

## 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 <sup>b</sup>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 plainmen 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 business<sup>-men</sup> 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<sup>-ed</sup> out. Secondly, even in the late 60s, the Deswalis were not "exclusively" a male society as he has point<sup>-ed</sup> 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 portorage. 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 likena

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 had<sup>r</sup>ly 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 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.

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Occupation, 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 "dependency 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 facilities even within the towns is quite significant. This may be clear from the following table (Table 8).

Table 8. Increase of Infrastructural facilities 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 unprecedently. 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 plainmen. The headmaster of most junior high schools, secondary schools, and higher secondary schools were and still are the plainmen. 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 plain 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-plainmen 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-plainmen 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.