

CHAPTER IV

DEMOCRACY IN SIKKIM UNDER SDF REGIME

Traditionally Democracy means people's rule. The origin of the term democracy can be traced back to Ancient Greece. Democracy is derived from the Greek word 'kratos', meaning power or rule. Democracy thus means 'rule by the demos', the demos referring to the 'people'. In modern times democracy is treated as a single, unambiguous phenomenon. It is assumed as a system of regular and competitive elections based on universal franchise.⁵² Most conception of democracy is based on the principle of 'government by the people'. This means people govern themselves—that they participate in the making of the crucial decisions that structure their lives and determine the fate of their society. The word Democracy is understood differently by different people. Amongst the meanings that have been attached to the word 'democracy' these are as follows:

- A system of rule by the poor and disadvantaged.
- A form of government in which the people rule themselves directly and continuously, without the need of the professional politicians or public officials.
- A system of welfare and redistribution aimed at narrowing social inequalities.
- A society based on equal opportunity and individual merit, rather than hierarchy and privilege.

⁵² In Bernard Crick's (1993) words 'democracy is the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs'.

- A system of decision-making based on the principle of majority rule.
- A system of rule that secures the rights and interests of minorities by placing checks upon the power of the majority.
- A means of filling public offices through a competitive struggle for the popular vote.
- A system of government that serves the interests of the people regardless of their participation in political life.⁵³

Therefore it is clear that democracy links government to the people (Heywood, 2007, p. 71).

The party President, Pawan Chamling had claimed that real democracy in Sikkim was restored by the Sikkim Democratic Front. The chapter basically deals with the question that "how far the Sikkim Democratic Front government has been successful in restoring real democracy in Sikkim?" The party stands for "Janta Ko Raj Ma Jantai Raja"- (In a popular regime, people themselves are sovereign)". The chapter basically analyses the status of democracy in the state under the Sikkim Democratic Front government. We analyse the status of democracy because the SDF as it claims arose against the undemocratic practices of the SSP led government. One of the principal aims of the SDF in 1994 was to restore democracy if it comes to power in the state. Restoration of democracy had therefore been an important aim and slogan of the party, which helped the party to achieve initial success in the state, thus it helped the party to mobilise support for itself. Hence we look at this aspect of SDF rule to see how far this had contributed to the building of support for the party.

⁵³ The starting point of the nature of democracy was given by the American first President Abraham Lincoln in Gettysburg Address delivered in 1864 at the height of American Civil War. He called 'democracy' a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people".

The chapter is divided into four sections; Section I deals with the restoration of democracy in Sikkim under SDF. It is important to discuss restoration of democracy here because SDF came to power with the promise of restoring democracy in Sikkim. Section II deals with the theme that 'Janta ko Raj ma Jantai Raja' because the Party feels that the people of Sikkim should be the real ruler. The third section deals with the democratic decentralisation in Sikkim as democratic decentralisation was absent during earlier government and it is a necessary condition for the existence of democracy. Section IV, deals with the question of substantive democracy. The section tries to discuss how far the SDF led government has been successful in implementing policies in the state and has been able to improve the living conditions of the people.

Section I

Restoration of Democracy under SDF Government

Democracy in Sikkim came up with different stresses, strains and long uprising against the ruler i.e., Chogyal.⁵⁴ Different political parties and groups emerged in Sikkim which challenged feudalism and the monarchical rule in Sikkim. These political groups were influenced by India's struggle for freedom movement. The intention of these groups was the abolition of the system of feudalism and hence monarchy and to bring democracy in Sikkim. Political parties like Sikkim State Congress and Sikkim Janta Congress emerged during this time. These parties also had common demands like abolition of landlordism and establishment

⁵⁴ The Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim was established in 1642 and survived till 1974.

of popular government. A new political party the Sikkim National Congress in late 1960's also opposed the Chogyal rule and the Zamindari system in Sikkim. The main objectives of the party were the establishment of responsible government, written constitution and universal adult franchise based on joint electorate. The party claimed that the majority in Sikkim wanted restoration of democracy and responsible government. Among all the political parties in Sikkim, the Sikkim State Congress was the only party which represented all the three ethnic groups in Sikkim.

Confrontation broke out on 4th April 1973 when hundreds of demonstrators from all parts of Sikkim came to Gangtok against the administration. Law and order completely broke down in Sikkim and the situation went out of control. The Chogyal requested the Indian Government to take the charge of law and order. The Indian army took over the charge of law and order and the administration was taken over by the political officer. A tripartite agreement was signed on 8th May 1973 between the Foreign Secretary of Chogyal, Government of India and the representatives of the three political parties for the establishment of responsible government in Sikkim with a democratic constitution, fundamental rights, and rule of law, independent judiciary and greater legislative and executive powers for the representatives of the people. Chogyal was made the constitutional head. On the basis of this agreement, the first general election was held in April 1974.

There was conflict between the ministry and Chogyal and it became difficult to continue with Chogyal as the head of the state. So on 10th April 1975 a unanimous resolution was passed for the abolition of the institution of the Chogyal and demanding the merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union. Ultimately Sikkim was merged with the Indian Union and it became the 22nd state of the

Indian Union on the 16th of May 1975, bringing an end to the 333 years old Chogyal rule in Sikkim.

Although the merger of Sikkim in 1975 marked the beginning of Parliamentary democracy in Sikkim, yet the general masses remained isolated from the mainstream as fruits of democracy failed to reach the grassroots who constituted the bulk of the population.

The first Assembly election in Sikkim was held in April 1974, two political parties; Sikkim National Party and Sikkim Congress contested the election. The Sikkim Congress swept the poll securing 31 seats. Lendup D. Kazi was sworn in as the first Chief Minister of Sikkim. But soon constitutional crisis broke on 17th August with the resignation of Kazi along with his colleagues and this led to the failure of the constitutional machinery and President's rule was imposed for the first time in Sikkim on August 18, 1979. Within this span of time not much democratic developments was visible. There are several reasons behind this. At the time of merger the state did not have a properly planned communication network, it lacked comprehensive infrastructure for light and heavy infrastructures. The geography of the state was also at a disadvantage for its development as it was a backward state surrounded with mountains and inaccessible terrains. Democracy was established as the governing machinery of the state but it failed to reach the base of the society. Many leaders left the Kazi Ministry and formed a new political party. Democracy was in the initial stage and people were not much aware of the spirit of democracy. Hence, the grassroots remained practically isolated from the fruits of development. People saw no other option but to fight for people's right and replace him. The party claimed that the people were happy and satisfied with the new government formed by Sikkim State Congress under Kazi Lhendup

Dorjee, as it was the only political party which united the Sikkimese people for the attainment of democracy in the state. Under the guidance of the party, democracy was attained and for the first time the people exercised their democratic rights. But soon there was a split in the party and the government could not continue in power for long.

After Kazi Lendup Dorji, the government was formed by Nar Bahadur Bhandari of Sikkim Janata Parishad after he won the Assembly election held on 12th October 1979. Since then Bhandari ruled Sikkim till 1993. The party formulated different policies in the political, social and economic fields. He promised to restore the seats of Sikkimese Nepali which was removed by the 1979 Act and 1980 Representation of People's Act. The Act not only abolished seat reserved for the Sikkimese Nepalese, it also scrapped seats reserved for the original Bhutia and the Lepchas of the State. He also promised to include Sikkim in the North East Council. Many social welfare schemes were carried on by the Bhandari government like drinking water facilities, transport and communication maintenance. It is said that 94% of the villages in the state got electric connection during his term. Importance to health, education and agriculture were given and facilities and incentives were provided in these fields. For the educational development, new schools were established in different parts of Sikkim. Many schools were upgraded, free text books were provided for the students of the Government schools. In the field of health, new primary health centres and sub-centres were set up in each village and awareness camp and programmes were held on diseases like Leprosy, tuberculosis and cancer. In the agricultural field, the farmers were given High Yielding Variety seeds, irrigation channels were made and training centres and farms were opened. After coming to power in 1984, the Bhandari government provided

books at subsidised rates and mid-day meals were provided to promote education and raise literacy rate in the state.

But after his victory in the 1989 Assembly Election he became quite different than what he was earlier. Opposition political parties were not well organised and hence not powerful; they became prominent only during the eve of elections. The opposition political parties in Sikkim criticised Bhandari on the grounds that he had become more powerful, confident and authoritative in his later phase of his rule. There was a complete suppression of the press and the media. The opposition leaders were tortured by the police. Bhandari used coercion and physical torture to those who opposed him and suppressed all the anti-government movements in Sikkim. He tried to establish hegemony of one reign, one leader, one party, and one language in Sikkim. With this one-party, one-man rule reign of terror began in Sikkim (Kazi, 1993). The other political parties could not survive. The right to press was curtailed. There was constant pressure over the press-media. This led to absence of a strong and effective opposition, ultimately leading to the absence of real democracy in Sikkim. During the SSP's sixth anniversary celebrations on May 24, 1990, Bhandari claimed in his public address at Gangtok that he had the support of every section of people in the state, including the press. He wanted everyone and every organisation in Sikkim including the press to acknowledge his rule. The journalists were the victims of torture during his government. In January, 1993, Jit Raikia, editor of a Nepali weekly; 'Sikkim Samachar' was brutally attacked. In the same year Frank Krishner of Sikkim Express and correspondent of the 'Telegraph' was beaten up for releasing the anti-government news in the state (Kazi, 1993, pp.255-257).

