to Sikkim alone. In all the countries of South Asia ethnicity-based politics is a regular feature in the post-colonial period. The Indian states in the North-East also experience ethnicity as the predominant means of mobilizing people and communities. Formation of ethnic identity is the predominant form of assertion of cultural rights and the widely practiced means of capturing power and holding on to power. Ethnic protest emerged in the relatively backward region like Nagaland as well as in an advanced region like Punjab. Ethnicity was a vital factor in the political reorganization of the North-Eastern States. The growing economic disparity and socio-political process accentuated the ethnic cleavages in North-East India. The ethnic cleavage in Sikkim has not reached the alarming point yet despite a strong undercurrent of inter-ethnic competition and tension. The course of events, however, is pregnant with such possibilities.

VII

In the modern or post-modern condition the social group that is called 'tribe' does not exist with all its traditional cohesiveness or collective consciousness. Because, one can easily notice generation of internal social and economic differentiation or stratification within a tribe, dispersal of the members over geographical areas, and the rise of a great deal of individual autonomy. The members usually have their own

definition of the social reality and an individual approach to the competition for resources. An intra-community competition can hardly be overlooked. In a relatively traditional social set-up that Sikkim offers, the way the tribes like the Lepchas and the Bhutias are responding to the forces of modernization provide examples in support of our conceptual statements. Talking about 'tribal politics' Zygmunt Bauman writes, "Tribal politics entails the creation of tribes as imagined communities." He further holds that the tribes can no longer rely on the traditional authority able to coerce their members into submission to tribal rules (seldom they have clearly codified rules to which submission could be demanded), nor on the strength of neighbourly bonds or intensity of reciprocal exchange (most tribes are de-territorialized), and communication between their members is hardly at any time more intense than the intercourse between members and non-members of the tribe. Therefore the 'post-modern tribes exist in no other form but the symbolically manifested commitment of their members.'² It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the Lepchas and Bhutias in Sikkim are the 'imagined communities' or 'exist only symbolically'. My study would suggest that a tribe forming an ethnic community based on their name, language, common symbolic tradition is still a reality although the erstwhile cohesiveness may no longer be found. However, when a tribe is shaping as an ethnic group or as a political group its ethnic formation may very well be temporal in nature, because it is formed with some specific political objective or an objective to work as a pressure group for a greater share of the resources in offer for redistribution by the welfare state. In its competition for resources the members of a tribe may have a tendency to render their rituals as spectacular as possible, mainly through their 'power to shock' and pose as a well-organized political vote bank to ensure their value in the electoral politics.

Our study of the neo-elite, the educated urban middle-class professionals, suggests that they are far from forming a class in Marxian sense of the term. They too present a fragmented and unorganized lot with their own subjective definition of the situation. They present a class in Weberian sense always eager to define and use the social, economic and political situations to their advantage. In their effort to have greater share of the economic resources and power the advanced section of each community fall back upon their ethnic identity and makes effort to consolidate such identity by talking more about their cultural rights, symbols, rituals, language, caste and religion. Their success in holding their community together and in posing as a

vote bank decides how far they would be able to realize their missions subjectively defined. The bureaucratic-political elite generally controls the distribution of state resources and establishes consumption privileges – improved access to salaries, travel, working conditions, pension schemes, and so on. In the state centric economic and political arrangement this class (not a class in the sense of being sourced in processes of production) occupies a distinct position, different from the average members of the community they represent, in terms of standard of living and in terms of their greater control over the political, economic and social resources. The present study explains how the class categories are subsumed within the ethnic categories and the vice-versa.

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