

CHAPTER I

SIKKIM DEMOCRATIC FRONT: ORIGINS AND ITS INITIAL SUCCESS

In the first chapter of the thesis we attempt to answer the question, what were the objective conditions that gave birth to the Sikkim Democratic Front (hereafter SDF) and what factors contributed to its initial success in Sikkim. We answer this question in three different sections in this chapter. In this chapter, section I looks in brief the political developments in Sikkim since its merger with the Indian Union in 1947 till 1994. In section II we deal with the emergence of Sikkim Sangram Parishad (hereafter SSP) as a regional political outfit in 1984 that continues to rule the state uninterruptedly. Section III analyse the conditions or factors that were responsible for the birth of the Sikkim Democratic Front as a regional political party and we also focus on the factors that contributed to its initial success.

SECTION I Political Developments in Sikkim (1947-1994)

Democracy as a new political system in Sikkim began its journey in the 1940's but the historians believe that real Democracy was experienced by the people only after 1975 when Sikkim became the 22nd state of the Indian Union on 16th May, 1975. But before we deal with the post merger period it is essential to look into the political developments in Sikkim in the pre-merger period. Sikkim

was ruled by the Namgyal dynasty for over 333 years.¹ Phensok Namgyal was coronated as the first Chogyal of Sikkim at Norbugang now called Yoksum, West Sikkim in 1642 A.D. Since then Sikkim came under the Namgyal dynasty and remained so till 1974. In the years Sikkim as a tiny Himalayan Kingdom had to face both external and internal uprisings. Externally, repeated invasion from Nepal (Gorkhas) in 1717 and by Bhutan in 1700 and 1718 was always a great threat to Sikkim.² For its protection, Sikkim approached the East India Company for assistance. The help came from a combined force of the Britisher's and the Sikkimese people. During the time of Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal in 1700-1706, Sikkim was invaded by Bhutan which was repulsed by the combined forces of Sikkimese Lepcha's, Bhutias, Limboo's and Nepalese.³

British showed interest in Sikkim as Sikkim is a border state between India, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and China. The Britisher's had to pass through Sikkim to carry out their trade and political activities in Tibet.⁴ On February 10th, 1817 Sikkim signed a treaty of Titaliya with the East India Company surrendering all her rights to deal with any foreign power and the right to free access to the British to the Tibet border. With this Sikkim became a de-facto protectorate in 1861 (Das, 1983, pp. 6-7).⁵ The ethnic composition of Sikkim also underwent a rapid change with the advent of the Britisher's in Sikkim.

¹ Before the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim, Sikkim was a vacant land inhabited by the primitive tribe—the Lepcha's.

² The first Bhutnese invasion of 1700 A.D occupied the entire area of Sikkim except Chumbi valley, Ilam and Limbuwan area of Greater Sikkim. Bhutan ruled Sikkim for eight years.

³ Disintegration of Sikkim started during the third Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal with the invasion of Bhutenese in 1700 and the process continued till it finally disintegrated into a constituent state of India in 1975.

⁴ The Britisher's saw Sikkim and Bhutan as possible gateways to Tibet but Sikkim was an easy access to them.

⁵ After signing the treaty of Titaliya, the British played a dominant role in Sikkim.

During Tashi Namgyal's period from 1914, the political history in Sikkim took a new turn. The Chogyal was under the influence of the Kazi's. Kazi's were the members of the Royal Parishad and they were also the Zamindar's. They often claimed that they were the members of the royal family and have every right to exploit, to tax and to adjudicate the cases of the king's subjects. In short they exploited the rural masses. The king was aware of these exploitations but no passive solutions were meted out. The exploitations took various forms like-Kalobhari, Jharlangi, Theki-Bethi and Kuruwa.

Kalobhari: the British sold arms and ammunitions to Tibet. To save it from terrain weather, rain and snow, it was wrapped in cardboards and put inside gunny bags coated with tar. The black colour gave the local name kalobhari or black load. Potters were fixed to carry this transport. For the potters the British depended upon the Kazi contractors. For the transport of each bag they paid 50 paisa but the Kazi contractors kept the whole amount for themselves. They did not pay the potters and forced them to carry the load through the difficult Tibetan terrain. This system of carrying on trade and transport was called Kalobhari.

