

CHAPTER V

MOBILISATION OF THE SUPPORTER'S AND THE ELECTORAL BASE OF THE SDF IN THE STATE I

The chapter analyses the support base of the party among different groups including classes in the state. This chapter and the following one (chapter IV) are based on a field survey conducted in four different constituencies in the four districts of Sikkim. In Sikkim there are 32 constituencies, out of which 17 (seventeen) are general constituencies, 12 (twelve) are reserved for Scheduled Tribe's, 2 (two) for Scheduled Caste's and one seat is reserved for the Sangha (monk). Delimitation of the constituencies was done in 1972 under the Indian Delimitation Act 1972. The number of Assembly Constituencies and Parliamentary constituencies in Sikkim has remained the same since it's first division in 1972. In Sikkim next delimitation of constituencies took place for the general election of 2009. But the current survey is conducted on the basis of the earlier 32 constituencies. The 32 constituencies in different districts are:

WEST DISTRICT

1. Yoksum
2. Geyzing
3. Dentam
4. Bermiok
5. Rinchenpong (ST)
6. Chakung

7. Soreng
8. Daramdin
9. Tashiding (ST)

SOUTH DISTRICT

10. Jorethang – Nayabazaar
11. Ralang (ST)
12. Wok
13. Damthang
14. Melli
15. Rateypani – West Pendam (SC)
16. Temi – Tarku

EAST DISTRICT

17. Central Pendam (East Pendam)
18. Rhenock
19. Regu
20. Loosing – Pacheykhani
21. Pathing (ST)
22. Khamdong (ST)
23. Martam (ST)
24. Rumtem (ST)
25. Assam Lingzey (ST)
26. Ranka (ST)
27. Gangtok

NORTH DISTRICT

28. Dzongu (ST)
29. Lachen – Manshila (ST)
30. Kabi Thingda (ST)
31. Rakdong Tentek (ST)
32. Sangha (Monk)⁶⁷

The survey was conducted in all the four districts of Sikkim. The constituencies covered were; Lachen– Mangshila in the north district, Geyzing in the West district, Damthang in the south district and Gangtok in the East District. Amongst these four constituencies, Gangtok is the only constituency which is urban and the rest are rural constituencies.

The chapter is divided into two sections and several subsections. Section I covers district wise distribution of population, with subsections which covers distribution of population town wise, social category, literacy rate, religion, language, occupation –land holders, agricultural farmers, voters and revenue blocks. Section II, deals with the base of the party in the Damthang constituency of the state. In the next chapter, the chapter that follows we look at the support base of the party in the remaining three constituencies that we have surveyed in the state.

SECTION I

THE PEOPLE IN SIKKIM

⁶⁷ The Sangha constituency is not a territorial constituency; it is reserved for only the monks of all the monasteries in Sikkim.

The study of the support base of the party in the four constituencies surveyed can be better understood when we have an idea regarding the population, literacy rate, linguistic composition, religious composition, social category, occupation of the people, cultivators and land holders, voters and revenue blocks of the state. Hence we in the beginning of chapter in this section look at the distribution of population, literacy rate, language, religion social category, occupation, cultivators and land holders, voters and revenue blocks in Sikkim with a focus on all the four constituencies where the survey was conducted.

District Wise Distribution of Population

Sikkim, with a total area of 7096 Square kilometres constitutes 0.22 percent of the total geographical area of India. According to the regional divisions of census of India, the state is one of the four micro-regions of the North-Eastern Himalayas, other being Darjeeling, Dooars areas of West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh.⁶⁸ The state is divided into four districts – North, South, East and West districts. Namchi is the headquarters of south district, Geyzing of the west district, Mangan of the north district and Gangtok of the east district.

As per the provisional census, 2001, the total population of Sikkim is 5,40,493 persons, consisting of 2,88,217 male and 2,52,276 female in the state. District wise population of Sikkim indicates that the East district has the largest population with 2,44,790 persons, 1,32,745 male and 1,12,045 female population and the North district is the least populated with 41,023 persons out of which 23,410 are male and 17,613 female population. The south district has a population of 1,31,506, out of which 68227 are

⁶⁸ The state is surrounded by Bhutan in the east, Nepal in the west, Tibet in the north and West Bengal in the south.

male and 63279 are female. The population of west district is recorded as 1,23,174, out of which 63835 are male and 59,339 are female (Census of India, 2001). Though the North district occupies the largest area of 4,226 square Kilometres of the state, it is the least populated district due to various factors like hostile geographical conditions, high altitude mountains, glaciers, rugged topography and difficult accessibility.

The table below shows the inter-causal change in population in the four districts of the state in the period from 1981 to 2001.

Table: 1
Inter-Censual change in population- district wise

STATE/ DISTRICTS	1981	1991	2001	2001 MALE	2001 FEMALE
SIKKIM	3,16,385	4,06,457	5,40,493	2,88,217	2,52,276
NORTH	26,455	31,240	41,023	23,410	17,613
EAST	1,38,762	1,78,452	2,44,790	1,32,745	1,12,045
SOUTH	75,976	98,604	1,31,506	68,227	63,279
WEST	75,192	98,161	1,23,174	63,835	59,339

Source: Census of India, 2001, Sikkim Provisional

As per the Census report of 2001, there has been decadal increase in the population in all the four districts of the state. The maximum rise is seen in the East district followed by South, West and the North districts. The rise of population in East district, especially in Gangtok is recorded as the most populated town in Sikkim. Gangtok is the headquarters of east district and the Capital of the state. All the important departments and offices are located at Gangtok. The facilities like easy transportation and communication and job facilities in both government and private

firms have attracted the people from other parts of the state and outside the state.