Sikkim Democratic Front, which was a new regional political party, in its initial stage pledged to restore democracy in Sikkim

and promised to strive for the democratic rights of the Sikkimese people. In the press release to the 'Hindustan Times' on March, 7-13, 1993, the party President, Pawan Chamling declared that the party stands for the democratic rights of the Sikkimese people as enshrined in the Constitution of India. Criticising the former government of SSP led Nar Bahadur Bhandari, Pawan Chamling pointed out that people were fed up with the politics of corruption, confrontation and division amongst people during the earlier Bhandari government. He further, urged to unite the people and revive democracy in the State. Thus the SDF was avowedly formed with the aim and objective of restoring real democracy in Sikkim.

The party was formed when Pawan Chamling left the Bhandari government. As such Pawan Chamling was against the Bhandari since he was not implementing the recommendation of the Mandal Commission Report. The Commission had listed all the communities of Sikkim as economically and educationally backward. The Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari who belonged to the Chettri caste then did not responded positively to the demands of OBC's. The SDF thus criticised the ruling government under Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) and held that the government had failed to safeguard the democratic rights of the Sikkimese people.

In its election manifesto of 1994 for the Assembly election, the party promised to safeguard Sikkimese rule, traditions and Rule of Law. Real democracy will be restored with freedom of speech and freedom of Press. The party promised to grant freedom of Press and check yellow press in the state. It further assured that there will be strict maintenance of law and order and restoration of peace and security in the state. The SDF

government also promised to provide social justice for all the sections of the society.⁵⁵

Pawan Chamling speaking to the reporters of Sikkim observer, on the 12th of December 1994 informed in his first press conference that the SDF party manifesto has now become a "Statement of Policy and Pledges" of the new government. He declared that "My government's first priority is the restoration of democracy in the State". In its first election manifesto, 1994, it had promised to grant the rights of the backward classes by implementing the recommendation of the Mandal Commission Report if it wins the election. This will give justice to the people. After forming the government, as promised earlier, the party recommended the Union Government for the inclusion of seven Communities from among the "Sikkimese Nepali Origin" as socially and educationally Backward Classes. These communities were; Bhujel, Gurung, Limbu, Mangar, Rai, Sunwar and Tamang (Sinha, 2008, p. 283).

Earlier the opposition political parties and other political groups, mainly the Joint Action Committee formed in 1993 had criticised Nar Bahadur Bhandari's rule in Sikkim as "Divide and Rule" policy which exploited the relation between the centre and the state. Under the Bhandari government it was charged that the democratic set up in Sikkim deteriorated. Pawan Chamling always moved with the policies and programmes that focused on the upliftment of the poor people. He was not comfortable with some of his colleagues who had no feeling towards backward classes and weaker sections of the society which left him sick and disgusted.

⁵⁵The General Assembly election of 1994 was won by SDF with 19 seats out of a total 32 seats. Pawan Chamling, the party president was sworn in as the next Chief Minister of Sikkim.

The business of the government turned from bad to worse as time passed. Differences arose between Chamling and the leadership of the Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP). The difference was on the issue of principles and ideology (Bali, 2002, p. 103). In 1993, before coming to power, Pawan Chamling criticised the faults and failures of the ruling government at different public meetings held at different places of Sikkim. He also got the support from his ministerial colleagues and MLA's in the party and declared Bhandari an autocratic master who was anti-people and undemocratic. The ruling party he claimed was a party with double standards and policies. He charged that the government had no concern and was insincere in its attitude to the welfare of the masses (Kazi, 1993).

Thus, on March 4th 1993, the SDF was born with clear and open commitment to uphold democracy, justice and development aspirations of the people. The party President Pawan Chamling stated and promised to change the social and political life of Sikkim and fight against the anti-people policies pursued by the Bhandari government. The party also promised for more decentralisation of power to make people stronger and practice democratic rights in real sense.

The press and media during the earlier government had lost its freedom of expression and speech. The party promised to maintain free and fair media in the state. During the earlier government the political rights of the people were non-existent; the opposition parties were prohibited from assembling for any purpose. The people could not reach the government and present their grievances. Therefore, the party resolved to safeguard the democratic rights of the people. The party sought to restore the constitutional rights of the press which was curtailed by the earlier government. Another instance where the Bhandari government

turned to be irresponsible towards its people was that on September, 29, 1993 Bhandari sent a letter to then Finance Minister of India, Man Mohan Singh for the imposition of central income tax rule in Sikkim. After the establishment of democracy in Sikkim in 1975, the state was kept outside the purview of the central income tax. There was opposition against this anti-people act of inviting income tax in the state. Responding to this the people of Sikkim called a three-day Sikkim Bandh (Bali, 2002, p. 133).

The Information and Public Relations Department plays a vital role in keeping the general public informed with the day to day events and activities of the state government. An environment has been created where the press can enjoy the freedom of speech and expression. Press Accreditation Committee has been constituted in 2001 to facilitate correspondents and editors of qualified registered newspapers and agencies. Under Media Initiative Programme, the IPR department provided computers, printers and fax machines to more than 60 local journalists to help them build their infrastructural development. For the protection of the rights of the journalists 'Press Club of Sikkim' was established in the year 2001. Annual grant of Rs 1.5 lakh is also provided by the government to the Press Club of Sikkim. In order to encourage educated unemployed youth, the department has organised a number of training programmes especially in the field of photography, videography and journalism. As a token of appreciation of the contribution made by the media personnel, the government instituted the Positive Journalism grant of Rs 5000/- in the year 2005-2006. The national Press Day is observed on 16th November every year in Sikkim. The journalists were also sent for orientation tour for interaction with their counterparts in India and abroad (Govt. of Sikkim, Department of Information and Public

Relations, 2005). The SDF criticises the earlier government for its failure and misgovernment and for curtailing freedom of press and media in the state. But it will be worth to point out here that the SDF government which once assured the people to grant freedom of the press and media is keeping away from its promise. The government gives various facilities and help in the development and promote free and fair press media in the state but in reality it is indirectly trying to curtail the right of press to function openly and freely.

Democracy seems to be at work in Sikkim. Free and fair elections are held at all levels of government and people take active part in electing their representatives. To ensure justice in the state and make justice readily available for the masses, Lok Adalats have been constituted in all the nine sub-divisions of Sikkim. In addition, Atrocity Court, Human Rights Court, Family Court and Consumer's Court have been constituted to ensure free and prompt justice to the people.

SDF claims that it is a party of the people and for the people. SDF government is the government where people are the rulers and there is maximum participation of the people in political activities. Democracy in the state brings social justice and communal harmony. The state government under SDF promise to maintain social justice from the grassroots level. It initiated steps to bring social justice.⁵⁶ Sikkim Commission for Backward Classes was reconstructed in 1998 to examine the request for the inclusion of any class of citizen as a Backward Class in the Scheduled and address complaints of wrong inclusion or non-inclusion of any backward class in the list. The communities which the earlier government failed to recognise as OBC- Bhujel, Gurung, Limboo,

⁵⁶ The communities like Limboo and Tamang are included in the list of Scheduled Tribes in 2003.

Manger, Rai, Sunwar and Tamang were included in the OBC category on 25th May 1995. On December 6th, 1999, Sanyasis and Thamis were also given OBC status. Similar status was given to Chettri, Bahun and Newar communities on 17th September 2003 (Govt. of Sikkim, IPR- 2009, p. 60).

However, the Electors Data Summary of the Assembly Elections of 1994, 1999 and 2004 shows that participation of the people in election, i.e. vote cast by voters, is decreasing. In 1994 out of total 2,17,743 voters, the vote cast was only 1,78,023, which means 39,720 voters did not cast their vote. Similarly, in 1999, the total number of voters were 2,55,377 out of which only 2,08,983 voted, i.e., 46,394 did not vote and subsequently in 2004, out of 2,81,937 voters only 2,48,959 voted and remaining 32,978 did not vote (Election Commission, Statistical Report, State Election, 1994, 1999, 2004).

This electoral participation however is more as compared to the earlier government. During Bhandari led period in 1979 total voters were 1,17,157 out of which only 76,299 cast their vote and the remaining 40,858 did not. In 1985, total voters were 1,55,041, out of which 99,435 cast their vote while remaining 55,606 did not. This shows that the electoral participation increased with the coming of the new government. The table below shows the electoral data summary.