Jharlangi: The Britisher's maintained the trade route to Tibet for which they depended upon the contractors for labourers and were paid, but the Kazi contractors used their peasants to work without paying their wages, this system of labour without wages is called Jharlangi system.

Theki-Bethi: In Sikkim, below the Zamindar's there was a class of people called Mandals or Karwari. Their function was to collect the rents of the Zamindar's. They too as middlemen exploited the masses. On festive occasions they were supposed to be welcomed by gifts. These gifts were packed in special receptacle called the

Theki, which contained meat, curd, bananas and other items. Along with theki, the peasants also offered the Mandals and Zamindar's their wage less labour. This wage less labour was called Bethi. There was no limit to the amount of time and labour and no special place for performing it.

Kuruwa: means a long wait. At times people sent to transport the kalobhari had to wait for several days for the arrival of the commodities. During such wait they survived on their own supplies, this process of long waiting is called Kuruwa.

The Zamindari System: From every house the Zamindar's collected Rupees 6/-, out of which Rupees 5/- was kept by him and Rupee 1/- was transferred to the government. Later, the Zamindar's collected taxes similarly from all the subjects of the king. The rent paid by the subjects was fixed according to the productive capacity of the land, for equally productive land the Nepalese peasants paid 14 annas and the Bhutia's 8 annas. ⁶

The Kazis used the system of kalobhari, kuruwa, theki-bethi and rents of the masses. They monopolised control over the agricultural land where the people simply worked. Many Sikkimese families left Sikkim and took refuge in Nepal, Assam, Darjeeling and Siliguri due to the ever increasing suppression of the Kazis. During those days the peasants were made to pay Rs 6/- as rent for their dwelling space (Dhurikhajana) and this amount was equal to the price of a set of oxen.

The suppression in Sikkim during that time reached the highest point. The masses rose against the suppression of the Kazis. The first underground movement began at Namthang

⁶ The Council meeting of 5th September 1898, it decided that those lands where Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalese were settled together, unequal rate of taxation was imposed (Subba, 2008,p,63)

followed by a secret meeting held in the forest of Tendong Hill, Damthang under the leadership of Dhan Bahadur Tewari and Gobardhan Pradhan of Temi Tarku. In 1947, villages of Temi Tarku opened a political party called Praja Sammelan. The party submitted a memorandum to the Maharaja requesting him to bring an end to the suppression of the Kazis. But there was no positive reaction on the part of the Maharaja. Another political party; Rajya Praja Mandal was formed at Chyakhung under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorjee, Birkhabahadur Gurung, Narbahadur Gurung, Maitabahadur Gurung, Narbir and Sangay Lama. Meantime another political party, The Praja Samaj Party was formed at Gangtok on 7th December 1947. These three political parties met at the polo ground, now Palzor stadium, Gangtok and decided to amalgamate their organisations and form a political party–The Sikkim State Congress (SSC), which was a much stronger force than the earlier ones. The main aim of the party was to end the autocratic rule of the monarch.

On December, 9th, 1947, the Sikkim State Congress as the only political party in Sikkim demanded the abolition of Zamindari system and also demanded the establishment of a responsible government and merger of Sikkim with India. On receiving this, the Chogyal assured them that the demand for the abolition of the Zamindari system will be met and land will be divided among the poor peasants. On the question of establishing a responsible government he agreed to take in his secretariat as advisors, the representative of Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali community. Chogyal however refused to accept the third demand put forward by the party on the issue of merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union.

On February 16th, 1949, the Sikkim State Congress launched "No Rent Campaign" to protest against the Chogyal of

Sikkim and the Zamindari system at its annual session held at Rangpo. The peasants would not pay their rents to the Zamindar's. This campaign was held against the Maharaja's proclamation to hold such meetings in any part of Sikkim. In this campaign Chandra Das Rai was arrested for violating the proclamation.