Distribution of Population: Town Wise

The total number of towns in Sikkim is 8 (eight). North has one town- Mangan, South with two- Jorethang and Namchi, East has three towns- Gangtok, Singtam and Rangpo and West district has two towns- Nayabazar and Geyzing. The population of Mangan is recorded as 1,248 persons out of which, 768 are male and 480 female populations. In the East district, Gangtok comprises of a total population of 29,162 persons out of which 15,816 are male and 13,346 are female. Singtam has a total population of 5,431 persons, with 3,049 males and 2,382 females. Rangpo comprises of a total population of 3,724 persons, with 2,044 male and 1,680 female populations.

The two important towns in south district are Namchi and Jorethang. West district has two towns, Geyzing and Nayabazar. Geyzing has a total population of 828 persons out of which 489 are males and 339 females. Nayabazar comprises of a total population of 996 persons with 537 males and 459 females (Census of India, 2001).

Table: 2.

Population of Town- 2001

DISTRICT	TOWN	MALES		FEMALES		TOWN	
		1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
NORTH	MANGAN	508	768	295	480	803	1248
EAST	GANGTOK	14189	15816	10835	13346	25024	29162
	SINGTAM	2259	3049	1609	2382	3868	5431
	RANGPO	1676	2044	1304	1680	2980	3724

SOUTH	NAMCHI	389	573	241	405	630	978
	JORETHANG	1128	1571	811	1397	1939	2968
WEST	GEYZING	441	489	276	339	717	828
	NAYABAZAR	560	537	485	459	1045	996

Source: Census of India 1991, Sikkim Provision, Population Totals
(Paper 1,2,3 of 2001)

Distribution of Population as Per Social Category

In Sikkim there are mainly three ethnic groups; Bhutia's, Lepcha's and Nepali's. Out of a total population of 5,40,493, the total ST population is 1,11,405.⁶⁹ The scheduled tribe population includes Bhutia's, Lepcha's, Tamangs, Limboos, Sherpas, Tibetans and Yolmos. The Scheduled Tribe's comprises of a total of 1,01,909 persons in the rural areas and 9496 persons in the urban areas. Among the four districts in the state, the north district records the highest percent; 22.33% of ST population in the state. The male population is 56,940 and the female population is 54,465. Bhutia and Lepcha community constitutes the majority of the scheduled tribe population. The Bhutia population is 70,308 in total persons out of which 62,662 are in rural areas and 7,646 in the urban area. In terms of sex wise distribution of population, 35,770 are males and 34,538 are females. Lepcha's are the original scheduled tribes in the state comprising of 40,568 of the total population with 38,757 in the rural areas and 1,811 in the urban areas. 20853 persons comprises of a male population and 19715 female population (Bhatt and Bhargawa, 2005, pp. 48-53).

⁶⁹ Scheduled Tribe population was 20.6% as the two communities –Limboo and Tamang were recognized as Scheduled Tribe only in 2003 and were not enumerated as Scheduled Tribe in 2001 census.

Scheduled Caste Population: The total population of scheduled caste in Sikkim is 27,165 persons, where 1,3807 are males and 13,358 are females i.e. 5.93 percent. The scheduled castes belong to Damai, Majhi, Sarki, Generic caste and Kami. The Damai's are 7,448 in total persons, 3,749 are males and 3,699 females. Kami is the highest among the scheduled caste with a total population of about 17,950, out of which 9,139 are males and 8,811 females. Majhi is probably the group having the least population of 345 persons with 179 males and 166 females. The Generic castes population are 499 in total, 273 males and 226 females.

District wise, the East district has the highest scheduled caste population comprising of 4,405 persons, followed by South district with 2,254 and the West district which has the least number of scheduled caste population with only 288 persons.

Nepalese/Nepali: The remaining category are Nepali's comprising 71, 74 percent of the total population. This category is further divided into OBC (Other Backward Classes), MBC (Most Backward Class), and General groups. OBC includes caste groups like Chettri, Bahun, Pradhan, Bhujel, Jogi and Sanyasi. MBC includes Rai, Gurung, Thapa (Manger) and Sunwar. The general class are the Marwaris, Biharis, Bengalis who have resided in Sikkim before 1975 and whose names are included in the voter list.

Literacy Rate

The Literacy rate in Sikkim has increased steadily since 1971 among both male as well as well as female population.⁷⁰ To raise the literacy rate education has been given priority by the state

⁷⁰ Since Sikkim's merger with the Indian Union in 1975, the literacy rate increased from 34.74% in 1981 to 69.68% in 2001 (Census of India, 1981,1991 and 2001).

governments. Education has been given much priority and free tuition fee, school uniforms, school bags and stationeries' up to class V has been provided by the state government. The provisional census report, 2001 shows that the literacy rate in Sikkim has increased to 69.68 percent in 2001.

Table: 3

Increase in Literacy rate from 1971-2001

YEAR	PERSONS	MALE	FEMALE
1971	17.74	25.35	8.90
1981	34.05	43.95	22.20
1991	56.94	65.70	46.76
2001	69.68	76.73	61.46

Source: Census of India, Provision 2001.