Table: 1

**ELECTORS DATA SUMMARY LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS
IN SIKKIM**

YEAR		TOTAL ELECTORS			ELECTORS WHO VOTED		
		Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
1 9 7 9	GEN	39,999	29,493	69,492	26,107	19,801	45,908
	SC	4,047	3,357	7,431	2,923	2,391	5,314
	ST	21,849	18,394	40,234	13,596	11,481	25,077
	TOTAL			1,17,157			76,299
1 9 8 5	GEN	53,022	44,784	97,806	34,791	26,749	61,540
	SC	5,867	4,907	10,774	4,162	3,001	7,163
	ST	24,917	21,544	46,461	17,559	13,173	30,372
	TOTAL			1,55,041			99,435
1 9 8 9	GEN	99,370	85,027	1,78,697	71,131	58,249	1,29,380
	SC	7,272	6,650	13,922	5,743	4,104	9,847
	ST	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	1,00,942	91,677	1,92,619	76,874	62,353	1,39,227
1 9 9 4	GEN	66,578	58,274	12,485	55,022	46,704	1,01,726
	SC	7,998	7,620	15,518	6,975	5,743	12,718
	ST	39,739	37,634	77,373	33,709	29,870	63,579
	TOTAL			2,17,743			1,78,023
1 9 9 9	GEN	77,177	69,503	1,56,680	63,927	54,765	1,18,694
	SC	9,306	8,693	17,999	8,223	6,856	15,079
	ST	46,108	44,590	90,698	39,705	35,505	75,210
	TOTAL			2,55,377			2,08,983
2 0 0 4	GEN	84,072	76,789	1,60,861	70,458	63,588	1,34,016
	SC	10,608	10,161	20,769	10,608	10,161	20,769
	ST	51,058	49,249	1,00,307	48,093	46,051	94,144
	TOTAL			2,81,937			2,48,959

Source: Election Commission of India- State Elections- Legislative
Assembly Election of Sikkim.

On June 6th, 1995, when the ruling party was about to complete six months in power, Chamling, at a press conference in his official residence at Mintokgang, while referring to the controversial 30 MW Rathong Chu hydel project, said those who opposed the project would be "construed" as opposing the government itself. His justification being that the people had given SDF the mandate to rule for five years and anyone opposing the government on "any" issue would be going against the mandate. This according to critics was not only a great blow to the anti-people project activists in the state but by this very act Chamling waged war on the democratic process he had sworn to establish. This was exactly how Bhandari functioned while he was in power to ensure support of the people. This style of functioning is not only undemocratic but also leaves little room for free speech and movement that are essential parts of the democracy (Hill People, October, 1995).

SDF had promised to give political rights to the people but on October 12, 1999 there was a 12 hour hunger strike by representatives of the three ethnic communities at the 'B.L. House' in Gangtok for restoration of political rights. Four members of the Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC), including its convenors, Nima Lepcha, and former secretary, Pintso Bhutia along with Vice-Convenor, Tenzing Namgyal represented the minority Bhutia-Lepcha community, former minister K.C. Pradhan represented the Sikkimese Nepali Apex Committee (SNAC), the Organisation of Sikkim (OSU) represented by its chairman, Jigme N. Kazi during the hunger strike (Sikkim Observer, October 13-15, 1999).

Opposition parties and groups were however not happy the way SDF was working. They felt the need for a strong and united organisation in view of the prevailing political situation and restore

democracy in the state. Thus, in February 2003, Sikkim United Democratic Alliance (SUDA) was formed with the objective to strengthen democratic process, ensure freedom of expression /movement and fight for restoration of the political rights of the Sikkimese people as safeguarded under Article 371F of the Constitution. The Alliance consisted of the BJP, Congress (I), Sikkim Himali Rajya Parishad Party, Organisation of Sikkimese Unity (OSU) and Nebula /National Liberation Front. The SUDA passed some resolutions in its first meeting at Gangtok with the following aims and objectives:

- To strengthen the democratic process, to secure freedom of expression and movement, justice and the rule of law.
- To fight for restoration of political and democratic rights of the Sikkimese people.
- To maintain peace, unity and communal harmony.
- To eradicate corruption and ensure rapid and genuine economic development.
- To work for national unity and integration and to safeguard national security interest in the region (Common Cause, April 2003) (Kazi, 2008, p. 333).

In July 1997, nine SDF leaders resigned from the party as they were dissatisfied with the non-implementation of some of the promises in the party manifestoes. They claimed that whatever commitments were made in the party manifesto were not fulfilled and the party has been working against the interests of the people. The leaders who resigned from the party were- Chairman of the Land use Board and Central Working Committee member, Dawa Sherpa, two other CWC members and one of the political secretaries of the Chief Minister, P.K. Chamling, T.M. Rai, the ex-political advisor to SDF and the others who were active members of the party (Sikkim Express, July 30-2, 1997).

In the same year, in August, 1997 a new political party- Sikkim Ekta Manch was launched by the former state power secretary, Laxmi Prasad Tiwari with the view that the administration in Sikkim was deteriorating day by day, while the political standard was going downhill and he urged for "political reform in Sikkim" (Sikkim Express, August 26- September-01, 1997). The indication is clear by the above events that there are opposition parties and groups in the society who still think that real democracy is yet to come in Sikkim.

Jigme N. Kazi, the editor of Sikkim Observer feels that the fourth estate, one of the main pillars of democracy has been under seize in Sikkim for a long time. The vast majority of the people, the main beneficiaries of a Free Press continue to remain silent spectators and helplessly watch the press being suppressed (Kazi, 1993, p. 312).

A new political party called the "Sikkim United" was launched in 2008, which committed to strive for the following issues and objectives- political, social and economic, good governance and democratic principles. This party believes that freedom, justice and rule of Law are the fundamental values in a democracy and should be preserved (Party leaflet, Sikkim United, 16, Feb, 2008).⁵⁷The organisation demanded the settlement of a long pending reservation of seats in the Assembly.

⁵⁷ The organisation of Sikkim Unity which was formed in 1994 with the sole objective of protecting the rights and interests of the three ethnic groups of Sikkim was revived in September - October 1999.

Section II

“Janta Ko Rajma Jantai Raja”

The restoration of democracy under SDF is followed by the its promise to establish “Janta ko Rajma Jantai Raja”. The section studies how far the party has been able to fulfill its promise? Democracy in one sense means people’s power to rule and making the people the real ruler. Sikkim Democratic Front was formed with the objective of restoring democracy in Sikkim. In the restoration of democracy, the party assured “JANTA KO RAJMA JANTAI RAJA”- In a Popular Regime People are Sovereign. This means that the party believes in the people’s power and people’s rule.

The SDF was voted to power in 1994 with the slogan that “Janta Ko Rajma Jantai Raja”, i.e. In people’s regime, people are sovereign. It means that the government respects for peoples’ power, peoples’ effective empowerment and their capabilities and choices. On 12th December 1994, SDF swept the elections based on the principles of law, spirit of democracy and good governance. In a state like Sikkim the overwhelming majority are poor people with handful of rich people. The party thus, feels that the real rulers are the poor majority and hence the process of marginalisation of the poor has to be stopped.

The SDF had claimed that one of the biggest achievements of the SDF government is the restoration and institutionalization of democracy in Sikkim. For the first time in the history of Sikkim the poor people of this tiny state realised their power as a ruler; “Janta Ko Rajma Jantai Raja” (Government of Sikkim, IPR, 2005, p. 141). Fear psychosis which existed in the previous regimes no longer

existed. The party in government have been able to restore freedom of speech and the rule of law. Everyone has been given ample opportunities to express them freely. The infrastructure requirement of the judicial system is completely met. Lok Adalats have been constituted in all the nine sub-divisions of Sikkim with a view of bringing justice to the door of the poor people. The Chief Minister meets the public every Monday and Tuesday to listen to the grievances of the people and is sent to different departments through the Grievance Cell for immediate address of the problems of the people. Similarly he meets Government employees, Panchayat's, Ex-MLA's various associations and students every Friday of the week. People's participation is seen to be greater in the SDF led government. A policy has been formulated by the government and as per this policy the local rural people of that particular area are given the construction and maintenance contracts in those areas where the work is to be implemented. The work of Rs 10 lakhs is given to the Panchayat level, Rs 20 lakhs at the Block level, Rs 50 lakhs at the Sub-Divisional level and Rs 100 lakhs at the District level. Housing being an essential element for socio-economic development of the society, the Government under the SDF have been providing grant of Rs 20,000 to the homeless people of the state to assist them to construct houses under the Rural Housing Scheme launched since 1995-1996. Indira Awas Yojna scheme is being implemented to provide shelter to the homeless rural people who are living below the poverty line. Economic programmes are formulated with an aim to create initiative among the poorest of the poor (Govt. of Sikkim, IPR, 2001).

Table: 2

DISTRICT WISE NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES FAMILIES (as on
30.6.2007)

District	Mukhya Mantri Antyodaya Yojna(MMAAY)	Mukhya mantri Khadya Suraksha Abhiyan (MMKSA)	Annapurna Scheme	Extended Antyodaya Annadan yojna (EAAAY)	Below Poverty Line (BPL)
NORTH	994	2048	226	671	2682
EAST	3531	10885	880	2645	11397
SOUTH	2528	65914	514	1522	6614
WEST	2860	5954	654	1760	6220
STATE	<u>9913</u>	<u>25478</u>	<u>2274</u>	<u>6598</u>	<u>26913</u>

Source: Food and Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department, Govt.
of Sikkim, 2007.

