PLAINSMAN IN THE HILLS
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN SIKKIM

Thesis Submitted to the
University of North Bengal
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)

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Nilotpal Sarma

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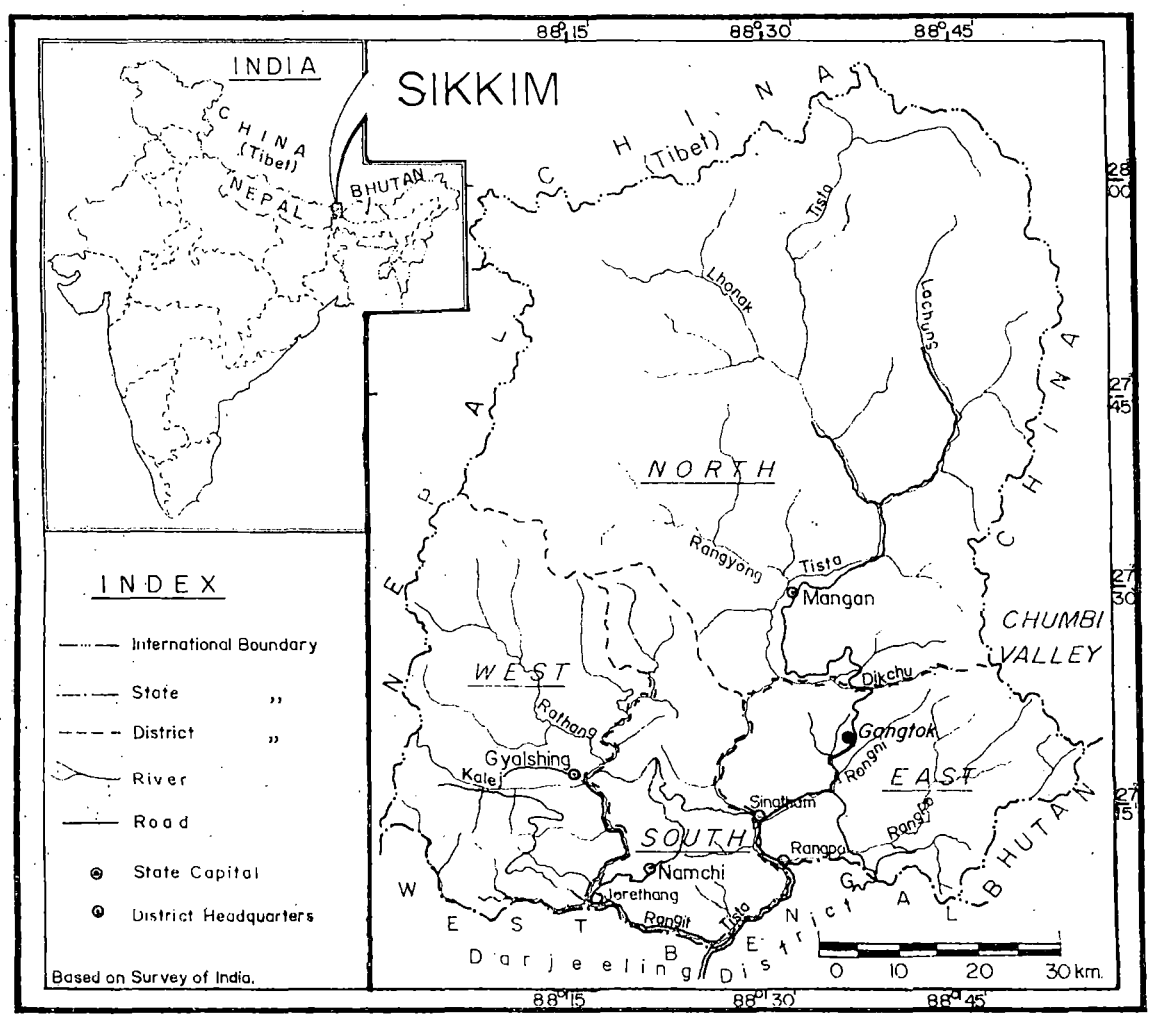

INDIA
CHINA (Tibet)
NEPAL
BHUTAN
SIKKIM
CHINA (Tibet)
Lhonak
Tista
Lachung
NORTH
Rangyong
Tista
Mangan
CHUMBI VALLEY
WEST
Dikchu
Rathong
Gangtok
Gyalshing
Kaleij
Rangit
EAST
Singtham
SOUTH
Rangpo
Namchi
Jorethang
Rangit
Tista
BHUTAN
Darjeeling Dist.
0 10 20 30 km.
88°15'
88°30'
88°45'
27°45'
27°30'
27°15'
INDEX
International Boundary
State ,,
District ,,
River
Road
State Capital
District Headquarters
Based on Survey of India.

Chapter I

Introduction

Sikkim, the 22nd State of India, has held the centre stage in the Himalayan trade and politics during the period that began in 1988. A lot has been written on this once tiny Himalayan kingdom by the British and other European travellers, administrators, and scholars. The Indian administrators and scholars have also not lagged behind in writing about Sikkim which had a controversial political status until about fifteen years back. And even today, the study of Sikkim and the people there is rather fascinating.

Not much is known about the pre-1641 Sikkim. It is generally believed that it did not have well defined boundaries. Its northern boundary, for instance, was defined by the vegetational characters: the area with pine trees belonged to the Tibetans and the area populated by bamboo grooves to the Mon, which in Tibetan, meant low landers, and which referred to the Lepchas. Its western boundary was the Arun river in East Nepal but the Lepcha king called Turve Pano probably did

not have a clear control over the Limbus whose habitat was extended upto the West district of the present day Sikkim. On the south, the present district of Darjeeling in West Bengal was under Sikkim but till the beginning of the nineteenth century it was hardly populated except its terai area. Similarly, the eastern border with Bhutan was never clearly demarcated.

There were Limbu and Mangar chiefs controlling the western and southern parts of Sikkim. But it is not clear to what extent were those chiefs under the control of the Lepcha king. It is however indicated in the various books on Sikkim that such chiefs continued to function even after the Namgyal dynasty was installed there in 1641.

The history of the pre-1641 Sikkim has not been properly explored. It is believed that the Tibetans destroyed most of the documents written in the Lepcha script. Whatever may be the reason, the picture as it stands today is heavily influenced by the Tibetan and British sources of history.

It was the British interest in the Indo-Tibetan trade that compelled them to get in touch with the Sikkimese rulers. Though exploratory expeditions were carried out by Joseph Hooker and

William Grant in the early years of the nineteenth century the attempt to establish formal contact with the Sikkimese rulers began in right earnest only in 1835. For this, Captain Lloyd was deputed to Sikkim to initiate the dialogue in the beginning of 1835.

The initial response of the Sikkimese ruler was not at all favourable for the British. But within a short period they not only managed to get the "deed of grant" about Darjeeling but also the permit to carry out trade with Tibet through this Himalayan kingdom. The "deed of grant" is thus still a subject of major controversy for historians (Pinn 1986). The control of the British was gradually consolidated and by 1888 they even had a political officer, J. C. White, stationed at Gangtok for supervising the Indo-Tibetan trade and advising the king in administrative and fiscal matters.

Such a state of affairs would not have come about in Sikkim but for certain historical accidents. It is well known that Sikkim was engaged in wars with the Bhutanese on the east and the Gorkhas on the west from at least the beginning of the

eighteenth century. It was following one such war that the present day Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling district went into the hands of the Bhutanese rulers in 1706 and remained under them till as late as 1864. Similarly, it lost the area east of the Arun river in Nepal during the rule of the king Prithivinarayan Shah. One of the Namgyal kings of Sikkim was even forced to flee to Tibet for some time. The frequent wars with the Gorkhas in particular had compelled the kings of Sikkim to shift the capital from the west to the east. It was only after the Treaty of Titaliya was signed following the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-16 that Sikkim had a peaceful border. This Treaty guaranteed peace to this Himalayan kingdom but made it vulnerable to the British designs. It was a consequence of all this that the district of Darjeeling went out of Sikkim's control in the mid-nineteenth century.

It was not until 1890 that the boundaries of Sikkim were fixed. The Anglo-Saxon-Chinese Convention of 1890 finally defined its present day boundary as follows:

> The boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crust of the mountain ranges separating

> waters flowing into the Sikkim and its affluents from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet. The line commences at Mount Epmochi on the Bhutan frontier and follows the above mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal territory (in Basnet 1974:9).

It was around 1890s that some people from the places like Bengal, Bihar, Haryana and Rajasthan, whom I have referred to in this thesis as "plainsmen", began to migrate to Sikkim. They were essentially traders participating in the then famous trans-Himalayan trade. There were a few like K. K. Das and K. K. Sen from Bengal serving as tutors to the royal family members but the overwhelming majority of them were certainly those who went for trading activities.

Those pioneer traders were subsequently joined by their fellow kinsmen from their native places. Their flow to Sikkim became more perceptible after Sikkim became a protectorate of India in 1950. There was another wave of migrants from the plains of India after 1975 when it became a part of the Indian Union. These migrants, as it will be seen

in the course of this thesis, were mostly absorbed in the service sector.

As a result, the plainsmen have assumed a significant position in Sikkim and they virtually control not only the market but to a large extent its newly founded educational, administrative, and bureaucratic set-ups also. This has not remained unnoticed by the political elites of Sikkim. There is a growing resentment against the presence of the plainsmen there. Hence, the present study on the plainsmen in Sikkim is relevant and topical.

Objectives of the Study

The present study has the following main objectives: (a) What are the mechanisms and strategies adopted by the plainsmen in Sikkim to adapt to the physically, culturally, and socially different milieu of Sikkim? (b) What are the problems and prospects of their adaptation to the Sikkimese society and polity? These two objectives may be operationalized with the help of the following questions:

1. Why did they migrate to Sikkim and settle there?
2. What were the problems of their physical, social and cultural adaptation?
3. What was/is their politico-legal status?

4. What is their socio-economic status vis-a-vis the hillmen?
5. How are they internally organized?
6. What are the patterns and trends of their social, economic and political interaction with the hillmen?
7. What is their role in the economy and polity of Sikkim?

An attempt has been made here to provide an answer to each of these questions and give a comprehensive picture not only of the plainsmen but also of their relationships with the hillmen in Sikkim.

Literature Survey

As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, Sikkim has received a considerable attention of administrators, travellors, and academicians. It is thus impossible to review all the publications on Sikkim. Hence, I have chosen here to discuss some of the important works only. Such works may be first classified into the following heads:

1. Political History
2. Defence Studies
3. Anthropo-sociological Studies, and
4. General Studies

1. Political History

Of all the books written on Sikkim its political history has received the maximum attention. In fact, the literature on this aspect of Sikkim are numerous enough to be classified into the following three heads:

a) Political development,

b) Pro-merger works, and

c) Anti-merger works.

A. Political development

The literature on the issue of 'merger' do come under political development but the reason why the literature under 'political history' are provided separately is that there are many books dealing with 'political development' but not touching upon the merger issue. Some of such books are published after 1975 but the focus of these studies has been on the pre-merger Sikkim. Some of the notable works in this regard may be presented below.

V. H. Coelho (1967) discusses the evolution of the administrative and political structure of Sikkim. He points out that Sikkim drew the world's attention because China issued an ultimatum to

the Indian government for dismantling the military structures on the Tibetan side of the frontier between Sikkim and the Chumbi Valley of Tibet. According to him, the people of Sikkim have a strong sense of belongingness to their land and are prepared to protect it from any political misadventure from across the border.

R. C. Mishra (1977) highlights Sikkim's political development from the British period till it became a part of India. For him, the rise of the British power in India, foundations of which were laid in the latter half of the eighteenth century, was a phenomenon of paramount importance for Sikkim also. The Indo-Sikkim relationship was a part of the integrated plan drawn by the British for the expansion of their colonial empire in India. The British were determined to extend their influence in the Himalayan kingdom and check the influence from across the border.

P. R. Rao (1978) chronicles the long and peaceful struggle of the Sikkimese people and the awakening of their political consciousness.

P. K. Bhattacharya's work (1984) is basically on the numismatics but he links up this with the political history of Sikkim and its relationship

with the British India. His book is based on documents collected from the last king and some important persons of Sikkim and Darjeeling besides those from the Archives of India, New Delhi.

N. Sengupta's study (1985) touches upon the question of 'merger' but the thrust of his argument is neither to support nor to oppose this. His objective is to underline the various political processes that ultimately resulted in the 'merger' of Sikkim with India in 1975.

B. S. K. Grover (1974) also discusses the history and socio-political development of Sikkim but focusses on the relationship between Sikkim and India from 1947 to 1974. He has made a special note of the mini-revolution of 1973 and has considered it as a turning point from feudalistic paternalism to a constitutional framework.

L. B. Basnet's book (1974) may be finally mentioned. He divides his book into two parts: in the first part, he discusses the period upto 1947 and in the second part from 1947 till May 1973. He has brought out the interplay of political parties, the Palace and the Government of

India on the political stage of Sikkim. He has also described the peasant movement against feudalism in the second part of his book.

B. Pro-Merger works

There are in fact quite a few writers on Sikkim, who have shown a latent approval of Sikkim's becoming the 22nd State of India. This is evident from their unqualified use of the term 'merger' instead of 'annexation'. Among them, S. N. Shukla and B. S. Das have openly justified the issue of 'merger'. For instance, Shukla (1976) discusses the historical development of Sikkim but his stand on the issue of 'merger' has been clearly that of the Indian government. He even claims that the role of the Indian government in this matter has been hailed not only in India but in most capitals of the world.

Similarly, Das (1983) provides an official version of the political upheavals in Sikkim between 1973 and 1975. It is significant to note that he was the Chief Administrator of Sikkim from April 10, 1973 to September 1974. According to him, India's stand on the issue of 'merger' was

based on the following premises:

a) Sikkim could never hope to have an independent status,

b) Delhi was always in favour of a democratic government in Sikkim,

c) The Chogyal should accept the provision of a constitutional head, and

d) Sikkim's identity was maintainable within the national framework.

C. Anti-Merger works

Writing anything against the 'merger' of Sikkim with India was not easy. But a couple of authors in influential positions had the courage to condemn the issue of 'merger'. The most notable among them were Sunanda K. Datta Ray and Nari K. Rustomji. The Indian government could not do anything to these authors but The Rape of Sikkim by L. B. Basnet was seized by the policemen easily. In this book, Basnet, who is a prolific writer with notable standing among the elites of Sikkim, had described how Sikkim was 'annexed'.

Datta Ray (1984) the editor of The Statesman, has made one of the most critical comments on the

'merger' issue. According to him, Sikkim was taken over in the "smash and grab" style. He describes the events leading to the "annexation" of Sikkim on the basis of documentary evidences, interviews, eye witnesses, anecdotes and unpublished letters. On the basis of all this he demonstrates that the Chogyal was not only the "victim of fraud" but the state assembly was also taken for a ride. He strongly argues that India's action in Sikkim was motivated by the desire of annexing it and making it a part and parcel of India.

Rustomji's work (1987) appears more as a biography of P. T. Namgyal, the last Chogyal, than a history of Sikkim. It includes a series of correspondences between the author and the last Chogyal or his family members from 1943 to 1981. Hence, it reflects some of the intimate thoughts of the ruler during his days of glory as well as humiliation. He also makes it clear that he never approved of India's 'annexation' of Sikkim.

2. Defence Studies

Sikkim is strategically located but surprisingly not many studies have been published on its mili-

tary importance. There are a couple of stray articles in this context but the only full length work is perhaps that of O. P. Singh (1985). He makes an indepth study of the geopolitical, geostrategic, and politico-military aspects of Sikkim and points out that the obstacles in tactical military operations, accessibility, visibility, mobility, communicability, and availability of defence resources in this frontier state. He has also discussed the system of administration, industries, means of communication, education and welfare of the people there.

3. Anthropo-Sociological Studies

Geoffrey Gorer (1938/1984) and John Morris (1938) are perhaps the first anthropologists to have done intensive village study in Sikkim. They conducted their fieldwork in the Lepcha "reserve" of Dzongu in North Sikkim for three months in 1937 and produced two of the most detailed ethnographic literature on the Lepchas. Their works are still unparalleled.

Then in the 60s two important anthropologists carried out their research in Sikkim. Chie Nakane,

the first, conducted her fieldwork in some of the villages of North Sikkim and wrote a rather lengthy article in Furer Haimendorf edited book published in 1966. This work of hers deals with the interrelationships among the Lepchas, Bhutias, and the Nepalis, and tries to explain the relative backwardness of the former two communities on the basis of religion (For review, see Subba 1985). Another important work done in the same decade was that of Halfdan Siiger (1967). This work was primarily done in late 40s in a village called Tingvoong in Dzongu though comparisons have been made with the situation then prevailing in Kalimpong. The second volume of this book published in the same year deals exclusively with ethnolinguistics of the Lepchas.

A. C. Sinha (1975) has also done his doctoral work on the political elites of Sikkim. The first part of his work explores the social forces causing the transition from theocratic monarchy to democracy; the second part with the socio-economic background of the elites; and the third part deals with the political development of Sikkim after 1947.

C. De Beavoir Stocks's book (1975) is a different work in the midst of the anthropological works on Sikkim. She has made a comprehensive study of the folklores of the Lepchas of Sikkim.

R. N. Thakur (1989) deals with the various aspects of the Lepcha society of Darjeeling and Sikkim like their customs, manners, food habits, institutions, religion and culture. The analytical part of this work is related to the questions of detribalisation in the process of modernization and the new tendency of retribalisation as major socio-cultural processes.

Veena Bhasin (1989) has worked on the cultural ecology of the Lepchas and Bhutias of North Sikkim. She has conducted fieldwork in some of the most inaccessible areas of North Sikkim like Dzongu, Lachen, and Lachung but her analysis is rather faulty because she has analysed the tribal societies in the caste framework.

T. B. Subba (1989) has also worked on five sampled villages out of which three are from Darjeeling and two from West Sikkim. This doctoral work deals primarily with caste and agrarian class

relationships in the rural areas of Darjeeling and Sikkim. The non-Nepali communities like the Lepchas, Bhutias, Marwaris, and the Biharis are occasionally referred to but they are outside the focus of his study.

A recent doctoral work by Amal Datta (1991) deals with the role of education in class formation. He makes a special mention of the emergence of the "New Class" in Sikkim due to the spread of education. The data relate primarily to the post-1975 Sikkim.

4. General Studies

There are a number of books which do not fit into any of the three broad classifications discussed above. Most of these studies are edited works with contributions from scholars belonging to a number of disciplines. The only unedited book on the general description of Sikkim is perhaps that of P. N. Chopra (1979). This book not only deals with the physical and historical aspects of this state but also discusses its socio-cultural and religious aspects.

Among the edited books falling in this category, three may be cited below. The first is edited by S. K. Chaube (1985). This book has a collection of articles on various themes not only on Sikkim but also on other parts of the eastern Himalayas. Similarly the book edited by R. L. Sarkar and Mahendra P. Lama (1980) includes a number of articles on Sikkim contributed by economists, sociologists, geographers, and political scientists. Finally, the book edited by T. B. Subba and K. Datta (1991) may be mentioned. This book also has articles dealing with Sikkim and written by scholars belonging to various disciplines.

In the above survey of literature, I have not referred to numerous articles that have been published in various journals and edited books by the faculty members of the Centre for Himalayan Studies in North Bengal University for whom Sikkim is one of the areas of specialization, or to those articles by scholars working elsewhere but keeping keen interest in Sikkim. A thorough survey of such articles was certainly desirable but it would make this survey unnecessarily lengthy and voluminous.