The table shows that the literacy rate in the state has increased rapidly. The total literate persons in the state is 3,22,828 (69.68%) out of which 1,91,326 are males and 1,31,500 females. Literacy rate in the urban areas is much higher than the rural areas. The total number of literate persons in the urban areas is 45,951 persons, out of which 26,407 are males and 19,544 are females, (84.82%). The total number of literate persons in the rural areas are 2,76,877 persons out of which 1,64,919 are female and 1,11,958 are male population (67.07%).

In the district wise distribution of literacy rate, the North district has 69.11% literacy rate comprising of 23,177 persons out of which 15,673 are females and 8,360 males.⁷¹ The total percent of literacy rate in the rural areas is 68.78% and the total percent of literacy rate in the urban areas is 79.41%. According to the 2001 census the east district has the highest literacy rate in the state with 75.57%, 72.89% in the rural area and 84.86% in the

⁷¹ North is the only district where female literacy rate is higher than the male literacy rate.

urban areas. The total number of literates are 1,62, 069, out of which 96255 are males and 65,814 females.

The literacy rate in the south district is 68.12%, comprising of a total 75,400 persons, out of which 43,251 are males and 32,149 are females. The rural area has 72,230 literate persons i.e. 67.43% of the total and 88.92% of the literates is in the urban areas. West district comprises of 61,326 literate persons, out of which 36,147 are males and 25,179 are females.

Table: 4

District wise Literacy Rate- 2001

		PERSONS	MALE	FEMALE	PERCENT
S I K K I M	TOTAL	3,22,828	1,91,326	1,31,500	69.68
	RURAL	2,76,877	1,64,919	1,11,958	67.07
	URBAN	45,951	26,407	19,544	84.82
N O R T H	TOTAL	24,033	8,360	15,673	69.11
	RURAL	23,177	8,059	15,118	68.78
	URBAN	856	301	555	79.41
E A S T	TOTAL	1,62,069	96,255	65,814	75.57
	RURAL	1,21,387	72,974	48,413	72.89
	URBAN	40,682	23,281	17,401	84.86
S O U T H	TOTAL	75,400	43,251	23,149	68.12
	RURAL	72,230	41,441	30,789	67.43
	URBAN	3,170	1,810	1,360	88.92
W E S T	TOTAL	61,326	36,147	25,179	59.31
	RURAL	60,083	35,386	24,697	59.02
	URBAN	1,243	761	482	77.98

Source: Census of India, Provisional 2001

In the East, West and South districts, the male population is higher than the female population. As per the distribution of literacy rate district wise in the state, the Bhutia community has the highest literacy rate with 67.90% followed by the Lepcha's with 65.67%. The literacy rate among the Scheduled Caste is 67.14% (Bhatt and Bhargawa, 2005).

Religion Wise Distribution of Population

The history of religion and socio-religious transformation in Sikkim moved with time and people. According to the 2001 census the believers of Hinduism were more than others with 68.37 % of population, Buddhism with 27.15% and Christians with 3.3%.⁷² The Hindus constitute a great majority in three districts except North. Buddhism is the religion followed by 60.20% of population in the North district. About 26% population in the East district are Buddhist. In the South and West districts more than 71% of the population are Hindus and more than 22% are Buddhist, the Christian's are sparsely distributed in all four districts of the state.⁷³ The Muslims, Sikhs and Jain's constitute a very low share in the population (Census of India, Provisional 2001)

Language

The three major languages spoken in the state are Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha. But due to the overwhelming presence of the Nepalese, Nepali language has become the lingua franca of the state. Officially English and Nepali are used for all purposes. The communities like Bhutia, Lepcha, Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Newari etc

⁷² The spread of Hinduism in Sikkim is traced back to the Gorkha invasion and the Gorkha rule in parts Sikkim for many years before the merger.

⁷³ Influence of Christianity in Sikkim has its background in the Treaty of Titaliya in 1817 A.D when Sikkim became British Protectorate through this treaty.

use their mother tongue as a means of communication within their own communities. For the preservation of the languages and scripts of the ethnic groups the state government have promised to take steps for its promotion.⁷⁴ At the college level languages like Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo were also introduced as an elective subject under the newly established Sikkim University.

Occupation

Sikkim being an agricultural land, agriculture and allied activities has been the mainstay of the majority of the Sikkimese people.⁷⁵ The economic activity of Sikkim is primarily mix-farming-agriculture, horticulture and livestock rearing. The mixed farming system of agriculture, horticulture and livestock rearing practices are common in Sikkim. The climate of Sikkim is favourable for growing a large number of high- value cash crops such as cardamom, seed potato, ginger, variety of fruits, off-season vegetables and numerous other horticultural crops (Subba, 2008).⁷⁶ The People are mainly depended upon government jobs as there is less employment opportunities in the private sector. Moreover, Sikkim being a non-industrial state, the establishment of industries is expensive as it has to important raw materials from outside the state, which is also a great reason for minimal employment and income generation.

⁷⁴ Raj, Tamang, Gurung scripts and languages had been introduced at the school levels as one of the core subjects.

⁷⁵ About 89% of the population of Sikkim is living in the rural areas (Census of India 2001).

