

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 Dzongpens (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 Dzongpens. 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, ^{and to provide for the welfare of the people} - 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 Sikkim.¹¹⁸ 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 Napali 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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