On the basis of the various books referred to here and articles not referred to, it may be safely concluded that no one has touched upon the problem that I have chosen for this thesis. Even the anthropo-sociologists like Geoffrey Gorer, John Morris, Chie Nakane, Halfdan Siiger, A. C. Sinha, and T. B. Subba have made only partial mention of the plainsmen in Sikkim.

Theoretical Framework

In the absence of adequate literature on the plainsmen in Sikkim, the primary objective of my study cannot but be exploratory. The ambition of experimenting with any theory or model is therefore out of question. However, the present study has some theoretical assumptions without which it is difficult to proceed. Let me briefly elaborate on this.

On the basis of a preliminary knowledge of the plainsmen in Sikkim it appears that the relationships among the various plains communities on the one hand and their relationships with the hillmen on the other are rather complex. By and large, it appears, however, that they form a single

ethnic group vis-a-vis the hillmen though within themselves there are a number of ethnic groups. Therefore, it is felt that neither the subjective nor the objective approach to their ethnicity is adequate. Their ethnicity is both "adaptive" as Fredrik Barth (1969) has argued and supported by Robert Bates (1983) as it is based on certain common racial, cultural, and historical factors, as argued by Harold Isaacs (1975).

In this context, the "insider versus outsider" model propounded by T. K. Oommen (1984) is significant. His frame of reference is India as a whole, where the Hindi-speaking people or the Hindus are "insiders" and the non-Hindi speaking Christians, Muslims and Buddhists are "outsiders". In Sikkim also there is a clear division of people into "outsiders" and "insiders" but the people who are considered as "outsiders" are those who are "insiders" to Oommen and vice versa. Though occasionally even the hillmen from the Darjeeling hills are also referred to as "outsiders" in Sikkim it is undoubtedly the plainsmen who represent this category of people in Sikkim. Even the term 'Indian' is sometimes used as a substitute for the outsiders.

The relevance of Oommen's model is, however, not lost in the process of the contextualization of it. The plainsmen are not only economically dominant but also have a lot of political influence. They may not also be the decision-makers or power-holders but they control the economy of Sikkim and are in a way "insiders" there. Thus, it provides an excellent model for the present study in Sikkim.

Methods

It was apparent from the census figures for Sikkim that the plainsmen were largely concentrated in the urban areas of Sikkim. Therefore, it was mandatory on the part of this study to concentrate on the urban areas of Sikkim. Some of the post-1975 migrants from the plains of India have also been working in various schools and offices located in far-flung rural areas of Sikkim.

For the purpose of this study, I interviewed the plainsmen from the following towns: East district - Gangtok, Rangpo, and Singtam; West - Jorethang; North - Mangan; and South - Namchi. The total number of randomly sampled interviewees from these six towns was 206. According to a rough

calculation, the sample size formed about 5 percent of the total number of households of the plainsmen in "urban" areas.

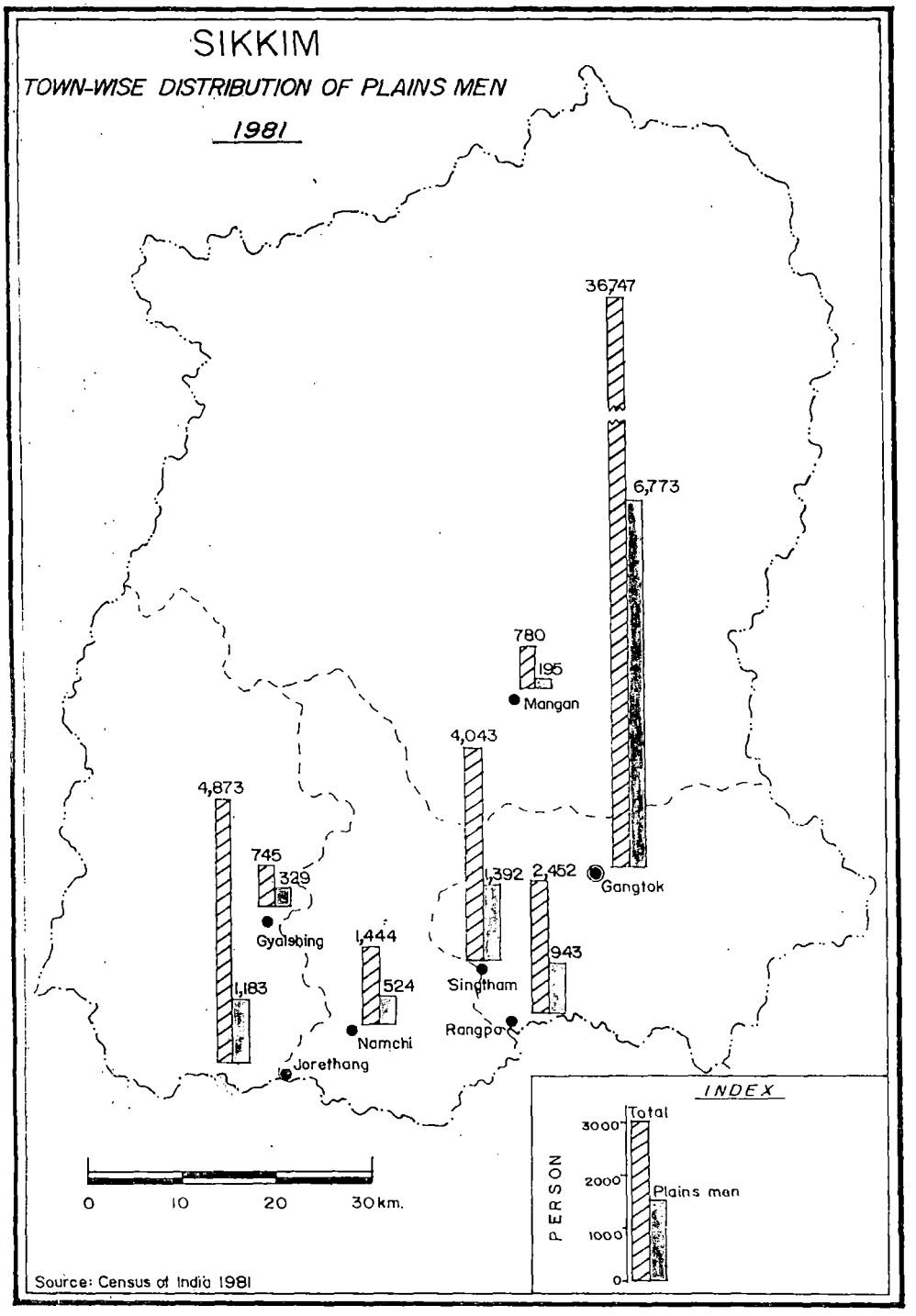
Apart from a detailed interview based on schedules having closed as well as open-ended questions, I took a detailed household census of the interviewees. These primary investigations were supplemented with secondary data collected from various books, articles, and news-clippings at the Documentation Cell of the Centre for Himalayan Studies and the Central Library of North Bengal University.

The fieldwork was carried out during 1989-90 in a series of phases. The net period of observation and interview in the six towns of Sikkim was about six months. The progress of work was initially hampered due to the difficulty in making the busy traders sit and answer my questions. It was only after some contacts were built with the leaders of the plains communities that cooperation was more easily forthcoming.

Plan of the Study

This thesis has been arranged in six chapters including this. Chapter II discusses the migrational

history, demographic composition, and politico-legal status of the plainsmen in Sikkim. Chapter III deals with the internal structure of the plainsmen. Chapter IV is on the occupational structure of the plainsmen in Sikkim. The fifth chapter is on their socio-cultural matrix. The sixth or the last chapter summarizes the findings of the thesis and makes some concluding remarks.


SIKKIM
TOWN-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PLAINS MEN
1981
36747
6,773
780
195
Mangan
4,043
4,873
745
329
Gyalshing
1,392
2,452
Gangtok
1,444
943
524
Singtham
1,183
Rangpo
Namchi
Jorethang
0 10 20 30km.
INDEX
Total
Plains men
PERSON
3000
2000
1000
0
Source: Census of India 1981

Chapter II

Plainsmen in Sikkim

Introduction

Since time immemorial people have been migrating from one place to another as individuals, families, and groups for various purposes like food, shelter, security, trade, pilgrimmage, and adventure. The nature, type and causes of the movement of people from one region to another have been found to be different in different places and times. The very flow of migrants has been greatly facilitated today by the improved means of communications.

Migration is not merely the physical movement of individuals and groups. It involves a lot of strains in their social, economic, cultural and other aspects of life. Hence, it is a subject of keen interest not only to the demographers but also to sociologists, anthropologists, economists and political scientists.

The reasons for migration could be many such as economic hazards, non-availability of jobs, educational opportunities, war, famine, drought,

and other such factors. But sociologists are usually more interested in the post-migration consequences rather than the situations leading to migrations. They are particularly interested in studying how the migrants manage to survive and adapt their institutions, values and beliefs under the changed situations. They firmly believe that people do not just migrate from one place to another but also from one culture to another.

Migration may be permanent, semi-permanent or seasonal. The distance covered may also vary considerably. It is also difficult to make a distinction between external and internal migration (Lee 1975:191).

Migration does bring about a change in residence but it need not involve any change of occupation. As far as the direction of migration is concerned it is more or less clear. It is usually from rural areas to the city, from areas of stable population toward centres of industrial or commercial activity, from more densely settled regions to the less densely ones, and from the core of the cities to their suburbs (Caplow 1954: 60).

It is also to be noted that migration is basically a social process. It assumes significance in the context of developing societies which are undergoing the process of change in their social, cultural and political aspects. Modern technology, education, industrialization and urbanization are some of the most important inducements for change in such societies. A close examination of the urban growth would show that it is primarily the result of the migration from rural areas whether for better economic opportunities or for other attractions held by the cities such as better educational and medical facilities.

This is one of the reasons why the social composition of the city is much more complex than that of the rural areas. In many cases, the city thus assumes a cosmopolitan look but in terms of interactions it reflects the diversity of cultures. Living in the city does affect their attitudes and behaviour to some extent but being constantly reinforced by the cultures in their places of origin the primordial values and institutions do manage to survive and even thrive sometimes.

This dualism provides the much required security and cultural impetus in an alien place. But, on the other hand, the cities remain as a conglomeration of rural enclaves. Such a situation is helpful for internal solidarity of the enclave members but it also proves to be a potential point of conflict between groups and cultures. Even when they live in intermixed settlements the social and cultural interactions are more often than not confined to the members of particular cultures. This has been largely so even in the towns of Sikkim, which I studied for the purpose of the present thesis.

Migrational History of the Plainsmen

The Himalayas as a whole have always attracted the plainsmen from various parts of India. Some of them are known to have visited and even lived in the Himalayas from very early times. They went there as pilgrims, travellers or for trade and adventure. To them, the Himalayas were not only an abode of gods and goddesses but held a lot of curiosity. The migration of the plainsmen to the Himalayas for economic purposes is but comparatively a recent phenomenon.

Sikkim is one such Himalayan territory where the presence of the plainsmen has been rather old. Though rather small in number, they constitute economically a significant group. The first plainsmen to have settled in Sikkim were the traders, engaged in the once flourishing Indo-Tibetan trade. They were mainly from the northern and western parts of India like Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.

Their migration to Sikkim was noticeable after 1888 when J. C. White, the first political officer, was appointed there for channelizing the trade across the border and for helping the king of Sikkim in his administration. A large number of them were engaged in the trade with the Tibetans on the north and the Gorkhas on the west. Others from Bihar, Bengal, Assam, Punjab, Orissa, Kerala, etc. also went there in smaller numbers to engage themselves in various subsidiary trade and other occupations. Among the business families of Sikkim a special mention must be made of the Somanis who had originally migrated from Hissar in Haryana. They had some business establishments in Kalimpong

as early as 1850s. After the British Residency was established in Sikkim in 1888 they moved to Gangtok as the sole cashiers of the British forces. Their commercial office in Gangtok was the pay office, state bank, state exchequer, department store, and the public treasury. They not only advanced credits to the British Residency but also to the king and the kazis or landlords of Sikkim. Hence, the Indo-Tibetan trade was virtually controlled by them.

This state of affairs continued upto 1968, when the administration established the State Bank of Sikkim with the help of the United Commercial Bank Limited of India. Though every Sikkimese, specially from the business community, was solicited to transfer his account to this new bank, the response was far from satisfactory. Thus the Jethmal Bhojraj Bank of the Somanis was, till as late as 1975, functioning as the state bank of Sikkim for all practical purposes (Sinha 1975:50).

Another large flow of the plainsmen into Sikkim was noticed after the 'merger' of Sikkim with India in 1975. They were mostly qualified persons looking for white-collar jobs though the

number of skilled and unskilled labourers was not insignificant.

It is quite well-known that the pre-1975 migrants from the plains of India had gone there basically for trade and the post-1975 migrants among them for business or service. It is important that statistical figures are presented to see to what extent is this broad classification true. This has been done in Table 1 given below.

Table 1. Reasons for migration of the Plainsmen, 1989

Community	No. of heads of households	Reasons	
		Business	Service
Marwari	105	100.0	-
Bihari	70	84.3	15.7
Bengali	8	37.5	62.5
Oriya	5	-	100.0
Keralite	3	33.3	66.7
Punjabi	15	-	100.0
Total	206	81.6	18.4

Source: Fieldwork

It is significant to note that an overwhelming majority (81.6 percent) of the people from the plains of India have migrated for business

and only 18.4 percent for service. Further, out of the six plains communities included in the sample above the only reason for migration of the Marwaris was business. It is seen above that the Biharis also had migrated primarily for business because only 15.7 percent respondents stated the reason for their migration to be service. The Oriyas and the Punjabis, on the other hand, had migrated entirely for service. Finally, the Bengalis and the Keralites had migrated for both business and service though about two third of the respondents of both communities had migrated for service and only one third for business.

Now the historicity of the plainsmen in Sikkim may be briefly discussed. Before starting the discussion on this, the following table based on 206 respondents from the six sampled towns of Sikkim may be presented. This table (Table 2) shows that more than two third of the total respondents had migrated before 20 years. The percentage of respondents migrated before 10 years is also quite large, which is because of 'merger' with India in 1975. This category of respondents, it may be admitted, was drawn basically from the communities other than the Marwaris and the Biharis.

Finally, it is to be pointed out that the percentage of plainsmen who had migrated to Sikkim before 40 years is also fairly significant, which shows a rather old inhabitance of them in Sikkim.

Table 2. Migration of the Plainsmen in Sikkim, 1989

Migrated Before	Total respondents	%
10 years	66	32.0
20 years	81	39.3
30 years	25	12.1
40 years	34	16.5
Total	206	100.0

Source: Fieldwork

It may be added that, like in most rural to urban migration involving long distances, the migration of the plainsmen to Sikkim was initially dominated by the males. It was only after they set up a comfortable means of living and found a place to accommodate their wives and children that they were joined by their family members and relatives. Most of them were bachelors at the time of their migration but they procured spouses from their own native places. Even today spouses are

procured from their own places of origin.

Present Day Distribution

The plainsmen are distributed all over Sikkim. There is hardly any office or school where one does not find any plainsman. Since almost every village in Sikkim has one junior high school there are at least two plainsmen in almost every village. Some of them have been living in the most inhospitable conditions but they are there.

Let me now present the distribution of the plainsmen in Sikkim on the basis of figures adapted from the Census of 1981. Here I have computed the figures on the basis of the mother-tongue of the speakers and excluded the speakers of the languages like the Lepcha, Bhutia, and the Nepali. This stands for all the tables presented in this section.

Table 3 given below shows that the percentage of the plainsmen living in the "urban" areas of Sikkim is only slightly higher than their percentage in the "rural" areas. But it should be pointed out that the "rural" areas also include those townships and hats which do not have a municipality. As a matter of fact, excepting those who are working

in school, located in far-flung areas all the plainsmen may be safely admitted to be living in urban areas though such areas may not be administratively recognized as such. It is further seen that the percentage of households in the so-called "rural" areas are much higher than the percentage of their total persons. This is because most of the households belonging to the plainsmen and living in rural areas have one or two members only. This also shows that the stability of the plainsmen in the "urban" areas is more than their counterparts in the rural areas.

Table 3. Rural-Urban and Male-Female distribution of Plainsmen in Sikkim, 1981

Sector	No. of Households	Population Persons	Male	Female
Total	4923	19,570	13,198	6372
%	8.2	6.2	67.4	32.6
Rural	2283	7865	5307	2558
%	46.4	40.2	67.5	32.5
Urban	2640	11,705	7801	3814
%	53.6	59.8	67.4	32.6

Source: Census of India 1981, Series 19, Sikkim Paper I of 1987, pp. 6-12.

Table 3 further shows that the male-female ratio among the plainsmen is roughly 2:1. This imbalance may be understood as a reflection of two things: one, such a scenario has emerged because of the relative instability of their society in Sikkim; and two, it may be taken as an indication of their relatively recent migration. But a closer look reveals that either of the explanations is not wholly correct. Such an imbalance has been caused largely by a very sizeable number of the post-75 migrants most of whom are single members in search of job or employment. They have largely chosen to remain single because of the nature of their service conditions. It is therefore quite natural that such gross imbalance in the male-female ratio is seen.

There is another important anthropological dimension which must be brought out in this context. It is a well-known fact that most of the plains communities have the practice of dowry payment. As a result, marriage of the males is often delayed because they have to collect enough money for the marriage of their sisters back home. Therefore, many males remain single even after achieving or over-growing the age of marriage. This cultural

dimension cannot be statistically supplemented here but my observation of such people confirms the importance of it.

Now the districtwise distribution of the plainsmen in Sikkim may be presented. This is shown in Table 4 presented below.

Table 4. Districtwise distribution of Plainsmen, 1981

District	Total Population	%	Total Plainsmen	% of Plainsmen to total pop.
East	1,38,762	43.9	13,859	10.0
West	75,192	23.8	1,697	2.3
South	75,976	24.0	3,075	4.0
North	26,455	8.3	939	3.5
Total	3,16,385	100.0	19,570	19.8

Source: Census of India 1981, Series 19, Sikkim Part I of 1987, pp. 6-12.

This table shows that the percentage of the plainsmen to total population is much higher (10.0) in the East district than that in the West (2.3), South (4.0), and the North (3.5). If we compare this distribution with the distribution of the total population in Sikkim it is clear that concentration of the plainsmen in the East and North districts is higher than in the West and South districts.

The greater concentration of the plainsmen in the East and North districts may be tentatively explained in terms of two related historical facts. The first is that these two districts have the old Indo-Tibetan trade route running through them. The plainsmen, particularly the earlier migrants among them being basically traders naturally chose to settle in these two districts rather than in the next two. Secondly, for strategic and administrative reasons these two districts have received greater attention of the state as well as the central governments.

Table 5 given below shows that of the total urban population in Sikkim, the plainsmen constitute as high as 22.2 percent, which is noteworthy. Moreover, it is significant to note that the plainsmen constitute more than one third of the total urban population in four out of seven major towns of Sikkim. In fact, Gyalshing, the district headquarters of the West district, has as high as 44.2 percent urban plainsmen out of the total urban population. But if we look at the absolute figures for the urban population from the plains it is very high (6773 persons) in Gangtok compared to 1392

persons in Singtam and 1183 persons in Jorethang. The total number of urban plainsmen in the remaining four towns does not exceed 1000. In fact, Mangan, according to the source, has only 195 plainsmen.

Now, the townwise distribution of the plainsmen in Sikkim may be shown with the help of the following table.

Table 5. Townwise distribution of Plainsmen, 1981

Towns	Total urban population	Total urban Plainsmen	% of Plainsmen to total urban population
Gangtok	36,747	6773	18.4
Rangpo	2,452	943	38.5
Singtam	4,043	1392	34.4
Namchi	1,444	524	36.3
Gyalshing	745	329	44.2
Jorethang	4,921	1183	24.0
Mangan	740	195	24.7
Total	51,142	11,339	22.2

Source: Census of India 1981, Series 19, Sikkim Part IIA and Part IIB, General Population Table and Primary Census Abstracts and Census of India 1981, Series 19, Sikkim Paper I of 1987, pp. 6-12.