⁷⁶ The cropping patterns of the state have undergone changes since the merger with India in 1975.

Land Holders and Agricultural Farmers

Despite the fact that Sikkim is a hilly and mountainous region, land has been central to the political economy of the state.⁷⁷ Agriculture contributes to nearly 50% of the State's income. Land distribution among the three ethnic groups- Lepchas, Bhutias, and Nepalese in the state is uneven. The Nepalese own more than 50% of the cultivable land, Bhutia's own the second largest and Lepchas the least. ⁷⁸

The total land holding in Sikkim is recorded as 99.36% which is divided into the three ethnic groups- Lepcha's, Bhutia's and the Nepalese. Out of this 58.66% is owned by Nepalese, 20.38% by Lepcha's and 30.32% by the Bhutia's.

Table 5

Ethnic distribution of land in Sikkim

Ethnic Group	Total Paddy Field	Total Dry Land	Waste Land	Cardamom (large)	Total Cultivated Land
Bhutia	27.12	16.13	24.18	27.05	20.32
Lepcha	14.97	-	17.53	32.72	20.38
Nepali	57.19	64.95	62.00	22.37	58.66
Total Public	99.28	99.56	99.60	82.15	99.36
Grand Total	11727.1	64739.8	11734.4	21761.7	109963.0

(Source: Sikkim, Human Development Report, 2001)

⁷⁷ Like other mountainous areas of the world, in Sikkim land is a scarce commodity. Out of total geographical area of 709,600 hectares (13.67%) of land is available for cultivation.

⁷⁸ According to Revenue order No. 1 of 1917, the land belonging to the two mainly Bhutia and Lepcha communities of the state have remained unaffected and un-alienated (Sikkim, Human Development Report, 2001, p.42)

Much of the land in Sikkim is distributed among the small and marginal farmers. The small and marginal farmers were 59.53% during 1976-77. It had increased to 68.71 in 1980-81, and 70.76 in 1990-91. This category were holding 21% of operational area in 1976-77 which increased to 28.20% in 1980-81, and again decreased to 28.00% in 1990-91 of the total operational area. The semi-medium, medium and large category farmers were 40.47% in 1976-77, it declined to 31.29 in 1980-81, and to 29.24% in 1990-91. They were holding 79% of the operational land in 1976-77, which declined to 71.80% in 1980-81 and 72% in 1990-91 of the total operational area (Subba, 2008, p.81).

Table: 6

Distribution of land holdings and area in % by size classes (1976-91)

Category	1976-1977				1980-1981				1990-1991			
	No %	%	Area %	%	No %	%	Area %	%	No %	%	Area %	%
Marginal	34.30	59.53	6.84	21.0	45.43	68.71	10.97	28.20	49.56	70.76	10.30	28.00
Small	25.23		14.17	79.0	23.27		17.23		21.19		17.70	
Semi-medium	23.92	40.47	26.44		19.44	31.29	27.97	71.80	17.19	29.24	23.68	72.00
Mediu	13.79		31.66		10.30		30.77		9.68		28.11	
Large	2.75		20.90		1.55		13.06		2.37		20.20	

Source: Agri. Census 1976-77, 1980-81, 1990-1991.

District wise, the East district has the largest number of holdings whereas the North district has the lowest. In terms of area, North district has 7.71 hectares, east has 1.70%, West 2.66% and south 2.28% hectares respectively (Lama, 1994, p. 137). The total numbers of cultivators in Sikkim is 95,078. The total number of

agricultural labourers constitutes 12851 in Sikkim, 12756 in the rural area and 95 in the urban area. The total number of cultivators and agricultural farmers in the west district constitutes the highest number with 33,676 cultivators. The north district has the lowest number of cultivators with 6,198 persons. The east district records 26027 cultivators and the south district 290177 cultivators.

East district has the highest number of agricultural labourers constituting 5,566 persons, followed by West with 3,171, South with 2,111 and North with 2003 (Government of Sikkim, Sikkim Human Development Report, 2001).

Table 7

Distribution of cultivators and Agricultural Farmers

SIKKIM	CULTIVATORS	AGRICULTURAL LABOUR
Total	95,078	12,851
Rural	95,039	12,756
Urban	39	95
NORTH-Total	6,198	2,003
Rural	6,193	1,992
Urban	5	11
CHUNGTHANG- Total	800	190
Rural	800	190
Urban	-	-
MANGAN- Total	5,398	1,813
Rural	5,393	1,802
Urban	5	11

EAST- Total	26,027	5,566
Rural	25,998	5,483
Urban	25	83
GANGTOK- Total	15,523	3,175
Rural	15,494	3,092
Urban	29	83

Source: Government of Sikkim, Sikkim Human Development Report, 2001

Voters

The total number of voters in the state as recorded is 2,55,377 voters, out of which 1,32,591 are male voters i.e. 48.8%. In 1979-1980 the total number of voters were 1,18,224 (64,616 male voters and 53,608 female voters). It increased to 2,62,445 in 1999-2000. In the State Assembly election, 1999, the total number of voters in east district was recorded the highest with 1,13,107 voters. In south district 57,588 voters were recorded, the west district recorded 66,278 voters and the north district with 18,404 voters respectively. The North district comprises of a total of 18,404 voters, where 9,061 (49.23%) are male voters and 9,343 (50.73%) female voters. East district has the total number of 1,13,107 voters where 33,612 are male and 32,666 female voters. South district has total 57,588 voters where 29,658 male and 27,930 female voters (Census of India, Provisional 2001).