In 1950 abrogating all former treaties between India and Sikkim, a new agreement was signed between the Government of India and Sikkim, making Sikkim a protectorate of India. The Indian Government agreed to pay Rs 3 lakhs per annum to Sikkim as rent. The Indian government slowly took the administration of the state under its control. Political leaders like C.D Rai of State Congress Party opposed the agreement signed between the Government of India and Sikkim which made Sikkim a Protectorate of India.

During the reign of Chogyal Tashi Namgyal, Sikkim became politically weak because of several political problems within the state. During his reign Sikkim witnessed a rise in political consciousness among the people which led to the bloody revolution of 1973. In March 28, 1973 there was an uprising in Gangtok when people raised anti-Chogyal slogans and riots broke out. Several demands were raised by the political parties and demanded in unison a written constitutional system of one-man one vote, reforms in the electoral process, land reforms and changes in the administration. The revolutionaries took over the Government Administration and in such a situation the king had to seek help from the Indian Government. On April 9, 1973, B.S. Das formally took over the administration of the state as the representative of the Government of India. Peace was established in Sikkim when a Tripartite Agreement was signed between the political parties of Sikkim, the Chogyal and the Foreign Secretary of India. As per the

terms of the agreement responsible government was to be established, fundamental rights and freedom of the people was to be guaranteed and in every four years elections were to be held in Sikkim. This agreement took away all the powers of the Chogyal.

The first historic election in Sikkim was held in April 1974. The Sikkim Congress swept the poll and Kazi Lendup Dorjee emerged as the first Chief Minister and the undisputed leader of Sikkim. The table that follows shows the party position in the Assembly Election of 1974 excluding the Sangha seat.

Table 1

Seats won by Political Parties in the Assembly election of 1974

Serial No.	Name of the party	Number of seats
1	Sikkim Congress	30
2	Sikkim National Party	01
3	Independent	01(Supported by State Congress)

Source: Sikkim Herald, Vol.15.no.3, April 14, 1974.

On May 16th, 1975, the three hundred and thirty three year old monarchy came to an end as Sikkim was merged with the Indian Union and it became the 22nd state of India.⁷ May 16, 1975 also marked the fulfilment of a quarter century long struggle of the people of Sikkim. Sikkim acquired the status of full democracy by joining the political, economic and social mainstream of the Indian Union by giving up the three hundred year old feudal traditional Monarchical systems. The tricolour flag replaced the erstwhile

⁷ The integration of Sikkim with the Indian Union in 1975 gave the status of a Special Category State of India, with the provision of providing 90% of plan funds as grant and 10% as loan.

Chogyal regime and B.B. Lal took the office of the first Governor of Sikkim (Sikkim Herald, Aug 15, 1975).⁸

With the establishment of democracy several political parties emerged in Sikkim's political scenario. There was a great difference in the role and performance of the political parties in the process of democratization and economic development before and after 1975. Out of all the parties, the Sikkim State Congress became the most popular party amongst the Sikkimese. The party stood for the democratic rights of the people with popular government and accession of Sikkim to India. It was for the first time in the history of Sikkim, the people of Sikkim voted in 1974. Among the National Political Parties, the Indian National Congress contested the election.⁹ In the Assembly Election of 1974, the lone Sikkim National party representative also joined the Congress party.

Following Sikkim's merger with India, Kazi Lhendup Dorjee Khangsarpa was sworn in as the first Chief Minister of Sikkim. The new government in 1974-75 depended upon the Central government funds to bring rapid socio-economic development in various sectors of the newly born state. There was some visible progress in the state but not to the extent it should have been. During Kazi's government Anti-Corruption branch was set up in Gangtok and Frontier Railway Passenger Out Agency was opened at Sikkim Nationalised Transport Office, Gangtok on September 1, 1975. Foundation stone of Temi Tea Factory in south Sikkim was laid down by L. D Kazi on December 21, 1975 and Governor B.B

⁸ The integration of Sikkim with the Indian Union brought tremendous development in socio-economic and literary fields. But this could not satisfy the high expectation of the people.