It is also desirable to present figures on the communitywise distribution of the plainsmen in Sikkim. This is done here with the help of the following table.

Table 6. Communitywise distribution of Plainsmen, 1981

Community	Total Pop.	% to the total pop.	% of males	% of females
Assamese	62	0.3	53.2	46.8
Bengali	1,683	8.6	66.4	33.6
Gujarati	42	0.2	45.2	54.8
Hindi	14,961	76.4	67.5	32.5
Kannada	30	0.2	53.3	46.7
Malayalam	577	2.9	62.7	47.3
Kashmiri	15	0.1	46.7	53.3
Marathi	54	0.3	48.1	51.9
Oriya	88	0.4	64.8	35.2
Punjabi	489	2.5	55.6	44.4
Sindhi	4	0.02	25.0	75.0
Tamil	133	0.7	49.6	50.4
Telegu	154	0.8	50.0	50.0
Urdu	1,278	6.5	82.0	18.0
Total	19,570	100.0	67.4	32.6

Source: Census of India 1981, Series 19, Sikkim Paper I of 1987, pp. 7-13.

Table 6 presented above reveals some interesting features of the plains communities of Sikkim. First, of the 14 linguistic communities in Sikkim, the Hindi-speaking community forms the largest single group constituting as high as 76.4 percent of the total plainsmen in Sikkim. The Bengali and Urdu speakers are also quite numerous but their members are much less than that of the Hindi-speakers though much higher than that of the remaining communities individually. It should also be noted that the Urdu speakers are almost entirely from Bihar. It is to be noted further that the male-female ratio is rather balanced but the gross imbalance in this ratio among the Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu speakers has clearly determined the male-female ratio of the plainsmen as a whole.

This table also indicates the places from where they have migrated to Sikkim. Going by the linguistic backgrounds of the migrants to Sikkim they represent almost the entire India barring the north-east. The only community from the north-east India that has been represented is Assamese, but its total population in Sikkim in 1981 being only 62 persons it is safe to conclude that there are hardly any migrants from the north-east India.

One of the reasons why the north-east India has not been represented in Sikkim is that most of the territories of this region excluding Assam and Tripura, are recently granted statehood like Sikkim itself. Like Sikkim again, they were economically backward. Hence, large scale development activities were ushered in these states only after 60s or 70s, when Sikkim too experienced a heavy influx of poeple from outside. Therefore, it is quite natural that there are hardly any migrants from the north-east India to Sikkim.

Politico-Legal Status

According to the Constitution of India, an Indian citizen can settle, own property, and pursue a vocation in any part of India. But the very Constitution does not allow every Indian citizen to settle and own immovable property everywhere. There are many states in north-east India, for instance, where the administrative concern for tribal welfare and development is statutorily protected. The Inner Line Permit still discourages the Indian citizens from settling in the sparsely populated state of Arunachal Pradesh. In Jammu and Kashmir, though basically a non-tribal area,

any Indian citizen is not allowed to buy land. In most areas of the north-east India in particular, the non-tribals cannot buy land and often do not enjoy full political rights as Indian citizens.

In Sikkim also, not every Indian citizen has the access to buy land or settle in the strategically vulnerable parts of North Sikkim, the Lepcha reserve of Dzongu, and even some parts of the East Sikkim adjacent to the Chumbi Valley. In some of these areas even the tribal citizens of other parts of India are not allowed to settle or buy lands. Even the permission to visit some of these parts depends on the discretion of the District Collector, the Subdivisional Magistrate or the defence authorities.

Whatever may be the political and military considerations for curbing on the non-locals to settle in some parts of Sikkim, or for that matter even in other parts of north and north-east India, the plainsmen who have been living there for such a long time naturally feel treated as second class citizens. They often allege that they do not have full civil and political rights as Indian citizens though Sikkim is within the Indian territory. But

such allegations need to be carefully examined in the light of certain special administrative arrangements still in vogue in the bordering states like Sikkim. The specificity of their gradually becoming parts of India also need to be taken into consideration. In particular, the apprehension of the hillmen, particularly the tribal people, about the potentiality of exploitation by the plainsmen has to be noted. Verrier Elwin's policy of "controlled exposure" of the tribals to outsiders was sanctified by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, and despite a lapse of about thirty years since then this policy is still the guiding principle of Indian administrators.

It may be recalled here that Sikkim was a theocratic state ruled by hereditary monarchs until the end of 1974. Though elections were held in 1953, 1958, 1967, and 1973, such elections could not strictly be considered as democratic. Those were as a matter of fact sponsored by the Palace and many Sikkimese either did not participate or were debarred from participating in the same. Even in the 1973 election the voters were only those

who belonged to the three local communities, namely, Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali though not all of them were qualified to vote.

But it may be noted here that there were about six thousand plainsmen with Sikkim Subject Certificates under Sikkim Subject Regulation, 1961 but they could neither cast votes in the election of 1967 nor in the one held in 1973. It was for the first time in 1979 that they were allowed to not only cast votes but also contest for the open seats (Chakravorty 1989:3). For the 1979 October election, a total number of 19 open seats were available for Sikkim Legislative Assembly. There were 5 such seats each from the South and East districts and 7 from the West. All the 3 seats from the North district were reserved for the Lepcha-Bhutia tribes. The total number of seats reserved for them were 12: 2 were reserved for scheduled caste Nepalis and 1 for the Sangha or the monastery.

It may be further noted that on March 17, 1958 the State Council of Sikkim had only one open seat out of the total 20. This remained unchanged until the Government of Sikkim Act, 1972 changed the State Council into State Assembly. But under this Act, out of 32 total seats 12 were reserved

for Lepcha-Bhutias, 17 for Nepalis, 2 for the Sangha and 1 for the scheduled caste Nepalis. This was what is popularly known as the "Parity System". Therefore, there was hardly any scope for the plainsmen to participate in the election then.

It was by a Presidential Ordinance passed in 1979 that the 17 seats, which were earlier reserved for the Nepalis, were opened. This Ordinance was later made into an Act under the 45th Amendment of the Indian Constitution. This has also been a major irritant to the Nepalis because it was their special privilege under the so-called "Parity System", which was withdrawn.

It was only the Janata Party led by Kazi Lhendup Dorji which never was critical of the rights extended to the plainsmen since the very inception of this party in Sikkim. Most other political parties of Sikkim had been advocating that if the plainsmen continued to settle there in such an alarming rate the general seats would soon be captured by them. The period between 1975 and 1980 did witness a phenomenal influx of the plainsmen but most of them had the slightest

idea of the Sikkimese politics nor their migration to Sikkim could be ascertained to be politically motivated. It was most likely a very simple act of migrating to a place which was badly in need of both skilled and unskilled personnels from outside to materialize its fast-expanding administrative and developmental networks. The local people did not face any problem of unemployment then but the large-scale influx of the people from the plains of India was not taken favourably specially by the political party leaders excepting those in the forefront of the Janata Party. They found in Kazi Lhendup Dorji an easy target for putting the blame for this.

As stated above, the plainsmen were granted the right to cast votes and contest elections but the changes in the political climate of Sikkim after that were not favourable for them. On the other hand, various political parties were constantly agitating against such political rights being granted to the plainsmen. On the other hand, there was a constant effort of the Nepali-dominated political parties to revive the old "Parity System", which would mean the closing of the open seats. The anti-plainsmen sentiment had risen to such a

height in Sikkim that no political party there was prepared to give any ticket to a plainsman. Even the Janata Party, which had a considerable following among the plainsmen, could not afford to offer a single party ticket to them.

One of the reasons why the Janata Party was reluctant to accommodate any plainsman as a candidate was because it was aware of the growing sentiment against the plainsmen. The political parties like the Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) held Kazi Lhendup Dorji responsible for merging Sikkim with India and opening the 17 seats for all communities so that the plainsmen could contest elections. Thus, the Janata Party was branded as the party of the dhotiwalas, meaning the plainsmen.

Given this, the plainsmen were expected to be united under the banner of Nagarik Sangharsh Samity formed in May 1977 but they were not. If they were united, it was not at all difficult for them to send one representative at least from the Gangtok constituency. Of the total 7895 voters in this constituency, the plains voters singly accounted about half. But incidentally, instead

of one of them contesting the election from that constituency in 1979 there were 8 plainsmen out of the total 17 candidates in the fray. The contestants were Marwaris, Biharis, and also South Indians. Obviously, the voters were divided along ethnic lines within the plainsmen and the result was that the 8 contestants combinedly could secure only 684 votes. This showed that only about one fifth of their voters actually voted for their own candidates. Even D. P. Bhawanipuri, who was projected as the most prospective candidate amongst the plains candidates, could not secure more than 420 votes (Sengupta 1985:110).

It was only in 1985 assembly election that Balchand Sarda, a candidate from the Marwari community, for the first time won the election from the Gangtok constituency. He secured 2010 votes out of the total 4656 votes cast while his nearest rival secured 1749 votes (Chakravorty 1989:9-10). The plainsmen had probably learnt their lesson from their experience in the previous assembly election held in 1979. Though elected as an independent candidate, Sarda's victory was a major political phenomenon not only for the

Sikkimese plainsmen but also for the Sikkimese hillmen.

Some early migrants from the plains of India, particularly belonging to the Marwari community, own immovable properties like land and building within the municipality areas but today they are not allowed to buy any immovable property. This applies even to those who hold Sikkim Subject Certificates. They have established their shops in houses taken on hire. Even the trade licenses of a large number of businessmen from the plains of India are in the names of the local Sikkimese.

The "sons of the soil" policy of the Sikkimese government has been particularly detrimental to the interest of the plainsmen. Since the plainsmen are politically not the "sons of the soil" they are officially deprived of the state scholarships and the privileges of entering into medical and engineering colleges in the state government's quota and finance.

But in actual practice some of the plainsmen do get the privileges which are proclaimed to be meant only for the local Lepcha, Bhutia, and the Nepali community members. Some of the plainsmen

being in highly influential bureaucratic positions in Sikkim or being rich enough to fund the election expenses of the ruling parties the state government cannot be too strict about this. For instance, in 1984, the daughter of a medical officer from Delhi serving in Sikkim on deputation got a medical seat in Sikkim's quota at Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Post Graduate Medical and Education Research (JIPMER) in Pondicherry. In reaction to this there was a students' movement in June 1984. They demanded that the children of the plainsmen serving there on deputation basis should not be allowed to occupy the reserved seats in medical, engineering, and other educational institutions outside Sikkim. They even filed a writ petition in Sikkim High Court which passed a judgement against the daughter of that medical officer. Her seat was cancelled and her father returned to Delhi but JIPMER allowed her to continue her studies there on sympathetic ground.

Another incident took place in 1987. But this time it was the turn of the plainsmen. The tension first cropped up in Jorethang which is a major commercial town of the West district. The issue was the state government's refusal to issue

new trade permits or renew the old ones even for those who had Sikkim Subject Certificates issued in the days of Chogyal. Even the street hawkers and roadside cobblers were insisted that they get the trade licences. But when the applications were put forward the licences were not issued to them. As a result, the traders of Sikkim belonging to the plains communities undertook a programme of relay hunger strike at Gangtok. The strike continued for one whole week but the response of the state government was reported to be further harassment as if they had no right to conduct business in Sikkim (Sen 1987).

It is also reported that, in 1980, the Chief Minister of Sikkim, in a press conference held at Gangtok, warned a "particular business community" (referring to the Marwaris) against financing some politicians of the opposition party to forment trouble in the state (Statesman 23/12/80). According to him that particular business community had established a flourishing trade in the state but was unhappy with his government. He even initiated 10 corruption charges against a "few important persons" of the Kazi Lhendup Dorji government,

out of which six were against plainsmen. He was further reported to have claimed that he had definite informations about the particular business community's financing a senior opposition leader of the state for compaigning against his government (ibid.).

Conclusion

This chapter deals primarily with the migrational history, present day distribution and the politico-legal status of the plainsmen in Sikkim.

About the migrational history there are two important points that need to be highlighted here. One, it is observed that the pre-1975 migration of the plainsmen was mainly from the north-western parts of India whereas the post-1975 migration has been from almost all over India. Two, the pre-1975 migrants were by and large illiterates and had gone to Sikkim primarily for business whereas the post-1975 migrants are qualified and often highly educated persons who have gone there largely for service occupations. There are, of course, some plainsmen who have gone there for different reasons from those mentioned above but the above classification stands true to

a very large extent.

About the distribution of the plainsmen it is clear that they have exhibited a sense of preference for urban areas to rural areas. This is nothing surprising about the plainsmen who had migrated before 1975 because their very occupation demanded that they settled in urban areas. But the apparent choice of the post-1975 plainsmen for urban areas needs to be briefly explained.

One of the most evident reasons for this is that most establishments, including educational institutions, were opened up first in the urban areas of Sikkim. Even now the non-educational establishments like offices, banks, and hospitals are almost entirely confined to the urban centres only. This has automatically controlled the spread of plains migrants to the rural areas. It is also to be noted that other infrastructural facilities like roads, electricity, water, and telephones were available only in the urban centres. At present, some of these facilities like electricity, road, and water supply are extended even to the remote rural areas but most of the plainsmen having gone there from relatively advanced areas do find

the urban areas a better choice. Further, the urban areas seem to provide them with some scope of social interaction with their own people and hence some sense of mutual security, if not some social life also.

On their politico-legal status it must be noted that the merger of Sikkim with the Union of India has given them more of economic and psychological security than legal or political. True, they have been granted the right to contest elections or cast votes from 1979 assembly election onwards but they still have to depend, for various purposes, on the pleasure of the political elites of Sikkim. For instance, trade licences are granted to them more often as a matter of political or personal favour rather than their legal right. But with regard to the "negative attitude" of the present government towards the plainsmen, it is difficult to take the various newspaper reports for granted. Such an attitude could very much be a political strategy of the party in power to keep the local voters happy because they know that there is a sustained demand from the public to control the migration of the plainsmen to Sikkim. In fact,

many local people reported that the state government is not at all sincere about its proclamations against the plainsmen. They instead claimed that the party in power tacitly patronized the plainsmen and criticized them over the microphones.

Chapter III

Internal Structure of the Plainsmen

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to depict the patterns of inter-personal relationships within each plains community and among the various plains communities. For the local communities like the Lepcha, Bhutia, and the Nepali the plainsmen constitute a single homogeneous ethnic group. Even the scholars writing on Sikkim have often referred to them as a single ethnic group. In many situations, the state government has also been found to have treated them as one community. And, finally, the plainsmen themselves have sometimes acted as such.

But it will be too naive to take the plainsmen as a single community or ethnic group. It is at least desirable that we explore it and see to what extent they really are a single ethnic group. Preliminary knowledge about them compels us to look into not only the similarities and differences among the various plains communities

but also within each of them. There is in fact a lot of scope to question the subjective and objective bases of even the identities like the Marwaris, Biharis, Bengalis, and the Oriyas.

It should be pointed out here that the Marwaris and the Biharis or the Hindi-speaking group of plainsmen constitute the core of the plainsmen as a group. Other plains communities like Bengali, Oriya, Assamese, Keralite, and Punjabi are small in number and none of them is reported to have any association of their own. Therefore, it is justifiable to devote on the Marwaris and the Biharis separately from what I have called 'other plainsmen' here.

Ethnic Structure

In this section, I intend to discuss the ethnic bases of the Marwaris, Biharis, and 'other plainsmen' separately. The last group of the plainsmen do not have a common ground for ethnic relationships to build upon because they represent a number of linguistic groups, different places of origin, and even religious differences. They are also much more scattered

than it is the case with the Marwaris and the Biharis. But occupationally there is a great deal of harmony within them because most of them are servicemen. It may also be added here that an insignificant few of them are holding Sikkim Subject Certificates too. They are by and large quite highly educated and sometimes with professional training also unlike their counterparts from the Marwari and the Bihari communities. Hence, the above classification of the plainsmen into three groups is more or less tenable. But it is necessary to go into the details of each of these three major groups of the plainsmen here.

(a) The Marwaris

The word 'Marwari' refers to the people of Marwar, in Rajasthan. The local synonym for this word is 'kanya'. Their migration to Sikkim first took place during the Indo-Tibetan trade. They were engaged in supplying various materials to Tibet and in importing goods like wool, incenses, and salt from Tibet. Some of them were also engaged in trading of the local products like cardamom and orange.

With the Chinese invasion on Tibet in 1950 the trans-Himalayan trade was severely affected. And the Indo-China War of 1962 virtually put an end to this prosperous trade. It was the Marwaris who were most badly affected by the border conflicts with China which now controls Tibet also. But being born traders and being highly adaptive the closing of the border with Tibet did not succeed in crippling them forever. They did face a temporary incapacitation but soon they overcame the shock by diversifying their trading activities. But without the sacrifices of the first generation Marwari migrants to Sikkim, the new generation members could not probably achieve the success they have achieved today.

The Marwaris living in Sikkim today are broadly divided into the following four groups:

1. The Agarwals,
2. The Oswals,
3. The Maheswaris, and
4. The Jains (Sarma 1990:27-33).

The Agarwals are believed to be the descendants of the king Agar Sen whose capital was at Agroha, in Punjab. They are divided into seven-

teen and half clans. According to a legend, the origin of their clans was explained thus. Agar Sen had seventeen sons and he wanted them to marry with the eighteen daughters of another king called Basuk or Vasuki. So the eighteenth son was formed out of the body of the eldest son. Hence, the seventeen and half clans. The half clan members cannot inter-marry with the members of the seventeen full clans.

The Oswals are believed to have originated from the Rajput clans who were converted into Jainism in the second century. But they have taken their names after the town of Osi or Osian, the ruins of which are still to be found about thirty miles north of Jodhpur. Some of the Oswal clans are Bhandari, Singhi, Lodha, Mohta, and Mohnot.

The Maheswaris are said to be the descendants of the Chauhan, Parihar, and Solanki clans of the Rajputs. The name Maheswari is derived from the name of their principal god called Mahadeo or Mahesh. They have seventytwo endogamous clans and are supposed to be strict vegetarian. The

orthodox among them do not even eat the garlics and onion.

The Jains are the followers of Mahavira who had reformed the tenets of Hinduism in the sixth century before Christ. He had named Jainism after Jina or the Victor. Jainism is divided into two sub-sects called Swatambara and Digambara.

There is no restriction on the members of one group having commensal relations with the members of another. Both cooked and uncooked food can be freely exchanged among the members of the various groups. But normally, commensal exchanges take place only between the members of close relatives and friends from within the community.

Further, the Marwari dialect which is spoken by all members of the community irrespective of their shades of Hinduism is a strong harmonizing or homogenizing factor. Whenever they come across the members of their own community, whether Agarwal, Oswal, Maheswari, or Jain, they automatically start speaking in their own dialect. It is seldom violated by any member of the community, particularly the old ones.

It is this rather than their religion or traditional dress that makes them feel and behave as one single community. Needless to say that there are conflicts and quarrels within the community but such relationships do not get the opportunity to assume an upper hand. Due to various social and political pressures and insecurity faced by them conflicts do not normally get known to the non-Marwari communities living within the same town or even neighbourhood.

(b) The Biharis

The Biharis are called so after the name of their state of origin, namely Bihar. The word 'deshwali' is often used to refer to the migrants from Bihar. The common term used to refer to them is however 'Madhise', which means plainsmen but which is not always used to refer to the Marwaris as well. Hence, the use of the hyphenated expression "Kainya-Madhise" for referring to the Marwaris and Biharis together.