Revenue Blocks

There are a total 453 revenue blocks in the state. Revenue block has been taken as the lowest enumeration block. Revenue block is

not a single agglomeration of habitation.⁷⁹ It consists of several hamlets, for census purpose the village (revenue block) has been the ultimate unit area in which the country is divided for the purpose of collection of land revenues in the state.

The revenue blocks in the state are divided into categories of different population ranging from- viz. (1) less than 200, (2) 200 - 499, (3) 500 - 999, (4) 1000 - 1999, (5) 2000 - 4999, (6) 5000 - 9999 and (7) 10,000 and above. In Sikkim no revenue block in any district or sub-division falls under the population range of 10,000 and above. Only three revenue blocks in Gangtok sub-division of East district fall under the category of 5000-9999 population. Majority of revenue blocks (160) are having population ranging from 500-999. A small proportion of population (1.26%) is living in revenue block falling in the population range of less than 200. The revenue block comprising the population range of 2000-4999 is occupied by the 20.71% of the total rural population and 5.08% of total rural population live in the revenue blocks in population range from 5000-9999.

Among the sub-divisions in the population range of less than 200, Soreng sub-division of West district has recorded the lowest percentage (0.53) where as Chungthang sub-division of North district recorded the highest proportion (5.47%). Out of a total 453 revenue blocks, 411 are the actual revenue blocks, 39 are forest blocks, 2 monasteries and one tea estate. The total number of inhabited revenue blocks is 447. The North district has total 53 revenue blocks, the East district has 130, South district has 144 and West district has 120 inhabited revenue blocks (Census of India, Sikkim, 1991, series 22, p. 100-125).

⁷⁹ In Sikkim revenue Block is the co-terminous of revenue village.

TABLE: 8

Number of inhabited revenue blocks in each census (1961-1991)

State/ district	1961	1971	1981	1991
Sikkim	460	215	440	447
North	45	21	51	53
East	155	68	126	130
South	260	66	144	144
West	-	60	119	120

Source: Census of India- series 22, Directorate of Census Operation, Sikkim, 1991, pp.100-101.

SECTION II

Support Base of the Party (SDF) in Damthang Constituency of South District

After having discussed certain general features on Sikkim let us now come to main section of the chapter where we look at the support base of the party. In this section we look at the support base of the party in Damthang Constituency of South District. It deals with the distribution of population, literacy rate, language, religion social category, income and occupation, cultivators and land holders, economic background, political participation and performance of the party in this constituency.

The survey was conducted in the month of April 2008 covering five out of nine panchayat blocks. The panchayat blocks include:

- 1) Maniram Singithang G.P -which covers villages like
 - a) Phalidara b) Phalipongdara.
- 2) Maniram Block –covering
 - a) Maniram and b) Bhanjyang Alley
- 3) Salleybung Block – covering
 - a) Upper Salleybung and b) Lower Salleybung
- 4) Singithang Block – covering Singithang
- 5) Boomtar Block which covers Lower Boomtar.

The section is further sub-divided into sub-sections which deal with the distribution of population caste/community wise in the constituency, occupation and income of the people, in terms of distribution of land of holders and cultivators, economic background, religion and language. The section further studies questions like why do the people support the party (SDF) and do not support other political parties. And whether the people are satisfied with the performance of the government under the Sikkim Democratic Front?

Caste/Community in Damthang Constituency

In terms of caste/community Damthang constituency consists of mainly Nepalese and some Scheduled Tribe's like Sherpa and Bhutia and Scheduled Castes. The Nepali community mostly belongs to the Most Backward Class (MBC) category. In Sikkim the Nepali's are divided into MBC (which includes Rai, Gurung, Thapa, Manger, Sunwar, and Bhujel). The Other Backward Classes (OBCs) includes Chettri, Bahun, Newar, Jogi and Sanyasi. General Class includes Marwaris, Biharis whose names are enrolled in the election voter list. The majority voters belong to Nepali

community, mostly Rai, Gurung, Manger and some scheduled tribe groups like Bhutia, Sherpa and Tamang. Among the surveyed population in this constituency out of a total 140 persons, 110 belonged to the MBC category, 15 belonged to Sherpas (ST) community, 10 belonged to the Bhutia category and the rest belonged to the OBC. The survey report shows that in Damthang constituency the majority belong to the MBC category.

Occupation and Income

As mentioned earlier South district falls under the rural area which means most of the people are agriculturalists. It is found that out of 100 persons 60 are agriculturalists/farmers cultivating paddy, maize, millets, pulses, cardamom, ginger and vegetables. The remaining 40 are government servants, private employees and landless labourers. The average income of the rural people ranges from 3000-10000 per month and those of employees begin from Rs 6000 per month and above. In this part of the state there are also people working on muster roll (temporary basis) with their monthly income (salary) ranging from Rs 3000 per month and above.⁸⁰

Out of a total 140 surveyed population 80 were found to be agricultural holders who cultivate or who are engaged in different agricultural activities and their income ranges from Rs 2000-8000 per month. Their income increases slightly during the production season. Around 25 persons surveyed were employees, in both government and private institutions whose income ranged from Rs 2500 and above. Around 2% of the population surveyed run small shops in the villages itself.