⁹The Indian National Congress is the oldest political party which has been functioning in Sikkim since its merger with the political party of L.D Kazi's Sikkim Congress in 1974. Since then it has been functioning as a state Unit of the party.

Lal inaugurated Gangtok Water Treatment Plant at Selep, East Sikkim. Gangtok–Chungthang Bus Service, Divisional Telegraph Office at Gangtok, Industrial Training Institute at Rangpo, Tashiling Secretariat and Kendriya Vidyalaya at Deorali were established during the Kazi's rule. The languages like Lepcha, Bhitia and Nepali were recognised as the official languages of Sikkim in 1977.¹⁰ (Information and Public Relations, Govt. of Sikkim, 2000).

But soon after the merger, large inputs of aid and implementation of new schemes within a short period of time created several ethnic, political and economic problems which the new government failed to handle. The local bureaucracy was inadequate and weak to handle the situation. Kazi had fought against feudalism and corruption for over two decades but when he finally succeeded and came to power he failed to satisfy the aspirations of the people. Moreover there was a split in the ruling party –Sikkim State Congress in 1977. Nar Bahadur Khatiwada along with three sitting M.L.As left the party and formed a temporary party called Provisional Unit for Congress for Democracy in 1977. Later in the same year this party was transformed into a new regional political party–Sikkim Prajatantra Congress under Nar Bahadur Khatiwada.

In October 1979, election to the Sikkim Legislative Assembly was held. This was the first elections in Sikkim under the direction of the Election Commission of India and Indian election rules. Altogether seven political parties and Independent candidates contested the election. National parties such as Indian National Congress, Janata Party, the CPI (M), several Regional Parties, Viz; Sikkim Janata Parishad, Sikkim Congress

¹⁰ During the Namgyal dynasty (1642 – 1974) Tibetan was the official language of the country (Subba,2008,p.69).

(Revolutionary), Sikkim Prajantantra Congress, Sikkim Scheduled caste League and other independents contested the election (Lama, 2003, p.100). In the election, the total number of voters were 1,17,157 and the total number of votes cast was 76,299 votes; i.e. 65.13%.

The election was won by the Sikkim Janata Parishad. Sikkim Janata Parishad was formed in 1977 by Nar Bahadur Bhandari.¹¹ Democracy and Socialism were its main objectives. The party brought into limelight the drawbacks of the Kazi government. The party promised three important things:

- Establish real democracy in Sikkim,
- Undertake all-out development of the state,
- Curb corruption (Election Manifesto, Sikkim Janata Parishad, 1977)

The results of the election gave Sikkim politics a new turn. The following table shows the position of the political parties in 1979.

TABLE: 2
STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 1979

Sl. No.	Name of Party	No. If candidates contested	No. Of seats won	% of votes secured
1	Sikkim Prajatantra Congress	32	04	15.76
2	Janata Party	30	nil	13.18
3	Sikkim Janata Parishad	31	16	31.49
4	Sikkim Congress (R)	27	11	20.58

¹¹ Before forming Sikkim Janata Parishad in 1977, Nar Bahadur Bhandari was arrested under Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) during L.D. Kazi's government and was kept in Behrampur Jail from 1976-1977.

5	Indian National Congress	12	nil	2.04
6	CPI [M]	02	nil	0.33
7	Sikkim Schedule Caste League	02	nil	0.12
8	Independents	108	01	16.50

Source: Statistical Report, Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election, 1979, Election Commission of India.

Sikkim Janata Parishad under Nar Bahadur Bhandari formed the government in 1979 with new hopes and aspirations. Before the party could complete its first term of office, the government was dismissed by the Governor in May 11, 1984 under Article 164 (1) of the Constitution of India. Bhandari was levelled with corruption charges by 13 legislators of his party including his four cabinet ministers and expressed their lack of confidence in him (Sikkim Government, Gazette, No. 58, 11-5-84).