The Biharis have the same traditional dress as that of the Marwaris. But there are some differences too. For instance, the Bihari society in Sikkim, unlike the Marwaris, is a hierarchical

society with the Brahmins occupying the top ritual position. There is also a sizeable number of the so-called Harijans among them. The Marwaris are, on the other hand, a highly stratified society with people whose income is a few hundreds to others whose income runs into lakhs per month. Secondly, there are dialectical differences between the Maithilis and the Bhojpuris within them. However, the Bhojpuri dialect is more or less widely understood and used by the Biharis in Sikkim.

The Biharis are slightly late migrants to Sikkim. They were initially engaged in subsidiary trading activities and other occupations like cobblery, barbery, and shop-keeping. The occupational diversification among the Biharis is therefore more significant than among the Marwaris. Many of them who went to Sikkim after 1975 are also engaged in masonry, carpentry, and construction works by the road side. Needless to point out that some of the post-1975 migrants are also highly educated and well placed in the educational and bureaucratic set up of Sikkim. The Marwaris are

conspicuously absent either in the menial occupations or in the educational institutions.

They are different from the Marwaris in yet another matter. While the Marwaris are professed vegetarian the Biharis are not so. Of course, being Hindus, they do not eat beef but some of them do eat buffalo and pork. Among the non-vegetarian food the most common are mutton, fish and egg. Further, unlike the Marwaris, alcoholism is known to be quite popular specially among the male migrants from Bihar. They not only drink it but also sell the factory-produced alcohol.

Because of the presence of considerable social distances within the Bihari community it has not been able to impose community endogamy within Sikkim. Apart from the social distances there is a considerable economic differentiation also though it is by no means as stark as it is so in the case of the Marwaris. As a result, despite being quite numerous the spouses are to be found from their own native places and not from their members living within Sikkim. This, however, applies also to the Marwaris to a large extent.

In terms of religion, the Biharis are clearly divided into two groups - Hindu and Muslim. Despite linguistic affinity and historical similarity the cleavage between these two religious groups seen at the national level is also reflected in Sikkim. The Muslim Bihari males can be easily identified by their head-gear and the typical beard they keep. They are also reported to be beef-eaters, which is perhaps a major point of cleavage between the Hindu and the Muslim Biharis. Being Muslims, they have other cultural and religious obligations too. The Islamic texts rather than the Vedic ones define their world view. Their places of worship are different and no matter what occupations they have the religious ditinctions seem to predominate any other form of interaction. However, their population being much smaller compared to their Hindu members the religious divide does not pose any threat to the pan-Bihari solidarity formation.

(c) The Other Plainsmen

There are thirteen linguistic communities falling under the category of 'other plainsmen' here. (For details, see Table 6.). Of these thirteen communities, Bengalis, Keralites, Punjabis,

and Urdu speakers are quite numerous but it is difficult to treat them either individually or as a group the way the Marwaris and the Biharis could be treated above. Since they represent so many linguistic communities the only language through which they can communicate with each other is either Hindi, Nepali, or English. Dispersed as they are in different schools, offices, hospitals, etc. a close interaction is difficult to visualize. None of these linguistic group members live in compact geographical areas as the Biharis and Marwaris do. Thus, unlike these communities, the members of the communities included under 'other plainsmen' interact with each other more as individuals than as members of a particular social or cultural group.

There is of course a universal tendency to interact with people from the same linguistic group. This is in fact more strongly evident among the members of some of these linguistic communities. And, as pointed out earlier, being mostly bachelors there is very insignificant cultural interaction among the members of these communities. It is also to be noted that, unlike the Marwaris and the

Biharis, some of the members of 'other plainsmen' have settled down with local women. This is particularly noticed about the Tamil, Malayalam and Marathi speakers in Gangtok.

Most of these communities are in fact not fit to be qualified as 'communities' in traditional sense they often are simply conglomerates of individuals having different educational, professional, economic, and religious backgrounds. It is perhaps because of this that their interaction with the local communities is more frequent, if not more intimate also. They can be quite easily identified by their physical characteristics such as complexion and facial features. But in terms of food habits, alcoholism, dress, etc. there is no clear picture that can be discerned.

Occupationally also, it is often difficult to classify the 'other plainsmen' into any distinct categories except that the Bengalis are almost entirely a service category people. No other community is so heavily dependent on the service sector as the Bengalis are in Sikkim.

In terms of religion, they are by and large Hindus though the followers of Christianity, Islamism and other religious denominations cannot be ignored. It is observed, however, that it is basically the Christians and Muslims who seem to have a clear inclination to their religious strictures. The Hindus by and large appear carefree as if it is none of their concern.

By way of concluding this section it may be stated that the plainsmen are a heterogeneous lot representing various languages, religions, cultures and historical backgrounds. In addition to such primordial differences the class distinctions are gradually becoming sharper and sharper. Such distinctions are not only witnessed at the level of the plainsmen as a whole but also within each community subsumed under this identity. Geographical or spatial spread of their members, despite their concentration in the urban areas, has further brought about communication gaps between and amongst them. Hence, the ethnic solidarity formation cannot be very different from what we have observed. The The heterogeneity of their social, cultural, religious, and class composition may be hypothesized to

be a major deterrent to a successful pan-plainsmen solidarity formation. This has been illustrated in the following sections.

Ethnic Silidarity Formation (I)

In this section the discussion is confined to the intra-plainsmen solidarity formation or at the level of the consituent communities from the plains of India. Among the fourteen odd constituent communities under the umbrella term 'plainsmen', only the Marwaris and the Biharis have exhibited some solidarity. Hence, the ethnic associations of these two communities may be separately discussed here.

(a) Sikkim Agarwal Sabha

Of the four major divisions of the Marwari community only the Agarwals have a council with the above name. Its aims and objectives are reported to be to promote the interests of the Agarwals living in Sikkim and to look after their welfare. Of its several social welfare functions, maintenance of the dharamsalas, charitable dispensaries, and temples are some of them.

This Association is considered to be non-political in nature but the leaders are often reported to be courting the political leaders of the state as well as the Centre for achieving some of its objectives.

It could not be ascertained about its origin or when it was established but from the very name of this Association it is clear that this does not include all the Marwaris. But this cannot perhaps be taken as a sign of political and cultural cleavage within the Marwari society. The Agarwals being the biggest group within the Marwari community, the name of this Association was naturally kept after them. However, the other divisions of the Marwari society there are also expected to contribute to the functioning of this Association.

(b) Sikkim Bihari Kalyan Samity

This Association was established in 1986 at Gangtok. Its aims and objectives are to promote and protect the interests of the Biharis in Sikkim. Apart from the existence of this Association not much is known about its activities.

Given the fact that the Bihari community is stratified and faced with linguistic and religious cleavages, this Association is not expected to be very strong. Nor is the state government expected to give it as much attention and importance as it does to the Sikkim Agarwal Sabha. The Biharis by and large have a lower economic standing than that of the Marwaris and they do not command as much of respect as the Marwaris do.

From the above two examples of ethnic associations in Sikkim not much can be inferred. In the first place, vital informations on these associations are not known to people belonging to other communities or to the common members of the same. The leaders of these associations, on the other hand, try to give a pious picture of the aims and objectives of their associations. Under the circumstances, one can only conclude that the Marwaris and Biharis at least have laid the foundations on which they can build their ethnic castles if need be. However, the potentiality of the Agarwals to do something for their welfare is certainly more than that of the Biharis. Both

have strong contacts outside the state but the sheer economic superiority of the former compels a researcher or the state government to take it more seriously than the latter.

Ethnic Solidarity Formation (II)

In this section, I would like to discuss some of the ethnic associations working in Sikkim and having a 'pan-plainsmen' character. For various reasons, details on the Rotary Club and the Lions Club in Sikkim could not be collected. These clubs are, however, basically controlled and monopolised by the businessmen from the plains of India. The names of these associations do not necessarily evoke any ethnic connotation but everyone in Sikkim knows that these are essentially the associations of the plainsmen. Let me now describe some of these associations briefly.

(a) Sikkim Byapari Sangha

The plainsmen living in Sikkim are broadly categorized into two: servicemen and businessmen. The first category of plainsmen have no association of their own which could function as a pressure group but the second category of them have an

association with the above name.

The businessmen of Sikkim were first allowed to form an association by the Palace in early 70s. It was granted basically as the expediency of time and situation demanded. It was difficult for the Palace to deal with individual trader and timely inform each of them of the changes in the rates or merchandize or other necessary trade regulations. But if there was an association of traders this would be easily taken care of. Hence, when the demand was made for recognizing this association, the Palace did not express much reservation about it.

The plainsmen in Sikkim did not have any political rights during the rule of Chogyal, as pointed out in Chapter II. But Basnet (1974) has shown that it also applied to a great number of the ethnic Nepalis there. But while the ethnic Nepalis were more vocal politically after 1940s itself, the plainsmen mustered the courage only after 1970s. Since its inception, this Sangha began to function as a presurre group though it articulated its interests mainly through personal

contact with the leaders. Some of the leaders of this Association had considerable influence over the members of the State Council and still exert their influence over the leaders of the Legislative Assembly.

It is also reported that this Association sometimes sought the help of top bureaucrats serving in Sikkim on deputation from other places of India. But it is alleged that in most cases the office bearers of this Association were concerned with the promotion and protection of their own personal business and trade interests rather than the general interest of the traders there. It was this feeling which later led some of its members to form a parallel association of the traders. The dissatisfaction about the leaders of the Sangha, particularly about their ineffective efforts to solve their licence problems, was indeed widespread.

The decision of the government taken in 1973 to abolish the excise duty on cigarettes and betel nut benefitted a large number of small traders (Sengupta 1985:131). Cigarette was earlier a mono-

poly of one or two traders. It was based on contract payment of lumpsum amount which could be made only by a handful of the traders. But this respite from the government was not enough to keep some of the members away from attacking the office bearers of the Sangha. They indeed had many problems which needed to be attended to.

As the dissatisfaction with the leaders of the Sangha grew, some of the traders formed in June 1975 another association called Sikkim Merchants' Association. According to the leaders of this new association the previous leaders had failed to capitalize on the changed situation in Sikkim after 1975.

Until the formation of this new association the Sikkim Byapari Sangha was the only medium through which communication with the state government was possible. But it was basically the multi-millionaires among them whose interest was served by the Sangha. The rich businessmen who were credited to have helped a particular political party in the 1973 mini-revolution were later given a lot of favour but the poorer among them were

given no attention (Sengupta 1985:132).

But even the Sikkim Merchants' Association has not been able to achieve things which are of vital interest to them. Some of them believe that their failure is due to the general feeling of distress among the plainsmen and the lack of cooperation of the Sikkimese government in solving their problems.

(b) Nagarik Sangharsh Samity

It was in this backdrop that the plainsmen in Sikkim formed an association with wider implications and bearing the above name in May 1977. They had begun to realize that their approach to the solution of their problems should not be as traders or businessmen but as rightful citizens of India. Thus, the new issue was the preservation of their political rights. In the very beginning the leaders complained to the Governor and the Chief Minister of Sikkim about the spread of anti-plainsmen propaganda and the growing trend towards regionalism in Sikkim. The expressed aims and objectives of this Samity were, however, to maintain communal harmony, to pledge faith in the

Constitution of India, to participate in the development of the state, and to struggle peacefully and legally for achieving and protecting their fundamental rights as Indian citizens. With regard to its membership any Indian citizen living in Sikkim could be its member though actually it was only the plainsmen who took its membership.

Whatever may be the reasons, this Association does not seem to be functioning soundly or receiving full support of the plainsmen. For instance, an annual general meeting of the members of this Association was held in March 1978 but because of the lack of quorum elections to the 9 executive posts could not take place. Further, they could not hold any election even in 1979 though in that year ad hoc committees were established at Rangpo, Singtam, and Mangan towns of Sikkim.

All this was despite the fact that its call for a strike in July 1978 in protest against the police excesses against some members of the business community was reported to be a total success (The Nation 9/8/79). Soon after this, it raised

its voice against the "Parity System". On the other hand, the Sikkim Prajatantra Congress, in its memorandum to the Governor, was reported to have demanded the retention the "Parity System" (Nagarik Adhikar 1/8/78).

In 1978, there was a widespread propaganda against the rights of the plainsmen to cast votes and contest elections (The Nation 9/8/79). Posters were reportedly displayed all over the town of Gangtok, which said that "Indians should not be given any voting rights". This was alleged to have instigated the Nagarik Sangharsh Samity leaders to mobilize their resources and send memoranda to the leaders in Delhi. They even took a delegation to Delhi in July 1978 and met the then Prime Minister, the Law Minister, and the Home Minister among others and apprised them of their demand for constitutional rights in Sikkim (Nagarik Adhikar 1/8/78). They also approached Jai Prakash Narayan who was reported to have assured the delegation to write a letter to the leaders in Delhi requesting them to fulfill the demands of this Association (The Nation 24/2/79).

Some of the leaders of the Sikkim Byapari Sangha were strongly opposed to the Nagarik Sangharsh Samity from the very beginning. The former believed that the ruling party was not sympathetic to the issues raised by the Sikkim Nagarik Sangharsh Samity due to its close association with the Sikkim Janata Parishad (The Nation 17/2/79). In the Assembly election of 1979, two important members of the Samity contested as independent candidates. Though some of the prominent members of the Samity supported Dorji Dadul, the Janata Party candidate from Gangtok constituency, other members supported the plains candidate, D. P. Bhawanipuri (Sikkim Express 27/9/79).

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it appears that there is not only a heterogeneity of primordial values and norms but also a heterogeneity of interests even within a particular plains community. It is a combination of these two objective and subjective factors that seems to be responsible for precluding not only a strong 'pan-plainsmen' solidarity formation but even a solidarity among the members of their constituent communities. Otherwise,

there is no reason why the various ethnic associations described above should be beset with dissensions and conflicts.

It is quite probable that some of the weaknesses of such associations are due to political pressure but without the strong sense of insecurity they have in Sikkim, it is equally probable that such associations would prove to be even less effective. Apparently, the plainsmen are geographically scattered over different towns and interspersed by the local people even within the town. But with improved transport and telecommunication facilities they can very well be in touch not only with their members within the state but also others outside it.

It boils down finally to a situation in which no matter how essential it is for the plainsmen to unite and overcome many common politico-legal disabilities faced by them it is those few rich among them whose narrow economic interests have prevailed over the common interest of the plainsmen. The few rich businessmen are seldom interested in attaining the interest of their poorer members because most of them not only have their own

interest to be protected. But such rich plainsmen often also do not have any politico-legal handicap from which most of their brethren suffer. Being first and foremost traders the leaders of the various ethnic associations described above seem to have traded even with the future of their own community.

From the point of view of local Sikkimese the emergence of the various plains associations is nothing but an encouragement they have received after Sikkim became a part of India. According to them, this historical accident has not only emboldened the plainsmen living in Sikkim but has also made many of them adament about the cause of their people.

Chapter IV

Occupational Structure of the Plainsmen

Introduction

In this chapter, I propose to begin the discussion on the occupational structure of the plainsmen in Sikkim with a theoretical discussion on the sociological significance of occupation. Then I plan to discuss the relationship between occupation and ethnic structure in Sikkim till the end of monarchy there. In the next section, I would like to trace the factors for the phenomenal diversification in occupation after 1975 and how the plainsmen are coping with the changes.

A related issue with the subject discussed in Chapter III is whether or not occupation of the plainsmen in Sikkim is a determining factor for their position in the class hierarchy. In other words, this chapter intends to explore if at all can the occupation be considered as a basis for ethnic stratification in Sikkim. This is attempted here both at the intra- and inter-plainsmen levels.

A major handicap in this regard is the lack of macro-data on the occupations of the plainsmen or the hillmen in Sikkim. The occupational classification is available in the census data but such classifications are not based on the ethnic backgrounds of the people there. As a result, one has to depend heavily on observation or on the data collected from the sample respondents. Though such data cannot be claimed to be fully representative of the 'plainsmen' as a whole they do give a fairly close idea of their occupations.

Occupation: Some Theoretical Discussion

A lot has been written on the sociological importance of occupation. It is not possible to present the entire literature on this but some important contentions about it may be brought out here.

According to Arthur Salz, occupation is important because it determines an individual's social position (1944:424). This is largely true of the complex societies where the most important question ever asked is: what does a person do? But occupa-

pation is not always a determining factor for social position in the simple societies. Rather than occupation, it is often the membership of a particular clan or tribe, or the ownership of land or animals (or even sometimes women!), which tend to determine one's social positions.

Another contention about the importance of occupation in the industrialized societies is made by Alba M Edwards, who writes that "(t)he occupations of the people influenced directly their lives, their customs, their institutions, indeed, their members" (1943:xi). This is once again not very convincing when we compare this with the situation in simple societies.

Occupation assumes much more importance in urban societies. Hence, the very education and training of children, or even their socialization is usually tuned to the kind of occupation the parents have in their mind for their children. It is also in the urban areas that one cannot easily separate the occupation from the individual and compare or contrast them. It is from such comparison and contrast that occupations are idealized by the urban dwellers.

It may be added here that in urban or industrial societies education creates a hunger for white-collar jobs. Western education, female emancipation, and the increased facilities for mobility create a situation in which there is a strong competition for limited occupations. Those who succeed in this competition win social prestige and financial security but for those who fail the same ideal becomes the source of their frustration.

Various studies on social mobility, change and stratification have shown that occupation is the singlemost representative indicator of social status of a particular social class (Reiss 1961, Miller 1968, Featherman et al 1974, Sarda 1977, Coxton and Jones 1979, etc.). Factors like income, education, power and authority are also found to have a high association with occupational achievement.

As the developmental activities begin in a backward region, two important events take place. First, the new occupational opportunities are created requiring skilled as well as unskilled manpower from outside because this is not always available within the region. Second, demographic changes take place with people from outside pouring

in such areas. The consequences of change, which are often due to the importation of the western concept of development, are but far more serious than the two events just mentioned.

In the concerned literature (Verma et al 1986: 5-6) one finds basically four models used to depict the situations of rapid development. First, the "assimilation" or "structural-pluralism" model shows that under such situations the migrants from outside are distributed over the various strata of occupations. Under such circumstances, occupational and ethnic stratifications do not get the chance to overlap. Second, the "class conflict" model lays down that such migrants occupy the top strata of occupations rendering the local populace to occupy the bottom strata. In such a model the ethnic stratification coincides with the class stratification. Such a model is more applicable in areas of colonial or neo-colonial domination. Third, the "stratification-segmentation" model proposes that the migrants occupy various strata of occupations excepting the top stratum and they get confined to their occupations due to other forces in operation like socialization or discrimi-

nation. Under such circumstances, the mobility takes place only within the strata they have already occupied.

Finally, the "structural-change" model depicts the migrants as occupying those occupations that are fast expanding. The very expansion of certain occupations, such as service in Sikkim after 1975, attracts migrants from outside.

It is difficult to eliminate any of the four models discussed above without going into the details of the occupational structure in Sikkim. However, on the basis of some preliminary observation and informations, it appears that the first model is rather close to the situation in Sikkim though it partly fits in the other three models also. It is quite clear that the plainsmen in Sikkim not only occupy the top occupational strata but also some of the lowest strata. In certain respects, the "stratification-segmentation" model also comes close to the experience of the plainsmen in Sikkim. There are traders among the hill people also but there is a segmentation within trade and the plainsmen and hillmen are concentrated in

different segments of trade. If the concept of "segmentation" is extended to the realm of time-series then one finds that the plainsmen often are occupied in the same occupational segmentation but the filling-in has taken at different periods of time.

The "stratification-segmentation" model, developed by Porter (1965), is based on the assumption that every ethnic group has some limitations and advantages in the pursuit of occupations. This model further lays down that the very pursuit of a particular vocation is often determined or conditioned by one's ethnic background. A cobbler's son is more likely to be a cobbler than the son of, say, a bureaucrat. Occupational segmentation of various ethnic groups may take place due to linguistic, cultural, or racial factors (Verma 1985), or historical circumstances (Tracy 1981), or even governmental policies (Boyd 1985).