⁸⁰ The people working in muster roll are government servants but in temporary basis.

Land Holders and Cultivators

Being a rural area most of the people are land holders owning large, medium, semi medium and small land holdings. South district stands second among all four districts of the state in terms of total number of cultivators. There are a total 29,177 cultivators, 29,176 in the rural areas and one (1) in the urban area. Namchi had 18,484 cultivators and 1,325 agricultural labourers. It means that in this constituency marginal and small farmers form the bulk of the total land holdings. The food grains produced in this constituency are; wheat, maize, millet, pulses and vegetables. Among the cash crops ginger and large cardamom are produced here. Among the surveyed population 80 persons i.e., around 60% of the people surveyed are engaged in agriculture, they either own land or work as agricultural farmers.

Economic Background

The people in Damthang constituency are mostly rural people. Most of the houses are old type houses built up with tin sheets. Tin sheets are GCI sheets distributed by the government led by the SDF.⁸¹ The houses are mostly pucca houses. Few kutcha houses are seen in some remote areas. Some houses are built with the help of centrally sponsored scheme, Indira Housing Yojna Model houses (worth Rs 3 lakhs) were also found in some villages. These villages are called Model Villages. Model houses are a cemented brick house with tin roofs, built for the poor people who are homeless and landless. The people in this area use furniture made with woods and bamboo's which are common and simple. Pucca houses are also built mainly in Namchi and its surroundings which fall within semi-urban areas. To improve the standard of

⁸¹ The SDF government distributed the GCI sheets as the party had promised to give every people of Sikkim, Roti, Kapda and Makaan.

living of the people it is found out that the state government has distributed GCI sheets (tin roofs), gas cylinders, blankets, and pressure cookers, water tanks (Sintex), toilets, drinking water provision etc. The people in this part of the state wear simple clothes. In the survey conducted, the economic conditions of the people are comparatively lower than the economic condition of the people in Gangtok constituency as the people in this constituency mostly depend on agriculture.

Religion

Hinduism is the common religion of the people in this constituency. Approximately 75% people follow Hinduism, 15% Buddhism and remaining are Christian and others. For the propagation and practice of their faith temples are built in the village. Churches belonging to various groups of Christianity are built. The villages have Buddhist monasteries and mosques have been maintained for the conduct of Islam in the area. As per the survey conducted in this constituency, out of 100 persons, 75 people were Hindus, 15 were Buddhist, 7 were Christians and the remaining 3 belonged to others category.

Languages

Nepali is the common language spoken in Damthang constituency. Nepalese constitute around 75% of the population so Nepali is spoken by almost all the people and all communities. Other languages like Bhutia, Sherpa, Rai, Tamang, Limboo, and Lepcha are also spoken but it is spoken within only their communities and family members. The communities like Bhutia, Sherpa and Lepcha give more importance in preserving their language and script. Thus their own language is proudly spoken among their family members and their community. Since Nepali is the main language

spoken among the people in this area, it was found out that all the people belonging to different communities speak the language very clearly.

Organisation of the Party

In south district, Namchi which is the district headquarter also is the District Working Committee of the party. Under the District Working Committee, Constituency Level Committee is formed. The members of the Constituency Level Committee are nominated by the party president in consultation with the President of the District Working Committee. The party also has block level committees in each Gram Panchayat Unit. The party has well established party office in each Gram Panchayat. All the meetings of the Gram Panchayat's are held at the Gram Panchayat office and the party meetings are held in the Party office in each block. The party office is maintained with party flags, notice board, party calendar's and photograph of the party President.

Performance of the Party

The table below shows the performance of the SDF at the Damthang constituency in the Assembly Elections of 1994, 1999 and 2004. The political parties which contested the General election to Legislative Assembly in 1994 in this constituency were SDF and it could secure 70.27 % votes; Sikkim Sangram Parishad which secured 26.33 % of votes; National political parties like the Indian National Congress which secured only 2.45 % votes and Independent candidates secured 0.95 % votes. It shows that the party was able to secure the majority of votes though it was its first election in the state. In 1999 General Legislative Assembly Election only three political parties contested the election, viz. the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP)

and the Indian National Congress (INC), in which the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) won the election with 72.26 % of votes. In the year 2004, the election results of Damthang constituency was in favour of SDF as the election was uncontested in favour of Pawan Chamling. No political parties contested the election from this constituency.

TABLE: 9

Constituency: Damthang

ASSEMBLY ELECTION - 1994 - PERFORMANCE OF THE PARTY (SDF)

Name of the candidate	Political Party	Votes secured	Percent %
Pawan Chamling	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)	3904	70.27%
Kumar Subba	Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP)	1463	26.33%
Anand Lama	Indian National Congress	136	2.45%
Buddha Raj Rai	IND	53	0.95%

Source: Election Commission of India, State Elections, 1994.

TABLE: 10**ASSEMBLY ELECTION (1999) PERFORMANCE OF THE PARTY (SDF)**

Name of the candidate	Political Party	Votes secured	Percent %
Pawan Chamling	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)	4952	72.26 %
Kamal Kumar Rai	Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP)	1866	27.23 %
Hom Nath Rai	Indian National Congress	35	0.5 %

Electors -8425, Voters-6937, Poll %-82.34.