Table: 3

DISBURSEMENT OF HOUSING LOANS (as on 31st March 2002)

YEAR	CATEGORY	No. of Loans	Amount of loan (in lakh)	Rate of interest	Recovery rate (%)
1998-99	Upto Rs 50000	312	109.64	14.50 %	65%
	Rs 50001 -100000	484	291.68	16.00%	
	Rs 100001-200000	92	138.60	18.00%	
	Rs 200001-300000	1	3.00	18.00%	
	Rs 300001-500000	-	-	-	
	Rs 500001 and above	-	-	-	
1999- 2000	Upto Rs 50000	204	65.68	14.50%	
	Rs 50001 -100000	243	183.60	15.00%	

	Rs 100001-200000	177	249.54	18.50%	71%
	Rs 200001-300000	3	8.00	19.00%	
	Rs 300001-500000	-	-	-	
	Rs 500001 and above	-	-	-	
2000-01	Upto Rs 50000	20	6.84	14.50%	86%
	Rs 50001 -100000	6	4.08	15.00%	
	Rs 100001-200000	4	7.00	18.50%	
	Rs 200001-300000	2	6.00	18.50%	
	Rs 300001-500000	1	4.50	18.50%	
	Rs 500001 and above	-	-	-	
2001-02	Up to Rs 50000	5	14.50	14.50%	85%
	Rs 50001 -100000	17	15.00	15.00%	
	Rs 100001-200000	24	37.95	18.50%	
	Rs 200001-300000	4	11.50	18.50%	
	Rs 300001-500000	-	-	-	
	Rs 500001 and above	-	-	-	

Source: Sikkim Housing and Development Board, Government of Sikkim, Gangtok, 2002

For the protection of the women and women's empowerment the government formed the Sikkim Women Commission on 12th November 2001. The government under the SDF initiated steps towards gender equality and empowerment of women by being the first to appoint a women minister Rinzing Ongmu from Ranka constituency during the first term of SDF Government in 1994. Kalawati Subba from Yoksum constituency was appointed in the most prestigious post of the Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly in 1999. For the protection of women 33% seats in the

Panchayati Raj is reserved for women. Women have got the opportunity to assert themselves because of the emergence of the SDF government. In the Panchayati Raj Chandramaya Subba was elected as Zilla Adhaksha from west district in 2004 and Nimkit Lepcha was elected as Zilla Adhaksha from south district in 1999 Panchayat election in Sikkim. Lassey Doma Bhutia from Assam Lingzey constituency was elected as Zilla Adakshya in 2004. In Sikkim, according to the Panchayati Raj update ISS Information and Documentation Centre, Bangalore 2003, there were 293 women in Gram Panchayat, which was 32.44% and 37 elected women in Zilla Parishad, which was 37% of the total. Table (2) shows women's representation in the PRIs in Sikkim.

Table: 4

Women Representation in PRIs in Sikkim

Local Body	Women	SC	ST	OBC	Others
Gram Panchayat	293	40	186	200	184
Zilla Panchayat	37	05	33	30	32

Source: Durga, Chettri, Sikkim Academi, Gangtok, 2007.

Table below shows the details of the number of post occupied by women representatives as; a) President, Vice President and Secretary in Gram Panchayats and b) Adhakshaya and Up Adhakshaya in Zilla Panchaya (as on September 2007).

Table: 5

District Wise Women Representation in Gram Panchayat as President, Vice-President and Secretary.

Gram Panchayat	South	West	East	North	Total
President	13	10	08	02	33
Vice-President	11	20	21	09	61
Secretary	09	09	10	01	29

Source: Sikkim Government Gazettee, 2002.

Table: 6

District Wise Women Representation in Z illa Panchayat, Adhakshya and Up- Adhakshaya.

Zilla Panchayat	South	West	East	North	Total
Adhakshaya	01	-	-	-	01
UP-Adhakshaya	-	01	-	-	01

Source: Sikkim Government Gazette, 2002.

Since 2000, the government has made the provision of reservation of seats to all the categories of people in all government jobs. For the Scheduled Caste seat reserved is 6%, Scheduled Tribe up to 33%, 21% to the Most Backward Classes and 14% seats are reserved for the Other Backward Classes. Reservation of seats for women in government jobs has been extended up to 30%. The provision also includes 3% seat reservation for ex-servicemen, 3% for physically handicapped and 2% for the sportsmen and artists.

For speedy and smooth functioning of administration at the grassroots level, 24 administrative centres were opened. People's Administration system is introduced where the power has been transferred to villages through panchayat's. To ensure greater role of Panchayat's in planning and administration, Gram Panchayat Administrative Centre has been made operational from 1st July, 2003 in all the Gram Panchayat Units (Lama, 2003).

The Government in the budget session (1995-1996) passed the Municipal Corporation Bill, Motor Vehicles Bill and the Language Bill. The party President Pawan Chamling stated that it was obligatory for the SDF government to produce a white paper and prevent misconduct and misrule.

Language being an important factor for the development of the society, the regional languages like Bhutia, Limboo, Lepcha are being taught at the college level also and the government claims that it is working towards the inclusion of these languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Languages like Tamang, Gurung, Rai, Sherpa, Manger, Newar and Sunwar have been recognised as state languages for its protection. Separate Welfare Boards for ST, SC and OBCs/MBCs have been constituted in 2000 by the government for the development and implementation of various programmes for the weaker sections of the population.⁵⁸ Various schemes for the welfare and development of women, SCs, STs, OBCs and handicapped and aged people are being implemented in the state which includes Indira Mahila, Balika Samridhi Yojna, small family scheme to delay marriage etc. A total 803 beneficiaries are covered under Balika Samridhi Jojana (Government of Sikkim, Sikkim: A Statistical Report, Directorate of

⁵⁸ Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 and Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 have been extended and enforced in the state to prevent atrocities against the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes.

Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2004-2005, p. 1810). The women in Sikkim are being encouraged by offering attractive incentives, widow remarriage scheme, and granting pensions to widows of ex-servicemen.

In Sikkim the weaker sections mainly comprises of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. Most of the population belonging to the weaker sections live below the poverty line and are mostly dependent on agriculture.

Table below shows poverty ratio in Sikkim in various years:

TABLE: 7

YEAR WISE POVERTY PERCENTAGE IN SIKKIM

	1973-74	1987-88	1993-94
Rural	52.67	39.35	45.01
Urban	36.92	9.94	7.73
Total	50.86	36.00	41.43

Source: Department of Information and Public Relation, Govt. of Sikkim, 2001.

TABLE: 8

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF BPL AND APL HOUSEHOLD WITHIN DISTRICT, 2006

DISTRICT	BPL HOUSEHOLD	APL HOUSEHOLD	TOTAL HOUSEHOLD
NORTH	18.65	81.35	100
EAST	13.53	86.47	100
SOUTH	24.38	75.62	100
WEST	26.54	73.46	100
TOTAL	19.33	80.67	100

Source: Census of India, State Socio- Economic Census, 2006.

It shows that when the SDF came to power in 1994, the poverty percent in Sikkim was 41.43%, out of which 45.01 was in the rural areas and 7.73 in urban areas. In the district wise distribution of BPL persons, the west district had the highest percent of people living below the poverty line with 26.54% of households living below the poverty line. The south district had the second highest percent of households-24.38% living below the poverty line. The north district had 18.65% households living below poverty line and the east district had 13.53% households living below poverty line. The table below shows that 19.33% households are below poverty line in the state. The government under the SDF has given prime importance to poverty alleviation programmes in Sikkim by providing financial aids and subsidies under health, education, agriculture, animal husbandry and horticulture etc. to enable the weaker sections to stand on their own feet and fight against their economic hardships. The social welfare wing under the welfare department in keeping with the government policies, implements programmes for the upliftment of the poor and needy handicapped persons, old and the aged, destitute and orphan children.

The government under the SDF implemented BPL schemes under BPL and Antodaya Anna Yojana from April, 1999 and distributed rice, Sugar and oil at subsidised rates to the people belonging to below poverty line. Under Antodaya Yojna 6711 beneficiaries were benefited and under Annapurna Scheme 2411 beneficiaries were benefited. Annapurna beneficiaries got their entitlement directly from 24 food go-downs. The BPL and Antodaya beneficiaries receive food grains through Fair Price Shops, MPCS and CCS approved by the department in each panchayat ward. In the east district the total number of beneficiaries under the BPL schemes are 17621 persons, the south district has 10951 beneficiaries, the west district has 10802 and the north district has

4077 beneficiaries under the scheme. Under this scheme the beneficiaries get 35 kg Rice per month per family @Rs 9/- per kg, 700 gms sugar per head per month @Rs14/25 PER KG, 1.25 litres Oil per unit per month in rural area and 1 litre per unit per month in urban area.

Table: 9

TOTAL LIFTING OF RICE AND SUGAR w.e.f April 1999 to March, 2003.