Before going to either corroborating or rejecting any or all the four models discussed above it is desirable that the context of the study is laid down first.

Ethnic Structure and Occupations

It is difficult to go too far into the ethnic history of Sikkim, particularly its relation to the occupational history. Historical data in this regard are rather scarce, as it is the case with the very history of Sikkim before the mid-seventeenth century. Therefore, any reconstruction of the history of the relationship between ethnic and occupational structure is often inductive in approach and may have to skip decades in between.

It is quite safe to contend that both the ethnic and occupational structure in Sikkim have been gradually growing more and more complex and diversified. By the end of the rule of the Chogyals these structures were fairly complex but after 1975 they seem to have grown even more so. These developments may be briefly illustrated here. In fact, the post-1975 diversification in the occupational and ethnic scenario need separate treatment as it has been done in this chapter.

The earliest inhabitants of Sikkim have been accepted to be the Lepchas by all those who have written on it. On the basis of some recent

researches, Subba (1988) has added that there were Tsongs or Limbus and the Mangars also there from the earliest times. Occupationally, all these three communities were agriculturists of the shifting or swidden type. The Lepchas and the Limbus did some trade with the Tibetans and Gorkhas respectively. The Mangars, on the other hand, are known to be expert in mining activities.

At this stage, there was hardly any division of labour worth a mention either within each of these tribes or among these three tribes. The Lepchas occupied the northern part of Sikkim. The southern part was occupied by the Mangars and the western part by the Limbus. They were hence geographically separated from each other and every community did most of the occupations required for its survival. For anything they did not produce they travelled long distances in order to procure them. Most importantly, there was no concept of occupational hierarchy among those tribes until at least the end of the seventeenth century.

As has been pointed out in Chapter I, the boundary line between Sikkim and Tibet was not

clearly defined before 1890. When the boundary with Tibet was demarcated some areas where the Tibetans had been living, whether permanently or seasonally, may have remained within Sikkim. It is thought so because the economy of North Sikkim being what it was people there moved along with their cattle to high altitudes for grazing them during the summer and moved down the hills during winter. Because of this peculiarity of the people in North Sikkim it is difficult to claim or disclaim the presence of the Tibetans within the boundaries of Sikkim fixed in 1890.

It is however fairly indicated that their migration to Sikkim became perceptible after 1641 when the Tibetan dynasty was firmly established there. It is believed that after that year lot of Tibetans migrated to Sikkim and settled in its present day South and East districts also.

On the basis of Subba's study (1990) it is clear that the Tibetans were not only traders, as is usually believed, but also practised agriculture and animal husbandry. But of these three major occupations of the Tibetans, trade obviously occupied a rather prominent position. The Lepchas,

Limbus, and the Mangars, on the other hand, did not have trade as a major occupational activity.

That the Tibetans occupied a dominant economic position vis-a-vis the Lepchas until the end of the nineteenth century has been considered to be due to their expertise in trading activities (Subba 1988:362-63). But Subba also considers this domination due to their superiority in culturo-religious matters and the fact that they belonged to the ruling race. Hence, until that period, there was ethnic segmentation of occupations but it was not so important. The ethnic segmentation was supported by a number of cultural and political factors which often marginalized the role of occupation in ethnic stratification.

The British connection with Sikkim began in the early nineteenth century but the influence of the British in the affairs of Sikkim was noticeable only after the posting of J. C. White as a political officer at Gangtok. He has been considered to be responsible for encouraging the migration of the Nepalese from the western side and this continued even after he left Sikkim. One of the reasons why the British wanted to populate

Sikkim with the Hindu Nepalis was to counter the Tibetan animosity about the British. There also were some local kazis who had their revenue interest in encouraging the Nepalis to settle there. The result was that the earlier inhabitants of Sikkim were outnumbered by the migrants by the end of the nineteenth century itself.

My concern here is, however, not the migrational or political history of Sikkim. I am concerned here with the question as to which occupational stratum or strata were occupied by the migrant Nepalis. In the absence of adequate literature on this, I have to fall back upon the doctoral study of Subba on the Nepalis of Darjeeling and Sikkim (1989b). This study shows that the Nepalis were primarily absorbed in the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. In the field of agriculture, they were absorbed as sharecroppers and agricultural labourers with no security of tenure. Of course, the land belonged to the Maharaja from whom the kazis had leased in and again leased out to the Nepalis and other local Lepcha-Bhutias. In this sense, even the Lepchas and Bhutias did not have ownership rights as such

but they did have usufructory rights over land. The Nepalis were, on the other hand, totally at the mercy of their lessors.

The other occupational category of the Nepalis constituted of menial labourers in the forest, roads, and other construction sites. The only Nepalis who occupied high occupational status in Sikkim were the Newars who had fled from the Kathmandu Valley during mid-eighteenth century or when the expansion of the Gorkha kingdom was in full swing. They were not only landlords and traders but also expert coin minters (Bhattacharya 1984). Apart from the few Newars who held a high occupational status there, an overwhelming majority of them were, however, not much different from the rest of the Nepalis.

The discussion so far provides the background to the entry of the plainsmen into the occupational structure of Sikkim. Their initial migration to this region was through the main trade route. Their entry into Sikkim helped the British considerably in procuring trade articles from other parts of India and also carrying out trade with

the Tibetans. The migration of the Nepalis, on the other hand, provided the much needed labour not only for the transportation of goods for this trade but also for the construction of roads and bungalows.

The plainsmen having migrated to Sikkim initially for trade the occupational diversification was minimum among them in the beginning. It should also be mentioned that their entry into the trade sector was in no way affecting the Bhutia traders of Sikkim itself. Both the groups of traders used the same routes and the same means of carrying merchandise (mules or ponies) but they dealt with different articles. In fact, the Tibetan trade got phenomenal push because of their interaction with the Marwari traders and vice versa.

There were of course a few plainsmen who were engaged in non-trading occupations such as medical practice, teaching, and administration. But this category of people was rather insignificant.

The present day towns were nothing but market centres or hats until 1950s. It was mainly after

Sikkim became a protectorate of India in 1949 that its market centres began to grow and some of them finally became towns. Along with the growth of market centres there was rural to urban migration of the local people. Thus, by the next twenty years or so the urban centres of Sikkim assumed the function of trade and business centres apart from being administrative centres too.

Writing about the businessmen in Sikkim, A. C. Sinha (1981), a leading scholar on the sociology of the eastern Himalayas, classifies them into four hierarchical categories. According to him, the Marwaris who conduct wholesale business between the Sikkimese towns and other trade centres in India, occupy the highest position. In the second position is placed the Newars who conducted trade and commerce between Sikkim and Nepal though earlier they were engaged in trade with Tibet also. The Bhutia traders are placed on the third stratum as most of them deal with petty trade in woollen and dairy products. The last stratum of trading occupations is considered to have been held by the deswali or Bihari petty hawkers, who "move

in and around the towns with their commodities on their heads and transact on a very limited scale" (ibid.). About this lowest category of traders in Sikkim, Sinha writes:

> One significant point which may be noted is that unlike the first three stock of the communities, who are settled down in Sikkim for the last many generations, the Deswali petty traders' community is exclusively a male society in Sikkim. They leave their families behind at their natal place in Bihar and/or Uttar Pradesh; remit their earnings to invariably joint families and visit them occasionally as if on leave from their occupations (1981).

The above classification of traders in Sikkim does not hold true today but it is difficult to believe if it was true even in the late 60s when Sinha had conducted his fieldwork in Sikkim. The difficulty arises at two levels: one, at the level of the classification itself and, two, at the level of the last category of traders. With

regard to the first, Sinha does not refer to any standard criterion for occupational classification on the basis of which he could justify the classification that he has made. And with regard to the bottom category of traders in Sikkim, there are again two difficulties. The first difficulty relates to the fact that there were many Deswalis who had grocery and liquor shops also but this has not been point-ed out. Secondly, even in the late 60s, the Deswalis were not "exclusively" a male society as he has point-ed out.

Despite these apparent weaknesses in Sinha's classification, there are hardly any other studies relating to the plainsmen of that period except his own. In view of this, his work, no matter how briefly dwelt on the theme of the plainsmen or the traders in general, has to be considered as a pioneering work. Some of the limitations pointed out above must have crept in because the focus of this study was something else - the political elites of Sikkim.

Another important area of investigation about the plainsmen's occupations is their alleged role

of exploitation. There is once again scanty literature to settle this controversial role of the plainsmen. In this context, an early study made by Gorer on the Lepchas of Lingthem in Dzongu (1938/1984) provides some clue to this controversy. It appears from the contents of Chapter IV of his book that the Marwaris in particular had exploited the ignorant and illiterate Lepchas by resorting to various clandestine methods. From his book, it appears that a group of Marwaris from Singtam had set up the only shops in Mangan in the beginning of the twentieth century. According to him, their presence in Mangan, which is close to Lingthem, "has been an almost unmitigated disaster for the Lepchas" (1938/1984:113). To quote him:

> The Lepchas are at a complete disadvantage in dealing with the kanya. Neither they nor anybody outside the caste can read the peculiar script of the Marwari; but the Lepchas cannot deal with figures and are unable to calculate the prices they should receive or the debts they owe; when they get receipts they cannot read them nor tell if they are correct. Though they have a strong conviction

that they are badly cheated by the kanya they can do nothing about it; intentional dishonesty in any form is so alien to them that they cannot comprehend or deal with it; they puzzle about the sums that the kanya say they owe; they are convinced that they are too high, but they cannot dispute them and have to pay. Since the kanya have the cardamum monopoly and collect the selling tax the Lepchas cannot take their produce elsewhere; and it is questionable if it would pay them to do so, for against the higher prices obtainable in Gangtok and Kalimpong must be set the cost of porterage. As with many such crops the price is often higher at the end of the season than at the beginning, but the kanya will not let them wait on the market; at the beginning of the season they send representatives to their debtors claiming immediate payment, and threatening court proceedings if the cardamum is not forthwith handed over. If the kanya would give cash for the surplus crop the Lepchas would be better off; but it is extremely difficult to get ready money, beyond what is needed

> for tax-paying, out of them when the cardamum is brought in the kanya claim that they have no money to hand and free goods, either metal ware, or China, or cloth, on to the sellers. And if during the rest of the year people come in to buy goods, rice seed, or cloth, or salt, they refuse to take cash except for quite small sums (say under Rs.10). They fully enforce and persuade the Lepchas to take goods on credit whether they want them or not (1938: 113-14).

The above citation is only a part of the story that Gorer provides about the ways and means adopted by the Marwaris of Mangan. Since there are groups of such Marwaris in every town or township in Sikkim from the very beginning of the nineteenth century, it is quite likely that the local people were subjected to the prowess of the seasoned traders from the plains of India.

The plains traders, particularly the Marwaris, were holding advantageous positions vis-a-vis the local people throughout the state. It was always the local people who were at the receiving end, not the other way around. This seems to likewa

colonial situation but it will perhaps be incorrect to assume so. Under colonial situations, the agents of the colonial system had a solid support of the state, which was not to be seen in Sikkim. As pointed out in Chapter II of this thesis, the Marwaris hardly had any political voice till the end of the theocratic rule in Sikkim. They did have the sanction of the government there but the government was native and not foreign though it was historically so.

The fact that the Marwaris could speak the local Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali languages very fluently is, however, not a point that can be forwarded in favour of the above line of argument. They learnt these languages not for any fancy of it or because they had any special love or respect for them. It was a necessity, at least in North Sikkim, to learn the Lepcha and Bhutia languages because until recently they could not speak in any language other than their own. Even the the British colonialists found it useful to learn the native languages in the administration of their colonies.

Even today, it is the Marwaris who have an upper hand in most economic affairs of the state. They not only control but also virtually dictate the terms of exchange relating to cardamom, the most important cash crop of the state. For instance, a recent publication has this to say:

> Contemporarily, the whole cardamom trade is in the control of the entrepreneurial class from the Northern and Western India, the Marwaris. They earn profit by advancing cash and household necessities to the neighbouring peasants against their cardamom produce. They impose a uniform price. At the beginning of each season, the Marwaris send their representatives to the debtors - the Lepchas, who take loans to meet their contingent expenditures - asking for immediate payment, failing which the people are threatened with court proceedings. In this background and also with the difficulties of getting ready cash, the Lepchas are compelled to sell their cardamom at lower rates (Bhasin and Srivastava 1990:136).

It should be pointed here that the above citation is based heavily on what Gorer had observed in 1937. There has been little updating here and the authors seem unaware of the developments after 1937. For instance, the Marwaris today cannot think of threatening the Lepchas with court proceedings as was the case fifty years ago. It is also not true that the Lepchas today have much difficulty in getting cash. Their compulsion to sell their produce to the Marwaris is not as acute today as it was before fifty years. However, it must be acknowledged that the Marwari traders do have a lot of control over this crop even today.

But what is clear from the above citations is that trade was not only an economic activity but also a means of exploitation by the Marwaris. In the absence of related informations on other trading communities of the state it is difficult for us to come to any definite conclusion about the traders in general. However, it is quite safe to remark that no other trading community has excelled the art of trade (and exploitation) as the Marwaris have. The spread of education and emergence of

the educated middle class among the local people do not seem to have posed any perceptible threat to the monopoly of the Marwaris over the trading activities in Sikkim.

Occupational diversition after 1975

The year 1975 was epoch-making in the history of Sikkim. It was in this year that the institution of the Chogyal, which had survived in this Himalayan territory for over three hundred years, came to an end. It was also in this year that the political and religious control of a particular ethnic group called the Bhutias was abolished. And it was in this year that the vagueness of the political status of Sikkim was removed for good, making it a constituent of the Union of India. Finally, it was in this year that the winds of democracy and development began to blow in the hills and valleys of this mountainous region.

The region which had aroused mystic feelings for some and romantic for others was politically and developmentally backward. Apart from the Bhutias and a few Lepchas who were prepared to

forget their own identity very few people belonging to other ethnic groups had the opportunity to develop a sense of belongingness to the state where they were born and where they had spent the prime of their life. The plainsmen in particular suffered from the lack of identity and belongingness to the region where they lived. They were "outsiders" and often depended on the mercy of the rulers there.

It is not sure whether it was due to a feeling of guilt or commitment to its citizens that India took very enthusiastic steps to develop this new state. The leaders in Delhi were not oblivious of the presence of a strong sense of Sikkimese nationality. The pumping in of a lot of money for developmental activities in Sikkim was perhaps partially aimed at winning over the confidence of the Sikkimese people. It could also be aimed at developing a "depedency culture" in them so that they would not think of any alternative territorial loyalty and the sharp edges of their Sikkimese nationalism would be hopefully blunted.

One can think of various alternative explanations to why India had to initiate development activities in Sikkim in a war footing. But it does not help one much by simply speculating on a subject without much concrete data. The more important phenomenon to be studied is perhaps the consequences of it rather than the cause of it. But before we go into the consequences of it the phenomenon may be briefly described.

Of all the developments that took place after 1975, the development of infrastructure has received one of the highest priorities and rightly so. The status of Sikkim's infrastructure before that was really poor and it needed to be expanded on a priority basis. And the achievements of the state government in this regard have been worth mentioning. This can be shown with the help of Table 7, which shows that out of 13 items 5 of them were introduced between 1971 and 1981. The increase in each of the items is too clear and in a way phenomenal.

Table 7. Growth of Infrastructure in Sikkim, 1971-81

Item	1971	1981
Pre-primary Schools	n.a.	100
Primary Schools	154	321
Junior High Schools	n.a.	23
Higher Secondary Schools	3	8
Colleges	1	2
Hospitals	3	5
Primary Health Centres/Dispensaries	25	47
Post Offices	35	119
Veterinary Hospitals	n.a.	7
Veterinary Dispensaris	n.a.	35
Cooperative Societies	n.a.	50
Telegraph Offices	1	6

Source: District Census Handbook, 1971, Sikkim, pp. 12-24 and Statistical Pocket Book, Sikkim, 1981, pp. 5-6.

The increase in the infrastructural facilites even within the towns is quite significant. This may be clear from the following table (Table 8).

Table 8. Increase of Infrastructural facilites in the Urban centres of Sikkim, 1971-81

Item	1971	1981
Primary Schools	1	17
Junior Secondary Schools	4	17
Secondary Schools	n.a.	10
Higher Secondary Schools	6	12
Colleges	1	2
Dispensaries	2	10
Banks	4	11

Source: District Census Handbook, Sikkim 1971, p. 6 and District Census Handbook, Sikkim 1981, pp. 174-82.

From the above table it appears that the increase in the infrastructural facilities in the urban centres of Sikkim between 1971 and 1981 was not as phenomenal as seen in Table 7. This shows that greater attention was paid to the rural areas during that period but, as pointed out earlier, the term "rural" is quite misleading because it includes more than a dozen small towns without any municipality. On the basis of obser-

vation, it may be said that while the villagers have not been deprived of most of the items laid down in Table 8 they have no banks and no colleges. It is also rare to find a higher secondary school or even secondary school in the villages. Most of the villages have a junior high school only. The higher secondary schools are, on the other hand, either in the centres of the major towns of Sikkim or in the close vicinity of such towns though administratively falling outside the so-called "urban" areas.

Apart from the infrastructural developments in Sikkim, the development of industry has received considerable attention. It may be recalled here that soon after the 'merger' all the four districts of Sikkim were declared as "industrially backward" and a Directorate of Industries was set up in 1976.

Due to its peculiar topography, establishment of heavy industries is either not feasible or has been avoided so far. It is but said that the government of Sikkim is proposing to set up a paper mill as a large-scale industrial venture.

But as of now the industries in Sikkim are either of medium or small and cottage level only. The growth of such industries has been remarkable as illustrated in the following table.

Table 9. Growth of Industries in Sikkim

Year	Number	%age of Growth
1976	10	-
1978	78	87.2
1987	360	78.3

Source: Himalaya Today, Sep 1988, p. 31.

Note: Though the source does not say what type of industries they are it may be stated that they are small and medium scale industries.

These are only a few examples to show the pace of development that was initiated in Sikkim specially after 1975. The increase in various infrastructural facilities and industries must be appreciated keeping in mind that the actual growth had taken place within a span of five to ten years. This should be even more clear if the figures for

1991 were available. But until now the details of the Census of 1991 have not been published and the Provisional Census of 1991 does not contain the details required here.

Now let me try and place the absorption of the plainsmen in the new or expanded segments of occupation in Sikkim. The simplest and the most systematic way of going about it is according to the major segments of occupation. Each segment is known to have expanded considerably, creating enough room for the entry of multiple ethnic groups into it. However, I shall concentrate here mainly on the entry of the plainsmen.

(a) Agriculture

After 1975, the agricultural sector received a major impetus of the state government. Though reclamation of new land for cultivation was not possible any more, intensification of cultivation and introduction of scientific methods and seeds was very much possible. It is also to be noted that after 1975 there was a new hierarchy of officials engaged in the agricultural development of Sikkim. For instance, there were village level

workers, agricultural extension officers, directors, secretaries, etc. Apart from these categories there was the Research and Development organ also.

At the level of the village level workers, no plainsman is seen. There are also an insignificant few of them as agricultural extension officers. The secretaries are also drawn predominantly from the local communities. But in the category of directors and in the Research and Development there are a number of technically trained plainsmen. The staff of Indian Council of Agricultural Research located at Tadong in East Sikkim has most of its higher posts filled in by the people from Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

Thus, it is observed that the plainsmen have got an entry into the agricultural sector as technical personnels. This, it may be noted, was clearly as post-1975 development.