Source: Election Commission of India, State Elections, 1999

The 2009 election was held after the delimitation of the constituencies in 2009. The SDF won the election from this constituency. Pawan Kumar Chamling, the Party president won the election. The number of political parties contesting the election was six. The following table shows the total number of political parties participating in the Assembly election of 2009.

TABLE: 11**ASSEMBLY ELECTION (2009) PERFORMANCE OF THE PARTY (SDF)**

Name of the Candidate	Political Party
Pawan Chamling	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Anjana Tamang	NCP
Khush Bdr.Rai	Indian National Congress
Arjun Kumar Rai	SGPP
Basant Kr. Rai	SJEP
Sheela Rai	IND

Source: Election Commission of India, State Elections, 2009

Support Base of the Party

The question that arises is why do the people support the SDF? Are they satisfied with the performance of the government under the SDF? Why don't they support other political parties in the State? To answer this question it is essential to discuss the history of party competition in the constituency from 1994 onwards. The party after its formation in 1993 contested the Assembly election in 1994. The political parties that contested the election in the constituency was; Sikkim Democratic Front, Sikkim Sangram Parishad, Indian National Congress and several Independent candidates. The candidates contesting the election were Pawan Chamling from SDF, Kumar Subba from Sikkim Sangram Parishad, Anand Lama from Indian National Congress and Buddha Raj Rai as an independent candidate. The Sikkim Democratic Front won the election in the constituency securing 3904 votes which was 70.27 percent votes. Sikkim Sangram Parishad candidate secured a total of 1463 votes, the Indian National Congress candidate secured 163 votes and the independent candidate secured 63 votes.

Pawan Chamling was the party candidate contesting the election for the Sikkim Democratic Front for the next term election held in 1999. The other political parties contesting the election were Sikkim Sangram Parishad and Indian National Congress. Kamal Kumar Rai was the candidate from Sikkim Sangram Parishad and Hom Nath Rai from the Indian National Congress. The Sikkim Democratic Front candidate Pawan Chamling won the election with a total of 5492 number of votes which was 72.26 percent of the votes. The Sikkim Sangram Parishad candidate Kamal Kumar Rai secured 1866 votes and the Indian National Congress candidate secured only 35 votes. In this constituency in the Assembly election of 2004 not a single political parties

contested the election against the SDF. This left the room for the SDF candidate Pawan Chamling to be declared as uncontested winner.

Now let us look at the supporters of the party in the constituency. To answer the support base of the party in the constituency, the supporters can be categorised into three groups- Government Employees, rural people (layman) and businessmen/self employed.⁸² The government employees who are regular don't have indirect benefits and their support is for SDF. This section of people have benefitted indirectly as a member of the society. The total number of government employees surveyed was 40 in number, out of which 9 Government Employees were working on temporary basis. The employees who work on muster roll on a temporary basis have benefitted personally from the government. The government has helped these people by giving temporary jobs and by raising the daily wage from Rs 50 to Rs 100 per day. Moreover the families have benefitted with governmental schemes like distribution of grant in aid of Rs 20,000 to needy families, distribution of GCI sheets, gas cylinder, drinking water facilities, toilets etc. The Government Employees working on temporary basis supported the party as they directly benefitted from the government.

SDF being the only political party in the state which is permanent in nature and character, the party gets more support from the people than the support which the other political parties get in the state. The party promises the people to ensure the principles of liberty, equality and safeguard the rights of the Sikkimese people. The government under the SDF rule has carried

⁸² Among the government employees there are government employees who are regular government servant and employees working on Muster roll.

many developmental works in the state like transport and communication, roads and bridges, eco-tourism, educational infrastructure, public playgrounds, libraries, community halls etc. More importantly, it has been able to maintain peace, order and security in the state.

The support of the people of the constituency is mainly towards the party and less to its candidates. They support and vote for the candidate because he/she belongs to the party. The employees both regular government employees and those working on temporary basis support and are satisfied with the performance of the party. The people support the party as they feel that the government under the SDF has been able to fulfil the needs of the common people and provided the people with various provisions and benefits for the betterment of the people. The party has been able to maintain communal harmony and equality among the various castes and communities in the society. The government is stable and safeguards the rights and privileges of the Sikkimese people under (Act 371 (f)). The party gets the support of the Government employees as they are satisfied with the government on the exemption from Income Tax which the earlier government has implemented in the State.

Common people think that the government has been able to bring developmental changes in many sectors like education, industry, tourism, health and agriculture. For the improvement in the educational system large numbers of teachers were appointed in the government schools and many schools were upgraded. Health Centres and hospitals had been increased with facilities for diagnosis and treatment of chronic diseases. The government also encouraged the traditional medicinal treatment in the state. Above

all, the SDF government has articulated and represented regional identities and aspirations based on common language and culture.

Another category of population in this constituency is the farmers. The farmers are of three types: the big land holders who cultivate cash crops and other vegetables; the second type of farmers is the marginal and small land holders who also cultivate crops and vegetables but in small amount, and the third type of farmers are the landless farmers, these farmers work for the other land-holders and in return they get wages. We found that the big landholders and the marginal and small landholders who are the owners of the land and who cultivate various crops and vegetables have benefited from the agricultural schemes of the government. The government have provided them with facilities and infrastructures for promoting the growth of horticulture, by helping them with the market facilities and transport facilities for the sale of their products like orange, ginger, large cardamom, cereals and seasonal vegetables. The people are given facilities like market infrastructure, transport carriage distribution of variety of seeds and seedlings, pesticides, tools and equipments and also training to the farmers regarding the use of new technological equipments and tools. Floriculture and horticulture is encouraged for the creation of more employment opportunities in the state. The government has been able to provide unemployment loans to the unemployed youths to start their own business.