Item	Period	Quantity lifted (in qtls)	Amount (in Rs.)
Rice	April, 1999 to March 2000	7,95,100	67,28,27,900
	April, 2000 to March 2001	84029	6,26,22,899
	April, 2001 to March 2002	1,85,281	12,29,24,610
	April, 2002 to March 2003	193758	4,41,176,681
Sugar	April, 1999 to March 2000	20,230	2,45,63,000
	April, 2000 to March 2001	29,800	3,88,15,000
	April, 2001 to March 2002	31,215	4,14,20,375

Source: Directorate of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Gangtok, Sikkim, 2004-2005, p. 78

Table: 10

DISTRIBUTION OF RICE UNDER VARIOUS SCHEMES DURING FINANCIAL
YEAR 2001-2002

SL.NO.	SCHEMES	UNIT	QUANTITY DISTRIDUTED
1	Below Poverty Line	Quintals	113730.00
2	Above Poverty Line	Quintals	5579.93
3	Annapurna Scheme	Quintals	1722.00
4	Antodaya Scheme	Quintals	10080.00
	TOTAL		131111.93

Source: Directorate of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation,
Gangtok, Sikkim, 2004-2005, p. 79

To promote economic and development activities for the benefit of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes and handicapped persons, the government recognised 89 revenue blocks having a majority of scheduled tribes population and 64 blocks having scheduled caste majority. The government launched three pronged strategy for the development of SC and ST comprising of

- a) Development measures for education and economic development.
- b) Protection measures through Civil Rights Act and SC, ST Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989 and protective discrimination in matters of employment and other facilities.
- c) Intensive and integrated development of areas having majority of scheduled castes and scheduled tribe population.

Table: 11

Schemes implemented for the welfare of Scheduled Caste during
1998-1999

S L	Department / Sector	Name of the Scheme	Physical and Financial Achievements	
			No.of Beneficiaries	Expenditure
1	Education	Stipends to SC students for undergoing one year Computer Course at CCCT.	11	Rs. 26,400
2	-do-	Stipends to SC students for undergoing Shorthand & Typing Course	10	Rs. 21,000
3	-do-	Stipends to SC students for undergoing six months computer Course at CCCT.	20	Rs.18,000
4	-do-	Winter Coaching Classes	30	Rs. 15,000
5	Animal husbandry	Distribution of piglets at Khamdong, east Sikkim.	100	Rs.,2,12,020
6	Other expenditure	Distribution of Sewing Machine at different villages	87	Rs. 3,20,421
		Total	258	Rs. 6,12,841

Source: Department of Social Welfare, Govt of Sikkim, 2005

During the Eighth Five Year Plan period emphasis was given on family oriented schemes and income generating schemes (Government of Sikkim, IPR, Sikkim, 2001). In order to encourage the students from the backward section of the society scholarships has been granted to students according to the guidelines of the

Government of India.⁵⁹ The Welfare department has also constructed a 50-bedded hostel at Palzor Namgyal Girls Senior School, Gangtok for OBC student's in 1999-2000. A 50 bedded hostel at Chakung Destitute Home had also been constructed. Residential school cum hostel for boys and girls at Kamrang, Namchi, South Sikkim and SC girls hostel cum vocational training centre at Tadong, east Sikkim has been constructed in the year 1999-2000.

Table: 12

District wise number of Welfare Institutions/Destitute Homes
Beneficiaries

District	Welfare Institutions/Destitute Homes	Number of beneficiaries
North	5	171
East	16	1212
South	7	185
West	5	681
state	33	2109

Source: Department of Food and Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs,
Govt. of Sikkim, 2006-07

The motive behind these constructions is to facilitate and benefit these weaker sections of the society. Stipends are provided to disabled students studying outside the state in special schools and

⁵⁹ The state government has worked towards the implementation of these programmes and Sikkim Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes Development Corporation (SABCCO) under the Social Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim was established under the Companies Act (Sikkim) 1961 on 29th February 1996.

scholarships for those studying in government schools and government colleges in Sikkim. Subsistence allowance at the rate of Rs 500/- pm is being given to identify disabled persons. Old and needy persons of 65 years and above who have no regular source of income are provided old age pension. The pension which was Rs 100/- pm before 1994 had been increased to Rs 400/- per month since April, 2007 (Government of Sikkim, Social Welfare Department, 2008).

A special school was established for the Hearing impaired children on 1st June 2004 at Sichey Busty, Gangtok. The Sikkim State Commission for Women Act has been extended to the whole of Sikkim and the Commission has been functioning from 24th November 2002 with eight members including the Chairperson. The Commission studies the economic, social and health situation of women in the state with particular emphasis on the tribal areas, which are underdeveloped.

In the year 1999-2000, the state government implemented the central schemes like (HYV) High Yielding Variety seeds, chemical fertilizers for maintaining soil health and promoting crop production in the fields. From 2002-03 the state government schemes includes use of organic manures such as farm-yard manure, composts, vermi-composts, green manure etc. as well as bio-fertilizers as micro-organisms like Rhizobium, PSM, Azotobacter, Azospirillum etc. The main idea is to avoid intake of chemical residues with food, to preserve and maintain soil ecology with living activities and in good health and to minimise expenditure on agriculture inputs. From 2003-04 the farmers are being given technology training and demonstrations at all the selected Model villages. The government also provided centrally sponsored schemes like Integrated Cereals Development Programme, National Pulses Development Programme, and

Oilseeds Production Development Programme. The state government has implemented the programme of centrally sponsored schemes on National Watershed Development Programme for Rain fed Area (NWDPA) and comprehensive package of agriculture development activities.

The SDF government in order to help the poor farmer's exempted the farmer's from paying toll tax for their products brought to bazaar for sale. The poor rural masses are helped by the state government who is distributing free LPG to families living below the poverty line. 50% rebate is being granted to rural household on electricity and a Janta Bhawan has been constructed at Gangtok for the poor.

"Janta Ko Raj Ma Jantai Raja"- whether the SDF government has been successful in making the janta the ruler will be more clear when an in depth study is made on the working of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Sikkim. Decentralised governance is a part of democracy since it ensures popular participation in decision making. We will look at the working of these decentralised bodies with an emphasis on the devolution of power and financial resources. This is what we are going to do in the next section of the chapter.

Section III

Democratic Decentralisation

It is important to discuss democratic decentralisation in Sikkim under the SDF because Pawan Chamling, SDF party president, claims that democratic decentralisation an important aspect of democracy was completely absent before the SDF came to power

in 1994. We note that Democratic decentralisation for development through the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions is one of the main concerns of the Sikkim Democratic Front government. The government gave attention to strengthen these institutions where they existed and provided necessary administrative and financial resources to these institutions so that they acquire the capacity for planning and implementation of development programmes which are important for economic development in the rural areas.

The concept of Panchayat Raj is not alien for the society in Sikkim. In the past the state was exclusively concerned with the urban affairs and neglected the rural poor, who had to run their affairs on their own. But Sikkim had their own councils called "Gyeme" (village elders) in Sikkimese Bhutia language and "Panchayat" in the Nepali Language. The head of the Gyeme was called the Khyomee. The traditional panchayat's were mainly concerned with the trial of petty village cases which were referred to them by the judicial authorities. They were not concerned with the welfare activities of the areas. The number of members of the Panchayat's was not fixed and not permanent. They usually consisted of five people or "Panch".

Panchayats was reorganised by the Sikkim government for the first time in January, 1948 by constituting an Elakha Panchayat Tribunal in every estate consisting of the Landlord and a government recognised Panchayat consisting of four villagers of the estate elected by the people with the powers to hear suits up to a value of Rupees one hundred only. The criminal jurisdiction extended to petty offences, breach of law and order simple hurt, wrongful restraint, criminal force, assault, theft and misappropriation and criminal breach of trust of money amounting to less than rupees ten only, mischief to property and person,

insult and abuse, and misconduct by a drunken person. The panchayat's were empowered to impose a fine of twenty five rupees only.⁶⁰ The establishment of well constituted panchayat's was further strengthened on 21st May 1950 and immediate steps were taken to institute village panchayat's by holding elections.⁶¹ Panchayat elections could not be held in 1954 owing to strong political opposition. Attempts were made to institute village Panchayat's on an elective basis during the period till 1965. Major attempt was made to strengthen panchayat's throughout Sikkim in 1962 but it failed to do so.

The Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1965 came into force from December, 1965 which constituted 213 block panchayat's, 68 in East Sikkim, 66 in South Sikkim, 60 in West Sikkim and 19 in North Sikkim. The Block Sabha consisted of adults who were Sikkim subjects, 21 years of age and those who paid land revenue as local tax to the government in their names. The election was not contested on a party or political platform. The first Panchayat election was held in 1966 under the supervision of the Chief Election Officer and the Land Revenue Secretary to the Sikkim Government. The election was conducted in 142 panchayat units. The second panchayat elections was held in April 1969 in 105 units of the total 213 as panchayat's of 108 units were declared uncontested. In 1982, a new Act was enacted which introduced the constitution of the Zilla or District Panchayat. Since its inception in

⁶⁰ This was the first recorded attempt to establish panchayat's in Sikkim which was made in 1948 under Notification No. 3052-254/PS dated 24/01/1948.