An important aspect of this development is the establishment of the Cardamom Board at Gangtok. This Board not only looks after the research and development of this crop but also directs the export of cardamom and other spices from India.

And this Board is manned almost entirely by the technical personnels from the plains of India.

Besides such technical personnels belonging to the plains communities there are a number of them as clerks, accountants, and sweepers at the headquarters of the Agriculture Department called Krishi Bhawan located at Tadong. Hence, the expansion of the agricultural sector has provided the opportunity to the plainsmen to enter into the various levels of this sector.

As seen above, the plainsmen are basically technical personnels but their entry into the agricultural sector is sometimes questioned by the local people. It was reported that there were some officers from the plains of India serving in the Cardamom Board but having no knowledge at all about the cardamom plants. Similarly, doubts were raised when some agricultural officers of the plains communities either proposed new techniques or supervised the existing techniques. They are by and large considered to be ignorant of the harsh realities of the local people fighting with nature in the agricultural pursuits.

(b) Trade and Business

Trade and business have for long been a monopoly of the plainsmen. With the expansion of the infrastructural facilities and graduating of many towns into district or subdivisional headquarters, the trade and business activities have considerably expanded and diversified.

Earlier, most of the traders and businessmen procured their goods and commodities from Siliguri, Calcutta or Delhi and sold them there by themselves. Some of them also dealt with the goods produced in Sikkim itself such as handicrafts and beer. The procurement of goods from outside Sikkim is now done through the Sikkim Trading Corporation, which is a government undertaking. Despite this, the supply business of the contractors in Sikkim has flourished like anything in the recent past. It is considered to be one of the most lucrative fields of business for them. But it is also reported that this business requires a lot of manipulation and bribery to the ministers and top officials there. Since smaller contractors cannot afford to do all this it is usually the big contractors who bag the contract tenders.

The increased military establishments in Sikkim, particularly in its East and North districts, provided unlimited scope for the business of supply after 1962. The plainsmen are reported to have controlled this business also.

Since it was one of the most lucrative businesses in Sikkim, the plainsmen were naturally facing a stiff competition from the local people. This led to a considerable amount of political and financial manipulations at the decision-making levels. There were allegations and counter-allegations about the state government favouring local or plains communities with regard to granting of contracts. The plainsmen often alleged that the contracts are mostly given to the local people. On the other hand, the local contractors alleged that the plainsmen managed to bag most of the bigger contracts.

It is difficult to ascertain who bagged most of the contracts, big or small. It is however observed that there are quite a few prosperous contractors among the plainsmen, particularly the Marwaris. Being some of the most affluent people there it is quite likely that they can offer

attractive packages to the ministers and secretaries, whose decisions matter in this regard. It is also easier for the plainsmen to acquire the goods to be supplied. Since such goods are to be supplied from outside, particularly from West Bengal, the plainsmen have definite advantage over the hill contractors because of a wide network of businessmen belonging to the Marwaris and Biharis not only in the neighbouring states but also in other parts of India. In any case, this has been a major factor affecting the ethnic relationships between the plainsmen and the hillmen. And this may continue to remain so even in future.

In other fields of business such as cloth and garment selling, groceries, stationaries, sport goods, motor parts, hoteliering, etc. the plainsmen have not met with much challenge from the local businessmen or from their fellow plainsmen from Bihar or Uttar Pradesh. The Biharis are mostly contented with betel-shops, saloons, shoe-making, stationary shops, and some grocery centres. Other plains communities are scarcely engaged in business and trade excepting a few south Indians who have established

radio, television, and watch repair shops in Gangtok but that is all.

It is to be added here that there was a mushrooming of the video-parlours and libraries in all the towns of Sikkim after 1975. The Marwaris and Biharis showed their adaptability once again by changing into the business of showing video-films by renting out video-cassettes, video-cassette-recorders/players, or even the video-screens. Despite occasional harassment by the policemen, this has been found to be another lucrative business for them. The same is true about the transport business. Though the Sikkim Nationalized Transport caters to most of the needs for long distance travels, the taxis which are also owned by the Marwaris have increased in number particularly in Gangtok.

Among the hillmen, most have gone for the sale of readymade garments, second-hand clothes, few stationaries, and hoteliering. These business activities are basically confined to the Bhutia ethnic group. The Tibetans, referring to those who migrated to Sikkim after 1959, are essentially engaged in handicrafts business. The Newars have

gone headlong into the business of flowers though a few of them are also engaged in gold or silver smithy. Most other Nepalis have set up vegetable or meat stalls in various towns.

Hence, it is basically the supply business, which was there before 1975, which got a special boom after this year. But it is this boom which has generated considerable tension between the plainsmen and the hillmen. Apart from this, there is not much of diversification in the fields of business operations though the items of business have multiplied after 1975.

(c) Service

Compared to the agricultural and trade sectors, the service sector was in its nebulous form at the time of Sikkim's 'merger' with India. Tables 7, 8 and 9 clearly demonstrate this. But after 1975 this sector expanded unprecedentally. Educated unemployeds began to enter into Sikkim not only from the neighbouring Darjeeling hills and the Dooars of Jalpaiguri district but also from as far as Kerala on the south, Gujarat on the west,

and Jammu and Kashmir on the north-west. Until 1977-78, they did not have to wait even for a full month to get a job in Sikkim's fast expanding service sector. Employment in muster rolls could be possible even within a week of their reaching Gangtok, where most of the recruitments - temporary or permanent - were made.

Jobs were plenty not only under the state government of Sikkim but also under the central government. The jobs under the Centre did not require any domicile certificates but the posts were rather limited and filled in largely by the transferees and deputationists from other parts of India. Even for the jobs under the state government, no domicile certificates were required until 1977-78 and particularly for teaching posts. For non-teaching jobs, however, domicile certificates were required to be produced at the time of interview from 1975 itself. Most of those who went to Sikkim before that period were absorbed on permanent basis. Those who went after 1977-78 and did not have domicile certificates were also absorbed but on temporary or contract basis. In

most cases the contracts would be renewed periodically and without much of hassle. But as the number of vacancies ran thin the state government began to demand domicile certificates even for teaching posts.

Here it may be recalled that there was a widespread resentment among the educated migrants from the Darjeeling hills against the Sikkim government for the latter's alleged insistence on domicile certificates only from them. The migrants from the plains of India were allegedly not asked to produce domicile certificates. The resentment got an outlet even in some local newspapers from Darjeeling and Sikkim but it gradually subsided. However, some of them still hold the view that the plainsmen are given preferential treatment by the Sikkim government whereas the hillmen from Darjeeling are not treated equally well.

There are many reasons behind what the migrants from Darjeeling experienced in Sikkim. Despite familial, marital, and cultural linkages between the people of Darjeeling and Sikkim the Sikkimese had developed a different nationality in the course of its long history. They were also treated as

an inferior lot by the people of Darjeeling, who due to greater exposure to the forces of westernization and missionary education had a superior air vis-a-vis the Sikkimese. Since most of the educated Sikkimese had their schooling or college education in Darjeeling until very recently they had gone back with a hurt ego. And when it was their turn to call shots they naturally showed some indignation towards the people of Darjeeling. They had, on the other hand, no such prejudices against the people from the places like Kerala, Tamilnadu, Bengal and other parts of India because they had not got the scope to interact with them earlier.

There were basically two types of jobs in Sikkim then. Of these two, teaching was undoubtedly more frequently available than the jobs in administration, as officers or clerks. Though the number of teaching posts was much larger than the number of administrative posts the latter also recruited persons from the plains of India.

Therefore, the plainsmen got an entry not only in the teaching jobs but also in the various offices. The post-1975 migrants from the plains

of India being highly educated or professionally trained occupied some of the key positions in the service sector also. For a very long time the Education Department of the Government of Sikkim was, for instance, virtually controlled by the plainsmen. The headmaster of most junior high schools, secondary schools, and higher secondary schools were and still are the plainsmen. To be a headmaster of such schools one required to be a postgraduate and there were not very many post-graduates lying unemployed even in Darjeeling, leave alone in Sikkim.

A special mention must be made of the category of servicemen who are known as jamadars or sweepers. A large number of sweeper's posts were created not only in the various offices in the state capital or district headquarters of Sikkim but also in the municipalities of different towns. What is significant to note here is the fact that this category of jobs was almost entirely occupied by the so-called Harijans from Bihar. Most of these Harijans were males though there were a number of females also. This is one sector where some plainswomen were also employed. But this is

certainly not the only sector where the plains-women are employed: the teaching posts in many private and a few government schools are also occupied by them.

A brief discussion on the category of sweepers in Sikkim may be desirable here. What is most notable in this context is the fact that there is not a single member of the local communities in this category. The Lepchas and the Bhutias being tribes had no category of people to fulfill this vacuum. The Nepali society was a highly stratified society from the very beginning but even this society had no traditional group of people serving as sweepers. There are ironsmiths, cobblers, and musicians but no sweepers among them. There are no barbers either as a professional group. The Newars are also a highly stratified community and, significantly, from urban background but even they have no professional group of people serving as sweepers nor did this group ever emerged from among them in the towns of Sikkim or Darjeeling. Hence, this group of professionals had to be drawn from among the migrant Biharis.

Of the teaching and non-teaching jobs occupied by the plainsmen and women in Sikkim the former

is larger and in close association with the students who were considerably politicized during the 1973 mini-revolution. The teacher-student relationship in the various schools and colleges there is one of the most delicate and disturbing parts of the story of Sikkim's accelerated development. Very few teachers from the plains of India have been able to control the students and discipline them. A common complaint that one hears from them is that they are not respected or feared as much the hill teachers are. They have also narrated a couple of instances in which the intervention of some local teachers was necessary to diffuse the tension built up amongst the students against the plains teachers. It is also reported that they sometimes have to swallow bitter remarks not only by the students but also by their parents and guardians. Needless to add that there are exceptions to this rule.

In short, most of the plains teachers in Sikkim are not happy either with the terms and conditions of service or the behaviour of the students at large. Their bitterness is certainly not without reasons but the whole thing should perhaps be seen from another point of view also.

After all the role of a sociologist is not to pass judgements but to bring out the relationships in its entirety.

The students, who are almost entirely locals, have their own point of view. Their major complaint is that most plains teachers cannot teach them in the language they understand properly. Even the English language, which is accepted as the medium of teaching in most of the schools, is reportedly not correctly used by such teachers. They also complained that many of them remain absent for days together and are not bothered about teaching for which they are paid. Worst of all, a few teachers from the plains were alleged to have sexually exploited the girl students of their schools. One such teacher working in Mangan and belonging to Uttar Pradesh was reportedly caught red-handed but he was not thrown out of his job and was simply transferred to some other school in the interior of Sikkim.

The teacher-student relationship has to be seen from a third point of view also. If the teachers are not given any job security or other incentives enjoyed by their counterparts in other states of India they would certainly take teaching

as a stop-gap arrangement only. Not only does their teaching become mechanical but the very relationship with the students becomes contractual. And, on the top of that, if they find an anti-plainsmen attitude in their students it is perhaps difficult to expect any ethics from them.

If they cannot teach in the local language(s) it is the fault of the administrators who should have seen to it that the teachers and students can communicate with each other. But in their enthusiasm to fill in thousands of teaching posts within a short period of time the administrators simply looked for the paper qualifications of the applicants and not their communicability. If some of them ventured to exploit their girl students sexually, it is certainly to be condemned but such instances cannot be many and regular. In any case, the administrators should have realized that it is ultimately the students - the future of Sikkim - who would be the losers.

It should also be added that the allegation about the anti-plainsmen attitude among the students is not accepted by many and it appears that

it is certainly an exaggeration. Some of the plains teachers only reported that the students of Sikkim are by and large very simple and 'unadulterated' as their counterparts in West Bengal or Uttar Pradesh. They are also considered to be very obedient and loyal to their teachers. Above all, some of them said that a lot depended on the teachers themselves.

That there are thousands of them working in remote areas of Sikkim without much of complaints for the last fifteen years or so confirms that the teacher-student relationship is varied from place to place and situation to situation. It is very difficult to generalize on this relationship by taking into consideration a few instances only.

Conclusion

The details of the occupational structure of the plainsmen presented in this chapter shows that they have a highly successful occupational adaptation there. The coming up of some local competitors whether in the field of business or service has not affected the interests of the plainsmen to

any significant extent. The withdrawal of the British from India or the Sino-Indian conflict in the Tibetan frontier has also not crippled the business and trade activities of the plainsmen in Sikkim. The occupational adaptability of the plainsmen is something to be really appreciated. In this context, it may be reported that one of the Marwari businessmen has even gone for beauty parlour, which is highly unconventional.

This chapter has also shown that the occupational structure of the plainsmen in Sikkim does not fit in any of the four models discussed in the beginning of this chapter. The picture is not only complex but also fluid. There are some elements that fit in each of the models while other elements defy the same fully.

In final analysis, it appears that it is not the occupational structure of the plainsmen which is entirely responsible for the ethnic divide between the plainsmen and the hillmen there. It is rather created by a multitude of factors like

cultural, linguistic, political, racial, and occupational interactions. The next chapter will throw more light in this regard.

Chapter V

Socio-Cultural Matrix of the Plainsmen

Introduction

The objectives of this chapter are mainly three. First, I intend to explore to what extent is the occupational integration seen in the previous chapter reflected in the socio-cultural integration also. The socio-cultural integration is explored here not only within the various plains communities but also between, the plainsmen as a whole and the hillmen. Second, I would like to explore the strength and weakness of the socio-cultural matrix of the plainsmen in Sikkim. In particular, attention is paid to its implications for ethnic solidarity/conflict within and without the plainsmen. Finally, I would like to assess the compatibility of the socio-cultural matrix of the plainsmen with that of the local hillmen.

In Sikkim, it is still not enough to know what a person does but it must also be asked

who the person is. It is often the latter question that seems to have complicated the situation with regard to ethnicity in Sikkim. When a stranger goes to a place he goes there not only as a person but also as a member of a community, caste, religion, culture, etc. And, when it is not a question of one or two stray strangers but hordes of them settling in an alien socio-cultural set-up, the tension is automatically built up among such people if not equally so among the local people also. A lot, of course, depends on how the migrant groups utilize their culture in the interactive process. Or, whether they utilize it as a means of survival or as a means of ascertaining their own identity. The choice is not there always for such migrating cultural groups: it also depends on what kind of demands are made by the indigeneous cultural environment.

In order to get an answer to some of these questions, it is desirable that the socio-cultural matrix of the plainsmen in Sikkim is explored to its fullest possible detail. I have made an attempt to do so in the following para-

graphs on the basis of eleven socio-cultural variables.

Socio-Cultural Matrix

The discussion here relates primarily to the socio-cultural dimensions of the various communities subsumed here under the word "plainsmen". But since the plainsmen do not operate in a jungle or uninhabited place the situation(s) must be related to its context. Though my primary interest is the plainsmen themselves, it is often by comparing them with the local hillmen that the situation of the plainsmen seems to become clearer. Hence, I often bring in the hill communities in the discussion below.

(1) Family

The family as a domestic group constituting of the father, the mother, and the children is absent in the case of a large number of the plainsmen living in Sikkim today. Such plainsmen are basically those who migrated to Sikkim after 1975. They may be loosely considered as single-member families. Though the exact number

of such single-member families among the plainsmen in Sikkim cannot be ascertained, they constitute about 75.0 percent of the plainsmen migrating there after 1975. Some of them live in groups of two or more than two while others are absolutely single.

About the type of family they have come from one notices two distinct types. Those plainsmen who had migrated before 1950 have mostly (82.5 percent) come from joint family background and only 17.5 percent of them from the nuclear family background. The plainsmen who had migrated to Sikkim after 1950s also have a sizeable section of them (48.5 percent) from the joint family background. On the other hand, almost all the migrants who went there after 1975 have nuclear family background. There is a division along the communities also. The Hindi-speaking Marwaris and Biharis have a greater number of migrants from joint family background than the non-Hindi speaking plainsmen like the Bengalis, Oriyas, Keralites, and the Punjabis. This background is largely reflected in their family types even in Sikkim.

Among the hill communities, there are basically two groups: migrants from the hills of Darjeeling and Dooars and the local hillmen. With regard to both the groups, almost all of them have nuclear family background. Though among the latter group members few joint and extended type families are still to be seen, what is striking to note is that almost all marriageable migrants from Darjeeling and Dooars have settled down either with the local girls or with the girls from their own places. It may be recalled here that unlike the male-dominated migrants from the plains, the females contituted a sizeable group among the migrants from Darjeeling and the Dooars area of Jalpaiguri district.

Thus, with regard to family, migrants from the plains do not seem to have achieved as much of stability as the migrants from the hill areas of Darjeeling and Dooars have. This is quite natural because, socio-culturally, Darjeeling and Dooars are very much a part of Sikkim and it was even historically so until the middle of the nineteenth century.

(2) Marriage

The objective here is not to discuss the institution of marriage as such but to show what forms and relationships of marriage do actually exist among the plainsmen in particular. The importance of marriage in society has been well documented by scholars like Johnson (1962) and Stephens (1963). Therefore, it needs no credential to establish that it is one of the most important sociological variable.

The plainsmen in Sikkim were and are basically monogamous and they normally disdain polygamy of any variety. They are aware of the practice of fraternal polyandry among the Hindus in ancient times, as depicted in The Mahabharata, but such practice was long abandoned by the people in their places of origin.

Caste and community endogamy are also a distinguishing feature of the plainsmen. While the caste endogamy is not usually possible to practise community endogamy seems possible. But strangely most of the plainsmen prefer to acquire their spouses from their native places or at

least from outside Sikkim. Because of this preference their marriages are ultimately endogamous not only at the community but also at the caste levels.

It is not that the plainsmen have always succeeded in maintaining even community endogamy. Deviances are seen among those plains communities which are small in number such as the Keralites, Tamils, Gujaratis, and the Punjabis. Even the Biharis and Marwaris, who are socio-politically well organized, do not seem to have always succeeded in this regard. There are a few cases of such people marrying with the local hill people but the reaction of the members of such defaulters' communities has often been strongly negative. This is particularly true of the Marwaris. There was one such case at Gangtok, where a Marwari boy from Kalimpong had married a Nepali Brahmin girl of Sikkim. That boy had a terrible time for almost one full year because of the ostracism meted out to him by his relatives. But since he was rich he could gradually win over his relatives but even now his community members do not seem to have fully reconciled to this fact.

The local hillmen are also generally monogamous. But polygyny is not very rare among the Nepali high castes and the Lepchas while the Bhutias have an established practice of polyandry, especially of the fraternal type. Both polygyny and polyandry among the three hill communities have remained due to specific environmental and economic forces to which they are exposed. For instance, polygyny among the Lepchas and Nepalis was functional because of the need for a huge labour force to man the cultivation. In the case of the Lepchas, it was also sterility that was responsible for polygyny. Polyandry, on the other hand, was often inevitable among the high altitude dwelling Bhutias because of pastoralism, trade and herding (Subba 1989c).

Another aspect of marriage among the hill communities is the rather weak endogamous rules. Like the plainsmen, both caste/clan and community/tribal endogamy is stressed by the hill communities also. But there are a large number of inter-community and inter-religious marriages among the three hill communities from the very early times. In this context, mention may be made of the inter-

marriages particularly between the Lepchas and Bhutias on the one hand and the Lepchas and the Limbus on the other (Subba 1989b). Similarly, the marriages between the Buddhist Lepcha-Bhutias and the Hindu Nepalis, though less frequent or fewer, have been reported to be fairly well accepted.

Apart from these differences between the hill and the plains communities, there is another very important difference between the two communities with regard to marriage. Both these communities are predominantly Hindus and patrilocal but among the hill communities, irrespective of cultural, linguistic, religious and other such differences within them, it is the male's family which has to approach the female's family for marital union. This is just the reverse in the case of the plainsmen no matter what linguistic group they belong to or from where they come. The most distinctive symbol of this difference is the practice of paying dowry by the latter and paying the bride-wealth by the former. As a matter of fact, these two practices are the most important homogenizing forces within the two

groups of communities.