During the course of the survey it was found that the landless farmers, labourers and above all the rural people are satisfied with the performance of the government led by the SDF for many reasons. Large number of households in the villages still depends on the rivers and spring water. The government has made provision of safe drinking water, improvement of the

environment, sanitation and water tanks to each household those who hold Sikkim subjects. The common rural people are happy with the educational system in the state. The Government has provided educational facilities to all, access to schools within walking distance of each villages, improvement in school infrastructure, encouragement of education to the weaker sections of society, widening scope of vocational education, establishment of technical colleges, mid-day meals to the students up to the 5th standard, distribution of free uniforms, books and free tuition fees from primary level to class XII. The government has provided training in the engineering and professional areas like computer software and information technology, accountancy, chemistry, physics, medicine, business management, rural development and tourism, which has benefited the education pursuing students in Sikkim. In the constituency at least twenty students are sponsored by the government for the attainment of such trainings. The students are getting an opportunity to study in the specified fields. The government under the SDF has granted loans to the landless, granted one acre land to build the house (model house) and implemented the central schemes like Indira Housing Yojna, financial and medical assistance in case of severe treatment of diseases referred outside the state, GCI sheets, gas cylinder, water tanks etc. RCC cemented footpaths in all the villages have been constructed. All these schemes have given a better living to the rural people. Among the surveyed persons 4 have benefitted with the Indira Housing Yojna, 20 families were granted GCI sheets, 20 families were provided with Cylinder gas stove and 8 families were given water tanks.

The next category of people surveyed is the businessmen, government contractors, and the self employed people. Five businessmen were surveyed and they were of the view that SDF is

the only party in the state which can lead Sikkim to prosperity. The business groups are allowed to carry their business without any disturbances. The business group consists of mostly the Marwaris and the Biharis who have been residing in Sikkim since 1975. The party has also assured the business group to be exempted from paying the income tax.

The contractors are also satisfied with the government led by the SDF and hence support the party. For the proper distribution of the construction of works in the state, the government has made the provision of granting contracts to the contractors in their own districts and areas. The contractors are satisfied that they are getting opportunities to work in their own respective areas. One of the contractor responded that they have to pay a percentage of the amount as party fund and some share to the unemployed youth of the area, which he said is not a right way of raising the party fund.

Unemployment is one of the serious problems that people face in the state today. The SDF government to help and satisfy unemployed groups has made the provision of granting loans to begin their own business and be self employed and self-reliant and not to depend only on government jobs for their livelihood. Unemployment loans has been granted; Rs 50,000 to class xii Pass and Rs 1 lakh to the graduates and Master Degree holders. Three youths had received the loan from the government and has set up their own business. Boys are exempted with 2 years interest and there is an exemption of 3 years for girls. The government has made the provision for providing driving course for one month for boys, beauty parlour course of six months for girls and computer training and capacity building courses. In each

gram panchayat ward twenty five men and twenty five women has benefited from the above training courses.

Most of the people in Damthang constituency support the SDF as it is the only permanent regional party in the state. It means that the people do not support other political parties in the state. Political parties like the Congress (I) under the leadership of former Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari, Himali Rajya Parishad under the leadership of A. D Subba, National political parties like Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) are also active during the election time which means it is not popular among the people, especially among the rural masses. These political parties also lack the organisational structure like the SDF in the rural areas. People have trust and faith in the Sikkim Democratic Front which the other political parties lack in Sikkim. The leaders of these political parties are not favoured by the common people as they are visible only during the election time and come for campaigning for their party. The reason behind the success of SDF's retaining political power in Sikkim for the last fourteen years is most probably due to the fact that the party has been able to reach the rural people and has helped the poor and needy people in all aspects of life. Party meetings are held in different blocks where interactions between the public and the leaders take place more frequently. The common people can meet the Chief Minister once a week, i.e. every Wednesday. One of the respondents from Kamrang met the Chief Minister and was able to put forward his grievances to the CM.

As mentioned earlier, Damthang constituency comprises of people mostly belonging to the Most Backward Class (MBC). Generally it is found that in politics people prefer leader from their own caste and community. A farmer at Damthang told that he

supports the party because the leader belongs to MBC. So it can be said that the people support the party because of the fact that they belong to caste to which their leader belongs. It was also found that even though the leader belongs to MBC category, but people belonging to Scheduled caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward classes are also the supporters of the party as the party has not neglected to include these groups in its schemes and policies. The party has promised to include Tamang and Limboo in the Scheduled Tribe's list in the 1994 election which was fulfilled in 2003. Likewise, the other caste groups are also included in the category of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) like; Chettri, Bahun, Newar and Most Backward Class (MBC) like; Rai, Gurung, Manger, Bhujel, Thami. All these caste groups in Sikkim are put in the reserved category. The economic policy of re-orienting and restructuring the economic sector has been well implemented by the government. All these have contributed in the expansion of the support base of the party.