⁶¹ On 15th August, 1951 the Sikkim Government issued a notification in the Sikkim Darbar Gazette superseding the earlier notification of 1948 which stated that the Panchayat's were to be elected for a term of three years and render welfare services like to establish primary schools in conformity with the government regulation and set up amenities like traveller's rest houses, wayside benches, repair village paths, set up cattle ponds etc. and jurisdiction in civil cases up to a value of rupees one hundred only.

1982, three elections from gram panchayat's were held viz. 1983, 1988 and 1993 prior to the coming of the SDF government.

The Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1993 (Act, No, 6 of 1993) was enacted and notified on 18/10/1993. This Act follows the guidelines laid down by the Constitution's 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 for the constitution of panchayat's in the State.⁶² The Act for the first time accords constitutional status to the local government institutions and ensure the reservation of seats for women in Panchayat's. The Act constituted a three tier structure at Panchayati Raj Institutions- all states to have uniform three tier Panchayati Raj structure.⁶³ At the base is Gram Panchayat. Gram Panchayat covers a village or group of villages. The intermediary level is the Mandal or Block level. At the apex is the Zilla Panchayat covering the entire rural area of the district. The amendment also made a provision for the mandatory creation of the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha would comprise of all the adult members registered as voters in the Panchayat area. All the levels of PRI are elected directly by the people. The term of each panchayat body is five years.

Twenty- nine subjects which were earlier in the state list were identified and listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. These subjects are to be transferred to the PRIs. These subjects were mostly linked with the development and welfare at the local levels. The actual transfer of these functions depends upon the state legislation. Each state decides how many

⁶² The 73rd Amendment Act came into force on 24th April.

⁶³ The following provisions were ensured by the Act:

Reservation of one third of the total number of seats to women in all the levels of Panchayat's.

Reservation of one third of seats for women STs and SCs from the total number of seats reserved for STs and SCs in all the three tiers.

c) Reservation of one third of offices of Chairpersons of Panchayat's at all levels for women including women from SCs and STs.

of these twenty nine subjects would be transferred to the local bodies. The Act thus paved the way for the exercise of political rights in local self government and participation of the rural people in grassroots politics.

Keeping in view the new Constitutional 73rd Amendment Act of 1992, the state government of Sikkim enacted a new legislation; the Panchayat Raj Act 1993. The new Act incorporated all the mandatory provisions of the Act including the reservation of seats for SCs, STs and women in Panchayat's. The reservations were introduced accordingly in 157 (presently 166) village panchayat's and four district Panchayat's of Sikkim. In 1997 the first election was held under this Act. The PRIs have been reorganised as per the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act 1992 accordingly the Sikkim Panchayat Act 1993 was enacted which emphasized on reviving of Gram Sabha's, direct election for seat in Panchayat's at villages and other level, reservation of seats for weaker sections SC, ST and OBC women, devolution of power to the grassroots level.

TABLE: 13

Details of Fund transferred to Zilla Panchayats During 2006 -07.

Sl .No	Departments	EAST	WEST	NORTH	SOUTH	TOTAL
1	Administrative Expenses	53.14	43.67	33	48.77	178.58
2	Development fund for Repair / maintanence (state plan)	56	56	56	56	224
3	Develpoment fund (T.F.C)	9.75	9.75	9.75	9.75	39
4	Local area Development fund	4	4	4	4	6

Source: Rural Management and Development Department, Govt. of Sikkim, 2006-07

TABLE: 14

Details of fund transferred to Panchayats during 2006 -07

Sl. No	Departments	EAST	WEST	NORTH	SOUTH	TOTAL
1	Administrative Expenses	40.84	20.3	14.69	24.82	100.65
2	Development fund for Repair / maintenance (state plan)	65.67	64.57	31.67	59.99	221
3	Develpoment fund (T.F.C)	510	500	200	450	1660
4	Local area Development fund	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Rural Management and Development Department, Govt. Of Sikkim, 2006-07

In the observation made under Rural Management Development, Govt. of Sikkim, that in the working of Panchayati Raj Institution in Sikkim it is found out that the 73rd Amendment Act and 74th Amendment Act has been implemented in the state of Sikkim. 33% seats have been reserved for women, which had been increased to 40%, 24 administrative centres have been opened for speedy and smooth functioning of administration at the grassroots level. Panchayat's have the jurisdiction over primary schools, primary health centre, subsidiary health centres, V=VLO centres, library, community information centres, village tourism, small scale-irrigation projects and community buildings.

One of the remarkable achievements of the SDF government is the degree of decentralisation of power in the rural areas. The villagers got more powers through Panchayat's to make the people partners in finalising schemes and implementing them at the grassroots level.⁶⁴ The Sikkim Panchayat Act 1993 has been

⁶⁴ Under Article 243 G of the Constitution of India, the Panchayati Raj Institutions Of Sikkim are empowered to function as " institutions of self government", enhancing their powers to plan and implement programmes of economic development and social justice.

amended to bring more participation of people in the village development of the society. On the basis of this for the first time in the state party based panchayat election was held in October 1997. By holding this party based election in 1997, democracy was broadened in Sikkim. There was devolution of functions and decentralisation of power. Panchayat's were vested with powers and adequate manpower to assist them in the administration and technical works. Funds were transferred to the Panchayat's both from the centre and state governments. In addition to this the state government transferred funds for the development purpose, for the establishment of Panchayati Raj. During 2003-2004 the state government transferred Rs 3600.00 lakhs to the Panchayat's for development works only (Govt. of Sikkim, Department of Information and Public Relations, 2005, p 125).

Table: 15

DETAILS OF FUND TRANSFERRED TO PANCHAYATS DURING 2002-03
AND 2003-04 TO ZILLA PANCHAYATS

SL. No	Departments	2002 -2003 (ZILLA PANCHAYATS)				
		East	West	North	South	total
1	Rural development					
a)	Administrative expenses	24	23.8	23.2	23.8	94.8
b)	Developmental fund	15	15	15	15	60
c)	Developmental funds for repair/maintenance(state plan)	5.7	19.32	9.35	5.7	40.07
	Total (RDD)	44.7	58.12	47.55	44.5	194.5
2	Indusries Deptt.	0.5	2.75	2.1	0.75	6.1
3	Health and Family Welfare	8.75	20.6	8.8	0	38.15
4	Irrigation deptt.	0.49	0.39	0.3	0.4	1.58
5	Agriculture deptt	1.8	1.5	1.5	0	4.8

6	Horticulture deptt.	2.5	2.5	2.5	1.25	8.75
7	Fisheries	1.1	0.4	1.1	0.95	3.55
8	A.H.V.S.	7	22	6	22	57
9	Tourism	0	0	12.5	0	12.5
10	Social Welfare	0	0	11.5	0	11.5
11	Education deptt.	1.41	3.46	0.96	2.17	8
12	Urban development	30	0	0	0	30
	Total (other deptt.)	53.6	53.6	47.26	27.52	181.9
	Grand total	98.3	111.7	94.81	72.02	376.8

Source: A Statistical Profile, DESME, 2004-2005.

Table: 16

DETAILS OF FUND TRANSFERRED TO PANCHAYATS DURING 2002-03
AND 2003-04 TO GRAM PANCHAYAT'S

SL. No	Departments	2002 -2003 (GRAM PANCHAYATS)				
		East	West	North	South	total
1	Rural development					
a)	Administrative expenses	15.13	15.03	5.35	14.13	49.0
b)	Developmental fund	15	15.3	6	13.5	49.8
c)	Developmental funds for repair/maintenance(state plan)	0	0	0	0	0
	Total (RDD)	30.13	30.33	11.35	27.63	99.4
2	Indusries Deptt.	-	-	-	-	-
3	Health and Family Welfare	-	-	-	-	-
4	Irrigation deptt.	-	-	-	-	-
5	Agriculture deptt	-	-	-	-	-
6	Horticulture deptt.	-	-	-	-	-

7	Fisheries	-	-	-	-	-
8	A.H.V.S.	-	-	-	-	-
9	Tourism	-	-	-	-	-
10	Social Welfare	-	-	-	-	-
11	Education deptt.	-	-	-	-	-
12	Urban development	-	-	-	-	-
	Grand total	30.13	30.33	11.35	27.63	99.4

Source: A Statistical Profile, DESME, 2004-2005.

Sikkim follows a two-tier system of Panchayati Raj with the Zilla Panchayat at the district level and the Gram Panchayat at the village level. State is divided into four Zilla's or districts presently consisting of 95 Territorial constituencies and 163 Gram Panchayat units comprising of 891 wards. The traditional institutions of Lachung and Lachen known as the Dzumsas were deemed to be Gram Panchayat units for the purpose of the Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1993 and exercise its traditional powers and functions.⁶⁵

The table below shows the district wise number of Zilla panchayat, Gram panchayat, and panchayat ward in Sikkim.