(3) Age

The age compostion of the migrants is an important variable because it not only seems to determine their adaptation to the local socio-cultural mileu to a great extent but also bears the potentiality of determining the internal structure of the migrants. Theoretically, the children and the youths tend to pick up the local customs and food habits much more easily than the elders among the migrants. Hence, the chances of adaptability and compatibility depend to a large extent on the age composition of the migrants.

Here it is more important to see the age composition at the time of migration rather than the same at the time of the present study. This is because of the fact that the first few years of contact with an alien environment are more important than the later years. It is in the first few years that the impressions - good or bad - are received or given in a contact situation. It is also in the initial phase of contact that one should seek to find answers to inter-

ethnic conflicts or tensions particularly between locals and migrants. The way the two groups interact in later years is not entirely insignificant but it is often secondary.

With regard to the age composition of the plainsmen at the time of their migration to Sikkim, it may be pointed out that no clear distinction can be made about the early and recent migrants. Whether they migrated to Sikkim for trade, as in the case of most Marwaris and Biharis, or for service occupations, as in the case of other plainsmen, the bulk of the migrants (67.1 percent) belonged to the age-group of 20 to 40 years. There were some (32.9) who were below 20 years or above 40 years at the time of migration but they had gone there to join their relatives and live there either as helpers or dependents. They had no active role to play in the economic or political activities of the family nor did they have any ambition of their own.

Even the migrants from the hill areas of Darjeeling and Dooars, it may be noted, were of the same age group at the time of their migration.

Like in the case of the plainsmen, they were later joined by their family members. But no such particular age-group dominance can be seen in the case of the local hillmen.

Given this background about the age composition of the migrants to Sikkim, it was quite natural that those who did not have strong familial ties settled down with the local men and women. Due to linguistic, cultural, religious and other barriers between the hill and plains communities as a whole, it was basically the migrants from Darjeeling and Dooars, who had shown a more successful socio-cultural adaptation than their counterparts from the plains of India. Because of the same reasons, many courtships between the members of the plains and hill communities could not finally mature into formal bonds of marriage as it did in the case of the migrant and local hillmen in Sikkim.

(4) Sex

Table 2 given in Chapter II has shown that the percentage of females among the plains communities is only 32.6, which shows that two-

third of their population is constituted by males. It may be remembered here that this male-female ratio is obtained at the time of the present study and does not speak of the male-female ratio at the time of migration. The present study shows that only a few females migrated to Sikkim along with their male counterparts. Such females belong to the category of servicemen who had gone there on deputation, transfer or were serving in the military services.

In other words, migration of the plainsmen to Sikkim was initially almost exclusively a male phenomenon. Some of the family members joined them later and those who did not have any to join them remained single even after many years of their stay in Sikkim. But almost every normal migrant who had stayed there for more than five years had acquired a spouse or a relative from the place of his/her origin.

Among the migrants from the hill areas of Darjeeling and Dooars the male-female ratio is not as imbalanced as it is seen in the case of the migrants from the plains of India. Sikkim being rather close to these regions and many of

them having relatives and friends in Sikkim the number of females migrating from these regions was naturally more than the number of females from the distant plains. Besides this geographical advantage for the females from these regions the cultural factor should also be added. It is commonly known that the hill women are much more outgoing and enjoy a higher degree of freedom than their counterparts from the plains of India. This is also an important reason why their number is more in Sikkim than the females from the plains. It was the same reason why the hill females are engaged in various jobs while the plainswomen are mostly householders. The plainswomen are, in fact, rarely seen outside their houses except in rare occasions.

More important than the ratio of male-female population among the migrants is perhaps the difference in the status of women between the hill and plains communities. It is quite commonly believed that the status of females among the plains community is lower than among the hill communities. Both hill and plains communities are patrilineal and male-dominant but there is no

denying that the hill females enjoy a much higher status than their counterparts from the plains. Here, the difference has to be located in the economic role the females play rather than their religious tradition because, as already mentioned, both the hill and plains communities are by and large of the same tradition. The hill women are to be true much more economically active than the plainswomen are found. This is perhaps why the former enjoy a much higher status than the latter.

This is also perhaps one reason why the males from the plains of India avoid marrying the females from the hills and vice versa. It is true that such cultural barriers have not succeeded in making such unions possible in some cases. But more importantly, it is reported that the cases of illicit relations between the plainsmen and hill girls are quite common and this has proved to be one of the important sources of tension, if not conflict, between the two groups of communities. In this context, some affluent Marwari traders and powerful bureaucrats from the plains of India are frequently alleged to have exploited the hill girls by virtue (or vice?) of their money or power.

Such a situation is nothing peculiar of Sikkim. Whenever the migrants from outside have settled in large numbers in areas experiencing rapid developmental activities, such developments seem to follow naturally. Such cases are known to have existed in states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh also. In most of these states, the indignation of the locals against the outsiders is rooted in such relationships though in actual practice these issues are not directly referred to. For doing so would mean humiliation of their own people. In most of these states, sex is rather free but women are at the same time a symbol of their prestige.

(5) Education

With regard to education of the plainsmen in Sikkim it may be first of all pointed out that there are quite sharp differences not only vertically but also horizontally. With regard to the first, it may be safely stated that most of those who migrated to Sikkim before 1950 and a large section of those who had migrated after 1950 but before 1975 were illiterates or semi-

literates in the sense that they had no formal schooling. Most of them were naturally expert in sums but very few of them could do anything more than that. But their descendants and their fellow members, who migrated there after 1975, are almost all highly educated and even professionally qualified. Even their womenfolk are almost equally ahead in this matter.

With regard to the horizontal division about education it is clear that the Hindi-speaking Marwaris and Biharis have much lower status compared to the speakers of other Indian languages. This is probably due to the historicity of their migration: while the former are by and large earlier migrants the latter are later migrants. It is also due to the reasons for their migration: the former had gone there mainly for business while the latter have gone there for service. There are other minor factors too but these two are the most important ones that explain their horizontal difference in educational status in Sikkim.

About this, the disparity between the males and females should also be brought out. Nowadays

the plainsmen and hillmen alike make no distinction about the ducation of their male and female children. But the fact that the literacy of females among the plainsmen is lower (21.8) than that at the state (22.2) and national (26.0) levels shows that the plainswomen did not receive equal attention in this respect before, which could be before their migration or even after it.

In this context, it should be brought to light that there was not enough scope for educational achievement in Sikkim before 1950s. Though the opportunities for education were much wider in other parts of India barring the north-east the traditional beliefs and values are known to have inhibited the spread of female education in general and that of the low caste people in particular. Thus, the level of literacy was on the whole very low for both sexes. It was mainly after 1950s that education began to receive a focussed attention of the government, particularly in Sikkim.

For various reasons discussed earlier in this section, the state of educational affairs in Sikkim is much better today than before. The same seems

true of the plainsmen as well, as indicated by the educational standard of the recent migrants vis-a-vis their predecessors. Hence, the emergence of the educated middle class in Sikkim is a rather recent phenomenon. It was not there before 1950s and it received full impetus after 1975. Ethnically, however, the dominance of the plainsmen in this class is still prominent though the local hillmen are also gradually coming up.

(6) Religion

About the religious affiliations of the plainsmen in Sikkim the Hindus constitute more than 90.0 percent of their total population. The remaining 10.0 percent plainsmen are distributed among the various religious groups like Christianity, Islam, and the like. Of the non-Hindu plainsmen, the Muslims are the most dominant numerically.

What distinguishes the religious pattern of the plainsmen from that of the hillmen is that the former group of people have no followers of Buddhism and the so-called 'Animism'. On the other hand, there are very few Muslim followers

among the hill communities in Sikkim. In fact, they can be easily counted in finger tips in any particular locality.

Hinduism is certainly one of the most dominant religions among the hillmen but it is certainly not the most dominant. Buddhism has received the royal patronage for about three hundred years in Sikkim. It is still a very important religion though numerically it is not as important as Hinduism. Most of the hill-tops of Sikkim are studded with chhortens, manis, prayer flags, etc. and the monasteries have a more prominent presence than the Hindu temples. Everywhere in Sikkim one encounters a Buddhist monk more frequently than a Hindu priest. Therefore, it is quite natural for any visitor to Sikkim to develop some interest in Buddhism and to get the impression that this religion is dominant.

There is another important dimension of the religious distribution of the hill people. The so-called 'Animists' are officially and often mistakenly clubbed together with the Hindus. Even the 'animists' find it easier to declare themselves to be Hindus than as animists because

there is no composite name for this religion and the various names used by them in their own languages are not accepted as 'religions' for administrative purposes. Some of them are also shy of being known as an 'animist'. Hence, officially they are known as Hindus only. Here, the contention of many scholars is that Hinduism cannot be defined and it very much includes the 'animistic' practices also. This is largely true but there is a growing consciousness among some of the groups practising 'animism' about their separate status in the eyes of the ignorant Hindus who look down upon it.

What perhaps needs to be highlighted in the context of religion is the multi-religious character of both the hill and the plains communities. The number of followers may be varying but there are members from both the hill and plains communities in almost every religion like Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. It is significant to note that even the small religious denominations like Pranami Dharma, Kabir Panthi, B'Hai, and others have some members in both. The religious intermixture is perhaps one of the most concrete bonds between them.

(7) Language

Table 6 given in Chapter II has clearly shown that the Hindi-speakers constitute more than three-fourth of the total plainsmen. The remaining one-fourth is represented jointly by about a dozen linguistic communities. But in fact this is only the picture that has emerged from the census enumerations. In actual practice, the linguistic situation of the plainsmen is quite different from what has been just projected.

The so-called Hindi speakers actually represent two major communities known as the Marwaris and the Biharis. As already stated, the Marwaris have a dialect of their own, which is difficult to understand by a pure Hindi-speaker. Similarly, the Biharis are actually divided into two major dialect groups known as Bhojpuri and Maithili, neither of which is, again, easily understandable to a pure Hindi-speaker. In other words, the so-called Hindi-speakers are a group of assorted people actually speaking the Marwari, Bhojpuri, and Maithili dialects of Hindi. However, it should perhaps be pointed out that all the members

speaking these dialects know Hindi fairly well and use it frequently as a link language between themselves.

The speakers of the so-called other languages have as a matter of fact only a rare opportunity in Sikkim to speak in their own languages. Being few in number and often living at distant places, it is virtually impossible for them to meet each other frequently and speak in their own languages. But it should be noted that they have not forgotten their languages because they have a close and regular contact with the people of their communities.

Even the local peoples, particularly those who are educated or who live in the urban areas can manage to speak in Hindi fairly well but the language which is most widely spoken by the hill communities is Nepali. Until 1950s, many Sikkimese could not speak or understand the Nepali language very well. As a matter of fact, there are still some pockets in North and West Sikkim where the local people cannot speak in any language other than their own. By and large, the hill people of Sikkim have four major language groups - Nepali,

which is the lingua-france of Sikkim as a whole; Limbu, which is widely spoken in West Sikkim; and the Lepcha and Bhutia languages, which are also widely spoken in North Sikkim. These three non-Nepali languages have received a renewed attention of the government today.

The Nepali language is in fact not only the lingua-franca of the three hill communities and other plains communities in Sikkim but also in areas like Darjeeling and Dooars. It is recalled by old informants from the plains communities that they initially spoke with the local people in the Hindi language but very soon they picked up the Nepali language and began to use it as a medium of communication. The post-1975 migrants also used Hindi but many of them could converse in English as well. Today, there is hardly any plainsmen living in Sikkim and yet not knowing the Nepali language. Hence, the widepread use of this language has bridged the communication gap not only witnin the plains and hill communities but also between the two.

In this regard, a special mention must be made of the Marwaris. The older generation Marwaris in particular can switch on to a number of languages like the Marwari, Hindi, Lepcha, Bhutia, and the Nepali smoothly. Their capability to learn the local languages has not gone unappreciated not only by the local people of Sikkim and Darjeeling but also that of Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan. Many of them can speak the Lepcha and Bhutia languages so easily that the Nepali neighbourers remain baffled because they cannot manage more than a few words of these languages. The learning of the local languages by the Marwaris and learning them so well may have been a strategy for their control over the economy of the local people if not the people themselves but this has certainly contributed to building a healthier socio-cultural matrix in Sikkim and other such Himalayan areas where the Marwaris have settled for trade or business.

Finally, it may be added here that I have noticed the children of the Marwaris and Biharis playing about the streets and lanes and the language they spoke in was Nepali only. This

was also found true of the school going children. The children belonging to the plains communities do not have separate schools to read in. They read in the same schools where the local children also go. And the local children being more in number in all the schools and collges the influence of the Nepali language on the new generation of the plains communities has been significant and there is every likelihood that it will be even more so in future.

(8) Dress

The plainsmen are often called dhotiwala, meaning loin-clothesmen, by the hillmen including the present Chief Minister of Sikkim, Nar Bahadur Bhandari in some of his speeches. But the loin-cloth is more a symbol than a dress actually used by the plainsmen. The very climate of most of the towns in Sikkim does not encourage the wearing of such thin loin-cloth by any person or community there. Thus, it is basically the older generation Marwari males who wear the loin cloth as lower garment and shirts and coats as upper garments. There can also be seen some Biharis

wearing loin-cloth sometimes but wearing of the one piece cloth called lungi is more common as the lower garment for them. The shirts they wear are slightly different from the western shirts in the sense that they have a bigger front pocket and two large and long side pockets. Even the length of such shirts is much more than that of the western ones. Their coat is also not identical with the western coat and it is better known as Nehru coat.

The youths and children among the Marwaris and the Biharis neither wear a loin-cloth nor the one-piece cloth called lungi. They are known to be ashamed of wearing them and take pride in wearing the western shirts and trousers only. The women among them wear sari and blouses but the younger ones are found to have a preference for salwar kameej. They do, however, wear sari after their marriage but seldom before it.

The Lepcha, Bhutia and the Nepali communities have their own special male and female dresses. But majority of them do not wear their traditional dresses. The common dress for most educated

and urbanized males of these communities is, as true of the plainsmen, the shirts and trousers only. In North Sikkim, however, many Lepcha and Bhutia people are often seen wearing their traditional dresses but even there it is more often the females and the older generation members who are found to be wearing their traditional dresses. Among the Nepalis too, it is mainly the older generation members who wear the traditional dress and cap.

The females among the hill communities have gone in a big way for the dresses like sari and salwar kameej. Wearing of the trousers by them, specially the youths, is also not uncommon. On the other hand, the Bhutia female dress called bakkhu is no longer the exclusive dress of the Bhutia women: the local Lepcha and Nepali women also wear this dress very often.

In short, there is a high level of homogenization in respect of dress irrespective of the cultural and historical background of the various local and migrant communities living in Sikkim today. Instead of each community wearing its own

traditional dress the most popular dresses for the males are trousers and shirts and for the females, sari and salwar kameej. Another interesting aspect of this homogenization process in Sikkim is the wearing of the western coat on the top of the traditional dresses like dhoti-kameej for the plainsmen and daura-suruwal for the numerically dominant Nepalis. And for the elites of Sikkim, the western suit and neck-tie completely overshadow their own cultural dresses and backgrounds.

Therefore, the dhoti or loin-cloth cannot be considered as the dress of the plainsmen except, symbolically. Even the symbolic use of this term for all the plainsmen is quite inappropriate because loin-cloth is not the traditional dress of all the plains communities. It is significant to note here that it is also the traditional dress of the Nepali high castes, particularly the Brahmins, who owe their origin to the plains of India only. Hence, the politics of dress seems to have nothing to do with the ecology of dress, particularly in Sikkim.

(9) Food Habits

The food habits of a migrant community depend partly on the tradition which it represents and partly on the availability of food articles in a new place. With regard to this, it is perhaps risky to either support the "cultural determinism" or the "ecological determinism" theory. This is because food habits tend to change over generations if not within a generation. Even when the foods conventionally eaten by a migrant community are not available in a particular area it often adapts the local foods to its traditions. And in Sikkim, where the infrastructural facilities are well developed today, it is not at all difficult for the plainsmen to conform to their traditional food habits.

Traditionally the plainsmen, particularly the Marwaris, are known to be vegetarian and teetotoller but not other plains communities. The Biharis, for instance, have a widespread habit of alcoholism and eating non-vegetarian food. They are not, however, believed to eat beef and pork but mutton, chicken, eggs, and fish are permissible in their society.

Barring these two plains communities, it is very difficult to generalize on the food habits of other plains communities. There are families among them who do eat beef though traditionally they are not supposed to. Among them, particular mention may be made of those who are married to Lepcha and Bhutia women and those who are Christians. The one thousand odd Urdu speakers from the plains being Muslims have no restriction on eating beef but pork is a taboo for them. On the other hand, the Hindu plainsmen including some Bengalis are known to relish pork. And alcoholism is more a matter of individual taste and habit than a cultural trait among them in Sikkim,

Among the hillmen, including those who have migrated from Darjeeling and Dooars, vegetarianism is practised but to a limited scale. There are many Nepali high caste members who are reported to be strictly vegetarians like the orthodox Marwaris. There are also people belonging to other Nepali castes like the Rai and the Mangar, who have some followers of the vegetarian sects of Hinduism like Pranami Dharma and Kabir Panthi.

Such people strictly avoid non-vegetarian food and alcoholism. Alcoholism is in fact a taboo among many Christians also such as those belonging to the sects like El-Shadai and Penticostal.

Most of the hillmen are otherwise both non-vegetarian and alcoholic. Alcoholism is particularly reported to be popular among the tribal societies like the Lepchas and the Bhutias and so is non-vegetarianism. A comparison with the Muslims among the plainsmen can perhaps be drawn with the prosperous Nepali caste called the Newars. Like the Muslims, the Newars do not eat pork while most other Nepali castes and tribes avoid beef. Buffalo meat is supposed to be the most prestigious among the Newars.

Smoking does not strictly come under food habits but it is generally included under any discussion on food habits. With regard to this, it may be pointed out that smoking is more common among the plainsmen, barring the Marwaris, than among the hillmen. The hill tribes in particular have very few smokers even today and this habit is believed to have been rubbed off by their Nepali

neighbourers. But even among the Nepalis, smoking is not an obsession as it is found among some of the tribes in north-east. Among the plainsmen, smoking of bidi and chewing tobacco are very well known among the Biharis while the Bengalis are particularly noted for their cigarette-smoking habits. As a matter of fact, smoking is catching up fast among the town dwellers, particularly the youths irrespective of their caste, creed and religious backgrounds.

Further, it may be noted that what has been described above is more ideal than actual. In actual practice, deviances from the norm are always reported. For instance, some of the teachers from the plains of India, who are professed Hindus and often belonging to high castes, are reported to be avowed beef eaters and alcoholic. In fact, there are some who lightly remarked that the plainsmen have become more non-vegetarian and alcoholic than the hillmen themselves. This is certainly an exaggeration but it also means that a part of it is true.

On the basis of the above discussion on the food habits of the plainsmen as well as the hillmen in Sikkim, the binary model of Levi-Strauss is difficult to extend to Sikkim. One cannot just classify them into vegetarian and non-vegetarian, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, beef-eating and not, pork easting and not, etc. Even if we confine ourselves to any particular community, whether from the plains or local, such binary oppositions are difficult to find in all respects.

Such a laxity cannot however be attributed to the expected anonymity in an urban set-up. The Sikkimese towns, excepting Gangtok, are fairly small and almost everyone knows the inhabitants of his town. Though food is often a private matter of a family, the small-town situations do not allow freedom to those who want to experiment with new food habits. That some plainsmen have taken to the foods and drink not usually permitted in their native societies is perhaps because the hill Sikkimese society not only permits but also encourages such experiments. In many

cases, it may also be due to loneliness, strain and anxiety of such migrants.