⁶⁵ At the District level, the Dzumsas were recognised as Territorial Constituencies of the North District Zilla Panchayats.

TABLE: 17

DISTRICT WISE NUMBER OF ZILLA PANCHAYAT, GRAM PANCHAYAT, AND PANCHAYAT WARD, PANCHAYAT GHAR, PANCHAYAT MEMBER.

District	No. of Zilla Panchayat Members		No. of Gram Panchayat		No. of Panchayat Ward		No. of Panchayat Ghar			No. of Panchayat members	
	2002-07	2007-12	2002-07	2007-12	2002-07	2007-12	constructed	Under construction	Not constructed	Zilla Panchayat	Gram Panchayat
WEST	25	25	51	53	274	283	29	12	10	25	274
SOUTH	24	23	45	45	255	257	42	4	0	24	255
NORTH	20	20	20	21	103	108	13	7	0	20	103
EAST	31	26	50	44	273	243	29	11	37 to go under municipalities	31	273
STATE	100	94	166	163	905	891	113	34	13+7=20	100	905

Source: Sikkim: A Statistical Profile, DESME, 2006-07.

Table below shows the proportional reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes in accordance with the population of the state and the Sikkim Panchayati Raj update in Sikkim.

TABLE: 18

Proportional representative for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes in panchayat election 2006-07

1	SCHEDULED CASTE (SC)	7 %
2	SCHEDULED TRIBE (ST)	38%
3	MOST BACKWARD CLASS (MBC)	23 %
4	OTHER BACKWARD CLASS (OBC)	23 %
5	UNRESERVED	9 %
	TOTAL	100 %

SOURCE: Panchayat Raj in Sikkim, Rural Management and Development Department, Govt. of Sikkim

TABLE: 19

SIKKIM PANCHAYATI RAJ UPDATE

Sl. No	District	Territorial Constituencies	GPU Nos	Total No of GPU members
1	WEST	25	53	283
2	SOUTH	23	45	257
3	EAST	27	44	243
4	NORTH	20	21	108
	TOTAL	95	163	891

SOURCE: Panchayati Raj in Sikkim, Rural Management and Development Department, Govt. of Sikkim

TABLE: 20**GRAM PANCHAYAT UPDATE**

District	Sc (w)	SC	ST (W)	ST	MBC (w)	MBC	OBC (w)	OBC	UR (w)	UR	Total
WEST	7	8	53	77	30	49	21	34	1	3	283
SOUTH	6	10	34	48	35	54	27	37	4	2	257
EAST	8	11	33	50	22	31	32	46	1	9	243
NORTH	1	1	41	63	-	-	-	-	-	2	108
TOTAL	22	30	161	238	87	134	80	117	6	16	891

SOURCE: Panchayati Raj in Sikkim, Rural Management and Development Department, Govt. of Sikkim

NB. Inclusive of the two Dzumsas in north district, Lachen and Lachung, total number of Panchayat members including Zilla panchayat members is 891.

Table: 21**NUMBER OF WOMEN PANCHAYAT ELECTED FROM**

SI No	Zilla Panchayat	
1	West	11
2	South	9
3	East	11
4	North	7
	Total women panchayat in Zilla Panchayat	38

Table: 22

Sl No	Gram Panchayat	
1	West	112
2	South	106
3	East	96
4	North	42
	Total women panchayat in Gram Panchayat	356

Total Women Elected Representatives in Sikkim 397

Source: Panchayati Raj in Sikkim, Rural Management and Development Department, Government of Sikkim.

While talking about decentralization in Sikkim, it is also right to talk about Dzumsa-traditional institution in Sikkim. The traditional laws of Sikkim have been upheld by the Supreme Court, the traditional system of governance which prevailed in the villages of Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim, known as the Dzumsas were continued without any changes. This system of governance is traditional and follows the tribal social organisational set, which is a unique feature that is different from other parts of the state. This traditional village level body consists of the elders of every household of the village including women and Lama's of the religious sect. Two persons are elected from amongst the members of the Dzumsa and are known as the senior and junior Pipon. The Pipons are assisted in their work by the representative of the religious sect (Lamas) called the Chutimpa. The Pipons have extensive powers in accordance with the customary laws practices.

The Dzumsa performs all the powers for trials of cases in their respective villages. The term of office is for one year. No office is nominated to these Dzumsa's. All office bearers are directly elected by the village community.

Pipon: The highest office bearers in the administrative hierarchy and are directly elected by the village community.

Gyapon: The next in the administrative hierarchy. They are also elected.

Thimpeon: are the jury members elected during the time of disputes or settlement of cases.

Mong-Khim or Dzumsa house: is the place where people meet to discuss their problem or to transact important business of the welfare of the community.

Dzumsa Meeting: the meetings are called to conduct public business (Government of Sikkim, RMDD,)

Out of 166 Gram Panchayat Units 105 units have been provided with self-contained pucca panchayat ghars. In accordance with the Constitutional 73rd amendment Act, the state government constituted the State Finance Commission. The commission assessed the financial position of the panchayat's and made specific recommendations to the government on measures needed to improve the financial position of the Panchayati Raj institutions in the state. Since 1997, the state government had made the provision of granting honorarium to the panchayat's and had enhanced the annual grants from 10,000 to 15,000 rupees per annum. Panchayat Assistants (PA's) were appointed to advice the panchayat's and conduct local survey, collect data for village plan for greater panchayat role and overall socio-economic development of the society.

Sikkim Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) an autonomous apex level training institute for Panchayat's was established which is involved in the skill developmental needs for rural development programmes. During 1995-1997, 100 numbers of panchayat assistants and 200 numbers of elected panchayat members were trained on different on-going schemes of the Department, which included rule awareness and rural management crash courses for the elected Panchayat's (Government of Sikkim, IPR, 1997, p. 34).

After coming to power in 1994, the government had set aside 70 percent of the state's annual budget for rural development. Reservation of seat for women in Panchayati Raj Institution was increased from 33% to 40%. The government opened 24 Block Administrative Centres for speedy and smooth functioning of administration at the grassroots level. The decentralisation process in the state is fast enough for which Sikkim has been graded as a leading state of the country in power decentralisation. To introduce the system of "Peoples Administration" power has been transferred to villages through Panchayat's. Policy has been framed for award of construction and maintenance of contracts to the people of the area where work is to be implemented. This has been done in order to generate employment in the rural areas. For rural development 10 percent of the plan budget is channelized through the Panchayat. Gram Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat's directly receive Rs 10 lakhs and Rs 60 lakhs for developmental works. The Adhyaksha's and Upa-Adhyaksha's of Zilla Panchayat's have been given status of ministers of state and Deputy Minister, respectively. Policy has been implemented which allows Gram Panchayat's to plan developmental activities of their area. To encourage rural people's representatives to work for the people the government has introduced "Pachayatshri" awards. Libraries

have been established to keep Panchayat members in touch with the latest happenings and knowledge.

With the increase in powers and functions of the panchayat's, local problems are resolved through Panchayat's and NGOs at the local level. To build peoples' confidence, the government has adopted a strategy that mixes decentralisation of power and people's involvement. Suchna Kendra's have been set up in all 163 Gram Panchayat's and training, workshops to the Panchayat's under State Institute for Rural Development are organised regularly to increase the rural people's participation (Govt. of Sikkim, Sikkim: A Statistical Profile, 2004-2005).

All the 29 subjects as per the XI schedule have been transferred to the Panchayt's for enhancing their capacity to work. Computer training programs to the panchayat members are being imparted. Policy initiatives are being undertaken for empowering panchayat's through power decentralisation. 27 GPUs of Sikkim were awarded the prestigious 'Nirmal Gram Puraskar (NGP)' by the President of India, Abul Kalam on 4th May 2007 at New Delhi. The NGP was awarded to these GPUs for having achieved 100% sanitation in the villages (Government of Sikkim, Directorate of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Revolution, 2004-05).

Delivering a speech at India- Bangladesh workshop on " Democracy, Development and Participation" on 13th October, 2003, the Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling stated that the SDF government's core intent is to make each village unit in the state a self-sustainable entity (Govt. of Sikkim, Sikkim in South East Asia and Europe, IPR, 2007). Sikkim has been one of the few states of the country to devolve and decentralize in a very comprehensive manner. This is done by devolving the financial and institutional powers, empowering, re-skilling and retraining the able-bodied

rural mass and by broadening their choices. The Pachayat's at the village level have been adequately empowered to undertake all development works including community services. This, Pawan Chamling calls as the "rule of the rural people". He further stated that in order to strengthen the institution of Pachayati Raj, the process of power decentralization shall be further expanded and broadened. To ensure greater participation of general public in state administration, Sikkim will be divided into thirty administrative blocks and establish Block Development Office in each of them. Moreover, the Panchayat members shall be further empowered and make more accountable. More powers need to be given to the Zilla Panchayat's for taking up various schemes in public interest.

The Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1993 was passed with passage of the Constitution 43rd and 74th Amendment Act which provided for the involvement of people in the formulation, planning and execution of programmes of economic involvement and social justice. It is primarily aimed at restructuring society towards participatory democracy and laying the foundation for democratic decentralization in Sikkim by transferring all functions listed in the 11th Schedule of the Constitution. Following the Sikkim Panchayati Act, 1993, two tier Panchayati Raj System has been set up in the state. Delimitation of state has been carried on with 100 Zilla Panchayat Territorial Constituencies and 166 Gram Panchayat Units represented by members from 905 panchayat wards, including two traditional local self-governments called Dzumsas at Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim (Govt. of Sikkim, IPR, 2007, p. 202).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ In 2005, the Sikkim Panchayat Act was amended to insert a provision for one-third reservation for women in the quorum of Gram and Ward sabha to ensure active participation of women in all decisions making.

Women in Sikkim are enjoying greater role and responsibility. 33.113% of total Panchayat strength constitutes of the women. The seats of Zilla Adhyaksha and Zilla Upa-Adhyaksha are reserved for women in every Panchayat election. The state government has given the administrative control of all government institutions like Primary schools, Primary Health Sub-Centres, VLO Centres, Libraries, Community Information Centres, Rural Tourism, Minor Irrigation Works, and Community Centres etc. to the President of Gram Panchayat Unit.

The importance of this type of devolution of power to the panchayat's and the rural people is that the rural people can be the best judge and make each village unit a self-sustainable entity and bring Rural Renaissance.

Section IV

The SDF Government and Substantive Democracy in Sikkim

It is also important to analyse how far the SDF led government has been able to improve the living conditions of the people by implementing policies in the state, and thus improving the underprivileged and poor (weaker) sections of the society. For fulfilling the promise of restoring democracy, bringing socio-economic justice to the rural people and promise to give important and transparent government based on the principles of justice to the people, the SDF government claims that it had aimed at taking development to the villages whereas during the regime of the earlier government most of the developmental projects were Gangtok- centric.

The government under the SDF introduced rural housing scheme which entitled the poor to get a grant of Rs 20,000 who were Sikkim subjects. It promoted and expanded environment friendly venture in horticulture, floriculture and tourism. As compared to earlier governments, centre-state relation has improved and the central government have given a positive response to a long awaited demand for the inclusion of Sikkim in the North East Council

Sikkim Democratic Front Government has provided direct assistance and improved the lives of the needy sections of the population by:

- Exempting poor farmers from paying toll tax for their products brought to bazaar for sale.
 - Providing housing grants of Rs 20,000 each for needy families.
 - Providing GCI sheets free of cost to needy families for house construction.
 - Distributing LPG gas free of cost to families living below the poverty line.
 - Granting 50 percent rebate on electricity to rural households.
 - Constructing a Janta Bhawan at Gangtok for the poor people who visit Gangtok for various purposes.
 - Providing safe drinking water to 100 percent of the population both in rural and urban areas.
 - Achieving 100 percent electrification in rural and urban households in Sikkim.
 - Simplifying the licensing system for rural traders and businessmen desirous to start business in rural areas,
- The government has included all sections of people as beneficiaries.

Table: 23

Physical and Financial Performance Report on Rural Sanitation
Programme for the year 2000-Oct 2003.

Sl.No	District	year	SCHEME (PHYSICAL)					
			HHL	ACH	ISL	ACH	BC	ACH
1	EAST	2000-01	100	30	30	-	1	1
		2001-02	200	200	45	45	-	-
		2002-03	1000	625	300	218	5	2
		2003-04	1500	327	110	25	-	-
	TOTAL			1182	485	228	6	3
2	NORTH	2000-01	50	50	15	15	1	1
		2001-02	83	83	15	15	-	-
		2002-03	100	75	100	70	1	-
		2003-04	500	105	71	8	-	-
	TOTAL			313	201	108	2	1
3	SOUTH	2000-01	109	109	100	10	1	1
		2001-02	35	35	60	60	8	7
		2002-03	35	35	34	34	4	-
		2003-04	11	11	6	6	-	-
	TOTAL			190	200	110	13	8
4	WEST	2000-01	125	125	100	100	1	1

		2001-02	75	75	70	70	4	-
		2002-03	30	30	20	20	-	-
		2003-04	15	15	15	15	-	-
	TOTAL			245	205	205	5	1

Source: A Statistical Profile, Directorate of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Gangtok, 2004-05.

HHL- Household Latrine

ISL – Institutional Sanitary Latrine

BC –Bathing cubical

ACH – Achieved

Table: 24

STATUS OF THE COVERAGE OF THE PROGRAMME

SL. No	Programme	unit	Coverage status			
			2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04 (upto september)
1	Rural water supply	No. Of Habitation partially covered	0	0	0	0
		No. Of Habitation fully covered	130	126	130	27
		No. Of Habitation not covered	0	0	0	0

2	Rural connectivity	Length in KM	0	0	0	0
3	Rural housing	No. Of houses	0	9600	7250	6000

Source; A Statistical Profile, Directorate of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Gangtok, 2004-05

People's participation was more in the democratic and political development process. Zigme Sherpa, a resident of Soreng in West Sikkim said that "the Sikkim Sangram Parishad under Nar Bahadur Bhandari, never brought any development work for the villages. She said at least SDF government under Pawan Chamling is doing something for the poor. Suman Gurung of Jorethang in South Sikkim feels the same, "the SDF has always helped the poor people through housing loans and in other ways" The SDF has a strong hold in the villages as other political parties do not have a close connection with the villages as they hardly visit the rural area and interact with the rural mass. Sikkim Democratic Front, thus, a well organised party has done the grassroots work very strong. It can be said that it is a Cadre-based political party like the Communist party of India (Marxist) in West Bengal. The party have made the rural areas very strong through the devolution of power to the Panchayat's. Out of the total 873 wards in rural Sikkim, the SDF controls around 850 wards.

However there are criticisms as well on the government's policies. Biraj Adhikari, an opposition leader had criticised that the SDF leadership is visionless, directionless and full of publicity stunts. Democracy in Sikkim under SDF can be called participatory Democracy where the grass roots are enabled to take part in the working of state administration through panchayat's, though the

final decision is from the top most level. The people are given chance to participate in the democratic process by different means and measures. The panchayat's are directed to conduct meetings with the public and discuss the problems faced by the villagers. Panchayat Bhawans, offices are maintained. People can meet panchayat leaders for different works. This has made the life of people easier. Verifications of many official papers are done at panchayat level so that people do not face any hardship in processing their works. This has made PRIs more responsible.

The State Government has implemented the central schemes under PRI's in order to make peoples' life easy. The schemes like

- 1) Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY) was launched in the year 2000. The core objective of PMGSY is the rural road connectivity and rural development by promoting access economic and social services and generating productive employment opportunity which also helps in poverty alleviation.
2. Rural Water Supply. The primary objective of the scheme is to provide safe drinking water to the rural people where water supply has not yet been provided. The state government is giving importance to this so as to provide drinking water to all the people in the villages.

The Table below shows the year wise Water Supply Schemes sanctioned under Sikkim Democratic Front.

Table: 25

Year Wise Break Up of Water Supply Schemes Sanctioned

Sl. No..	YEAR	No. Of SCHEMES	COST IN CRORES
1.	1994-95	247	9.76
2	1995-96	448	18.36
3	1996-97	183	9.98
4	1997-98	59	0.82
5	1998-99	594	25.88
6	1999-2000	417	19.46
7	2000-01	103	3.16
8	2001-02	309	16.68
9	2002-03	1	9.02
10	2003-04	476	37.58
11	2004-05	2	1.54
12	2005-06	482	25.82
13	2006-07	2194	9.44
14	2007-08	194	13.22
15	2008-09	156	12.00
	total	3693	212.72

Source: Panchayati Raj in Sikkim, Rural Management and Development Department

3. Model Villages: Construction of Modern Villages is a scheme which has been implemented since 2001-2002 with an objective to encourage village tourism in rural areas and to provide rural shelter to the financial weaker sections in rural areas. The government has sanctioned Model Villages at

- a) Assangthang in South District
- b) Phenzang in East District
- c) Rangang in South District

4. Total sanitation campaign: is being implemented in Sikkim through the sanitation wing of the Rural Department, Government of Sikkim. It has covered at large the sanitation aspect in schools individual households, Anganwadis in rural areas, institutions and public places with sanitation facilities and promoted hygiene, education and proper sanitary habits among students and public in general.

The other schemes being National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Sikkim (NREGAS) which was implemented is 2006 in North District and 2007 in South and East Districts with the objective of providing 100 days of guaranteed unskilled wage employment to each rural household. With the decentralization of power the panchayat and Gram Sabha's have been directed to take up schemes and programmes at villages.

Democracy however simply does not mean the implementation of schemes and policies of the government. Free and fair participation of the people in the decision making ensures successful democratic set up in the state. But there has been an ideological and political debate in the contemporary world regarding democratic rule. Political equality is the core feature of democracy which means political power should be evenly distributed. But here it is not very clear to whom or to what body or persons the power should be distributed. Democratic system which is known as the best form of peoples' rule sometimes restricts political participation which means under the Indian democratic condition the act of voting.