(10) Attitudes

Attitudes being a subjective feeling of persons, groups, or communities about another group of persons or community, it is difficult to make any definite statement about them. For judging the attitude of one about another, stereotypes are usually taken as the basis but this cannot be a strong criterion. Above all, attitudes are classified into subjective judgements like 'good' and 'bad' or 'neutral', or 'superior' and 'inferior', and 'advanced' and 'backward'. But the very classification of such attitudes into the above categories tend to be based on subjective judgements of the researcher.

Yet social psychologists in particular put a lot of emphasis on the study and measurement of attitudes. About half a dozen attitude scales are available in social psychological literature but such scales neither help us to understand the social background of the people bearing different

attitudes nor do they help us in changing or improving their attitudes.

Despite such problematics related to the study of attitudes it is nonetheless an important cultural variable. Attitudes are not just formed in a day: they take a long time to form and crystallize. Hence, it may be briefly discussed here in the context of Sikkim.

On the basis of my limited field experience in Sikkim, I believe that some attitudes are built in a migrant community much before they actually migrate. Such attitudes are formed on the basis of whatever they have heard from the people visiting their places of origin. Hence, in a way, the attitudes of a few individuals get transported to distance places and which are retransported by the people migrating afterwards. This process goes on giving attitudes an almost stable form.

Most attitudes are derived from what a society gathers about another society's cultural practices like food habits, marriage practices, sexual relations, religion, language, dress, and

so on. Normally, if such cultural traits and practices are different from what a community holds to be ideal it tends to consider them as bad, and good if they tend to conform to their own value and cultural systems.

The attitudes like good and bad can be merged with the superior - inferior classification of attitudes. If the cultural practices and norms of the native communities are considered 'bad' by the migrant communities the latter also tend to consider themselves as superior and vice-versa. Now, with regard to such attitude classification, it may be grossly generalized that the plainsmen in general have a superior feeling vis-a-vis the hillmen there. Though the superior - inferior feeling is also found within the plains and hill communities what seems to matter more is this feeling between the migrant and the local communities. It is is the politicization of such feeling and attitude that was largely responsible for the ethnic divide between the Bengalis and the Nepalis in Darjeeling, the Manipuris and the Kuki-Naga tribes in Manipur, and the Khasis and the Dakhars in Meghalaya, and the like.

But a close observation reveals that such attitudes are very much there within the plainsmen and the hillmen in Sikkim or the migrant and the native communities there. To illustrate the case of Sikkim, a few points may be noted here.

The Marwaris by and large consider the Biharis as 'inferior' to them. The Bengalis on the other hand often treat the Marwaris as 'inferior' to them. The Nepali high caste members similarly treat their low caste members or even the Lepcha-Bhutias as 'inferior' to them and the latter tribes, in turn, consider the castes like the Kami, Sarki, and Damai as 'inferior'. Thus, the attitude difference between the migrant and the native communities there can also be very much extended to the inter-plains and inter-hill communities.

It has been briefly mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that the people from Darjeeling considered themselves superior to the people of Sikkim. They belong to the same cultural group, speak the same language, and have the same food habits. Despite this, the higher level of literacy and greater participation of the hill people of Darjeeling

in literary and cultural activities has given them the false reason to feel superior to their brethren in Sikkim. And, finally, there is also seen the same sort of dichotomy between the urban and the rural dwellers in Sikkim and Darjeeling. The former consider themselves more advanced than the latter.

It is also important to note whether or not a particular community, caste or tribe admits itself as inferior. For instance, with regard to the Marwaris, the Biharis do have an inferiority feeling but the same cannot be said, with equal confidence, about the Bengali attitude towards the Marwaris. Similarly, the Lepcha-Bhutias are often considered as inferior by the orthodox Hindus but they do not suffer from the inferior status accorded to them. Some of them, on the contrary, discuss some of the cultural habits of such orthox Hindus like cunningness and treachery with considerable derision.

(11) Orientation

The orientation of a migrant community depends partly on its own level of socio-cultural adapta-

tion and partly on the socio-cultural environment of the host society. In certain states of India like Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh it is even influenced by some special constitutional or legal provisions made on behalf of the native tribes and communities. Theoretically, the orientation of a migrant community is expected to be directed towards their native place for quite some time after their migration. After that, the orientation is expected to shift its direction towards the region of their inhabitance. It is implied here that such a migrant community will have had some degree of economic as well as socio-cultural adjustment with the local milieu by then.

But the Sikkimese experience shows that no such theoretical proposition can be made about the migrants as a whole. For instance, the Biharis and Marwaris migrated to Sikkim almost at the same period but they have different economic orientations. Orientation can further be conceptually divided into economic and cultural and the two may not go always hand in hand. Let me illustrate

these statements with some examples.

In Sikkim, almost all the plainsmen are culturally oriented towards their native places. They celebrate most of the festivals and rituals celebrated by their native people but seldom participate in the local cultural and ritual functions. They have their own priests, own festivals, etc. though some of them invite the local priests and some of the festivals are the same as that of the locals. They mostly acquire their spouses from their own places of origin and only a few of them have married the local hill girls. Whether it is for their superior feeling or the crisis of identity but they are by and large oriented towards their places of origin only.

With regard to their economic orientation, however, there are perceptible differences within the plainsmen. The Marwaris, for instance, are economically oriented towards Sikkim itself in the sense that whatever profit or surplus capital they earn is reinvested within Sikkim. The source of such capital may have changed or they may not

reinvest in the same business but the capital remains very much within Sikkim. But other plains communities, barring those who are married with local women and settled there, are very much oriented towards their places of origin only. The savings are remitted back to their native places for supporting their families back home or for buying oxen or lands as the Biharis do. The reasons for such remittances may vary from community to community and family to family but they do not plough back their savings in Sikkim. As a result, a large sum of money is siphoned off from Sikkim every month or so.

The following table may be presented to show how closely do the plainsmen interact with the people at their places of origin.

Table 10. Frequency of respondents' visit to their native places, 1989

Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percent
Twice in a year	62	30.0
Once in a year	110	53.4
Once in two years	5	2.4
Occasionally	22	10.8
Very rarely	7	3.4
Total	206	100.0

Source: Fieldwork

Table 10 given above shows that 30.0 percent of the respondents visit their native places twice in a year and 53.4 percent once in a year. The percentage of other categories of visitors to their native places is only 16.6. Thus, on the basis of this table, one can conclude that the plainsmen have a strong backward pull. This can be taken as one of the criteria of their low socio-cultural adaptability.

The above table, however, does not include figures on those who keep in regular touch with their family members and relatives with the help of trunk-calls and letters. It was not possible to collect data on such matters but it was learnt that telephone calls between them in Sikkim and their relatives far away was common.

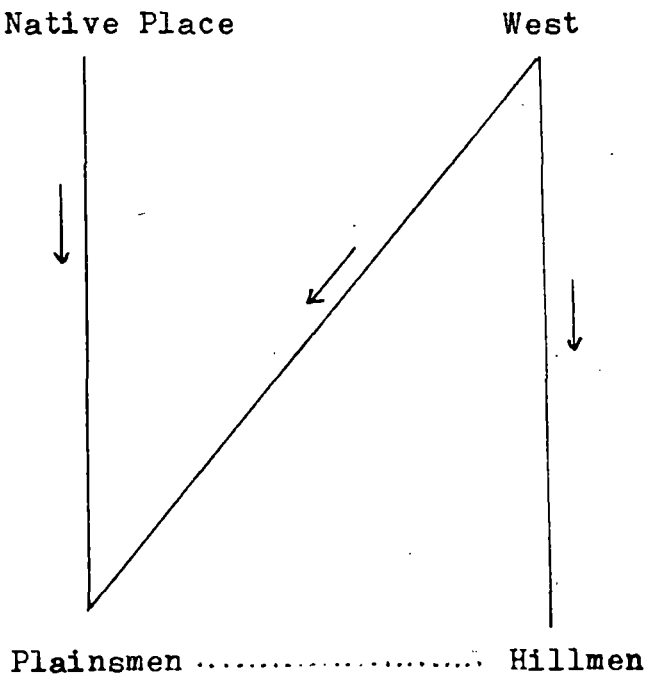
Compared to the migrants from the plains of India, the migrants from Darjeeling and Dooars are obviously in an advantageous position to visit their places of origin. But since most of them have some relatives there in Sikkim itself, they often do not feel the necessity of going home every now and then. They do, however, visit their

natal families whenever possible and particularly during festivals and other such major occasions.

Conclusion

The above discussion on the socio-cultural matrix of the plainsmen vis-a-vis the hillmen in Sikkim may be summarised with the help of the following three figures.

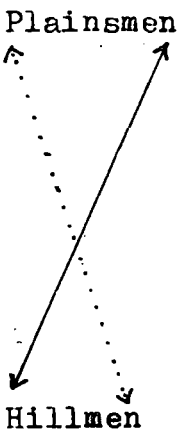
Figure 1. Acculturation of the Plainsmen and Hillmen



Index: ———— strong acculturation

..... weak acculturation

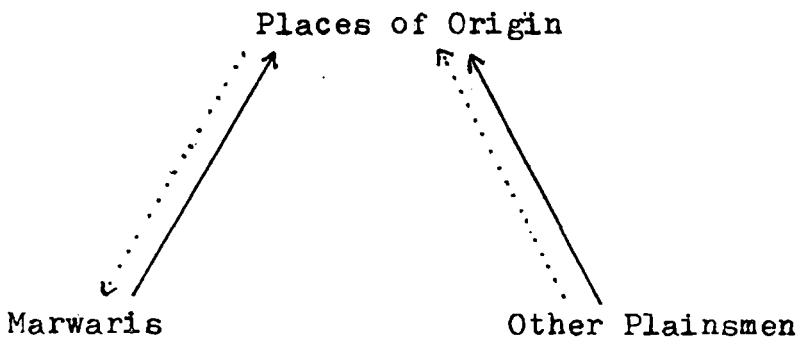
Figure 2. Interaction of the Plainsmen with the Hillmen



Index: ——— Occupational interaction

..... Cultural interaction

Figure 3. Orientation of the Plainsmen



Index: ——— Cultural orientation

..... Economic orientation

Figure 1 given above is intended to show that the plainsmen and the hillmen have been constantly borrowing cultural traits from the West but there has been negligible cultural exchange between the plains and the hill communities themselves. The plainsmen are also constantly reinforced by the people in their places of origin but there is no such dependence in the case of the hillmen from Darjeeling or Dooars.

Figure 2 shows that there has been close economic interaction between the plainsmen and the hillmen but this is not reinforced by cultural interaction. True, no culture exists as an "island" (Boon 1982:15) but the interaction is really negligible enough to be ignored.

Finally, Figure 3 is presented to depict the orientations of the plainsmen in Sikkim. The figure shows that the Marwaris are economically orientated towards Sikkim itself whereas culturally towards their native place only. On the other hand, the non-Marwari plainsmen are both econo-

mically and culturally oriented towards their native places.

The above three figures being gross representations of the socio-cultural matrix of the plainsmen in Sikkim, the details discussed in this chapter could not obviously be brought out. However, one of the possible roles of a sociologist is to build models out of a myriad of complex details. It is only through model-building, even at the cost of factual details, that one can probably strive towards theorisation proper.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This chapter has been divided into two sections. The first section entitled "Recapitulations" deals with the summary of the findings in the various chapter, and the second section entitled "Reflections" makes an analytical overview of the plainsmen in Sikkim. Let me begin with the first section.

Recapitulations

Chapter I of the present thesis introduces the subject matter - the plainsmen in Sikkim. It gives a brief background of Sikkim and shows the importance of the present study. It is clear from the review of literature included in this chapter that there has been no full-length study on the plainsmen in Sikkim in particular and other hill areas of India in general. Whether it was due to the colonial practice of studying "other" cultures or for some other reasons the migrant

societies representing the Indian mainstream in its peripheral areas have not received the academic and administrative attention they deserve. Their problems are not yet known properly and the changes that their culture and society have undergone after coming in contact with the local cultures and societies have not been studied so far. There is little information even about their legal and political status in such areas.

The second chapter deals with the migrational history and patterns, distribution and politico-legal status of the plainsmen. With regard to the first, the present study shows significant difference between the pre- and post-1975 migrants from the plains of India in terms of their literacy and reasons for migration. The first category of migrants are found to have a low level of literacy and with regard to the reason for their migration business is the main. But with regard to the second category of migrants, they are highly educated and the main reason for their migration has been found to be service. With reference to their distribution it is seen that they are more con-

centrated in the urban than in the rural areas. Their male population is also found to be much higher than their female population. The male-female ratio is even more imbalanced in the rural than in the urban areas. Finally, about their politico-legal status, it is observed that their political status has considerably improved after Sikkim's 'merger' with India.

The third chapter has discussed the internal structure of the plainsmen. The various plains communities are found to have developed only a loose ethnic structure because of complex and heterogeneous historical, linguistic, cultural, vocational, and religious backgrounds. It is found that the same reasons are responsible for their failure in forming ethnic solidarities both at the inter- and pan-plainsmen levels. The narrow trade and political interests of a few affluent plainsmen are also found to be responsible for this. The class stratification that has developed within the plainsmen is indeed an important factor in this regard.

The fourth chapter has dealt with the occupational structure of the plainsmen vis-a-vis the hillmen. In the beginning of this chapter, a brief survey of the theoretical literature on occupation has been made. This has shown that most of such literature in this regard deals with the industrial and developed societies rather than the tribal or peasant societies of India or Asia. It has also been observed that the plainsmen were well entrenched in the economic or occupational structure of Sikkim. And when the service, administrative, and agricultural sectors were expanded after 1975 they could have a successful entry into these sectors also. Thus, they are found to be very well integrated into all the three major sectors of Sikkim's economy, namely, agriculture, trade/business, and service.

The fifth chapter has discussed the socio-cultural matrix of the plainsmen in Sikkim on the basis of eleven socio-cultural variables like food habits, dress, age, sex, attitude, orientation, and the like. On the basis of

the discussion it is found that there is very insignificant socio-cultural interaction not only between the plains communities themselves but also between the plains and the hill communities there. Secondly, the hill and plains communities are found to be very well integrated into the occupational structure of Sikkim but the socio-cultural integration has been far from satisfactory. Finally, the only plains community which has been found to be economically oriented to Sikkim is the Marwari though culturally, like all other plains communities, it is very much oriented towards their places of origin only.

Reflections

The summum bonum of the various findings discussed in this thesis is that the plainsmen in Sikkim have experienced a highly successful economic adaptation but not so successful socio-cultural adaptation. The former precedes the latter though the two processes may not move towards the same direction. In the case of Sikkim, the lack of socio-cultural adaptation therefore needs to be analysed.

As far as the ethnic theories related to this phenomenon are concerned they may be broadly categorized into objective and subjective theories. There is an increasing consensus to combine the two sets of theories in any attempt to explain the ethnic phenomena, which are getting increasingly complex today. One need not necessarily follow this prescription deliberately but one must see the phenomenon in its possible entirety without being biased to any theory no matter how sound.

Coming to the Sikkimese situation, it may be recalled that the primordial factors like culture, language, religion, and the like not only seem to have divided the plains communities but also the hill communities. Such primordial heterogeneity seems particularly responsible for the lack of both intra- and inter-plainsmen solidarity.

The primordial differences are strengthened by subjective differences emerging from the competition for limited environmental resources (Barth (1969). The resources in Sikkim being scarce,

as elsewhere in the country, they cannot be appropriated by all the members of any state or even a particular community. Hence, it is only a few communities or families of a community, who succeed in controlling the resources and once they are in control they do not want to forgo with them. The net result is that the socio-cultural adaptation is hampered at all levels of society.

Another reason for the low socio-cultural adaptation of the plainsmen is rooted in the history of Sikkim itself. It is to be remembered that no matter what the exact statutory status of Sikkim was earlier, it was a separate nation and its various subjects had separate political statuses. It was only before fifteen years or so that its status changed from country to state, from Sikkim as a Himalayan kingdom to the 22nd state of India. While the transition of its political status has been completed, the emotional transition of the people, particularly the Buddhist Lepcha-Bhutias who had to lose most, has not been

completed. It is no wonder therefore that the Sikkimese often refer to the plainsmen in Sikkim as 'Indian' as if they are not themselves. It is also equally unsurprising to find many Indians in Delhi or Bombay asking a Sikkimese about visa and other details for visiting Sikkim.

The Government of India is aware of this problem in Sikkim. It is probably due to this awareness that it does not want to scare the local Sikkimese communities by guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities to the plainsmen as Indian citizens. It is perhaps for this reason only that the local hill communities have been allowed to enjoy the primacy over their Indian neighbourers from the plains of India. The government also cannot afford to have its border states like Sikkim fretting with ethnic tensions.

But the result of this policy has been that the plainsmen have been deprived of the opportunity to feel Sikkim as a part of India or to feel themselves as Sikkimese. There is not much hope in the near future for any radical change in the

existing arrangements of the administration in Sikkim. But the young children who are born and brought up in Sikkim itself are not expected to suffer from the complex which their parents suffered from. Hence, a new socio-cultural situation may emerge once the first migrants are eliminated by their age and the new generation takes charge of the affairs there.

Writing on similar situations in the north-east India, B. P. Singh (1987) isolates two key factors with regard to this region - "limited socialization" and "rapid modernization". These two factors are responsible for the situation in Sikkim also. But "limited socialization" is actually an event rather than a cause. Socialization may have been limited not only because of various primordial differences but also due to factors like attitude and orientation. Therefore, the second factor is clearly the most important determinant of the ill-adaptation of the plainsmen in Sikkim with regard to their socio-cultural aspect. When a region is rapidly exposed to the forces of modernization and development, the local people and the migrants do not get the opportunity

to understand each other properly and develop networks of social and cultural relations. Instead, the interacting groups and cultures get insulated and sharpen their identities like "insiders" and "outsiders".

Thus, the lack of socio-cultural adaptation of the plainsmen in Sikkim is due to a large number of factors like primordial differences within and without, administrative policies, and rapid modernization. In this context, one is compelled to exalt the Elwin-Nehruvian policy of "protected development" or "hastening slowly". Both Elwin and Nehru were aware of the consequences of exposing a backward region rapidly to the forces of development and modernization. Looking at the consequences of such a process in Sikkim, one feels that A Philosophy for NEFA, published in 1959, could still provide the guiding principle in the post 'merger' Sikkim. It was therefore quite natural that Nari K. Rustomji lamented the development in Sikkim in his Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy (1987).

It should be remembered here that Rustomji was closely associated not only with the ex-

Chogyal of Sikkim but also with Sikkim's administration as its Dewan. But persons of his stature are branded as pro-status quo and outdated by the present day administrators or advisors to the administrators. Had the insight developed by Elwin been borne in mind the socio-cultural adaptation of the plainsmen in Sikkim would perhaps be more successful than it has been witnessed there.

Finally, a word about integration. There is a growing consensus on abandoning the policies of 'assimilation' or 'isolation' for the backward tribes and regions in favour of the policy of 'integration. But since the policy of integration is not free from many misgivings, the administrators would do better if they clearly laid down what they mean by integration and with what. The National Integration Council members would do better if they scratched their heads hard and found some solution to this keeping in mind the situations in the peripheral societies and not the interests of their sponsorers in New Delhi. They would also do better if they involved some related social scientists actively in the attempt

rather than spend thousands of rupees in organizing functions and melas.

A common misgiving of the peripheral societies about integration is that it means integration with the mainstream Hindu culture and ethos. If this suspicion is not got rid of completely it may instead further isolate such societies rather than integrate them.

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