B. B. Gurung, the Finance Minister in the Bhandari cabinet became the third Chief Minister of Sikkim but the government could survive for just 13 days.¹² As a result of the failure of the constitutional machinery, Sikkim was brought under presidential rule by the Centre once again. In the meantime, Bhandari formed a new political party, Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) and returned back to power on March 11th, 1985 ending 10 months of Presidents rule securing 30 out of 32 seats. Political parties like the Congress (I), Janata Party, and the CPI, CPI (M) and two regional parties viz SSP and Sikkim Prajatantrik Congress and some unregistered party contested the elections. For contesting the Assembly election of 1985, R.C. Paudyal's Rising Sun Party made

¹² B.B Gurung worked under L.D Kazi's Sikkim National Congress in 1972 and was elected in 1974 Assembly election of Sikkim.

an alliance with the National Front and the Left Front. It was for the first time that national political parties like the Indian National Congress, Communist party of India, Communist party of India (Marxist) participated in Sikkim's Lok Sabha Election in 1991. The Assembly election went in favour of the SSP which won 30 out of the 32 seats in the state.

TABLE: 3

The following table shows the party positions in the Assembly of 1985.

Sl. No.	Political Parties	No. of Candidates	No. of elected	No. of votes	%
1	Communist Party of India	2	0	25	0.03
2	Communist Party of India [M]	1	0	336	0.35
3	Indian National Congress	32	1	23440	24.15
4	Janata Party	20	0	913	0.94
5	Sikkim Prajatantrik Congress	14	0	438	0.45
6	Sikkim Sangram Parishad	32	30	60371	62.20
7	Independents	94	1	11534	11.88
	Total	195	32	97057	

Source: Statistical Report, Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election, 1985, Election Commission of India.

The party (SSP) was able to mobilise the people easily as there was no other political party which could be an opposition to the SSP. There was the domination of a single party in the state. This proved to be an advantage to the party in the next state Legislative Assembly and the 9th Lok Sabha election of 1989. Political parties like the Indian National Congress, Rising Sun Party, Denzong Peoples Chogpa (DCP) an unrecognised party and

20 independent candidates contested the election. The election results went in favour of the SSP which won all the 32 seats and the lone Lok Sabha seat from the state.

TABLE: 4

Assembly Election 1989

Sl. No	Political party	No. of Candidates	No. of elected	Votes polled	Votes polled in %
1	Indian National Congress	31	0	24121	18.05
2	Rising Sun Party	31	0	11472	8.59
3	Sikkim Sangram Parishad	32	32	94078	70.41
4	Denzong Peoples Chogpa (unrecognised)	4	0	298	0.22
5	Independent	20	0	3650	2.73

Source: Statistical Report, Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election, 1989, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

However, Bhandari and his party (SSP) which ruled Sikkim for eleven years soon started facing many problems and challenges from within and also outside the party. Corruption charges were levelled against him by the C.B.I., there were also charges of anti-party activities by the S.P.C.C. (I) and there were dissident activities within the party and all this led to the formation of factions in the ruling party.¹³ Bhandari lost vote of confidence in May 1994 in Sikkim Legislative Assembly and resigned from the government. Sanchaman Limboo became the next Chief Minister of Sikkim on 18th May, 1994. His ministry lasted for only six months when the general election was declared to be scheduled in

¹³ According to press reports, the 32 SSP MLA's were divided into three major groups: the first one was led by Bhandari himself with 12 members, the second was led by Pawan Chamling who had the support of 12 members and the third was led by N.Chamla Tshering who had the support of 8 members.

December 1994. He remained the caretaker Chief Minister from September 1994 to 11th December 1994.¹⁴

In such a situation, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), a new regional political party under Pawan Chamling was formed on March 4th, 1993; with the aim of establishing real democracy and safeguarding the right and interest of the Sikkimese people.

SECTION II

Emergence of the Sikkim Sangram Parishad

In this section we deal with the emergence of the SSP as a regional political party and its rule in Sikkim. Sikkim Sangram Parishad was formed by Nar Bahadur Bhandari in 1984 with a promise to protect and preserve the interests and rights of the Sikkimese people and to work for communal harmony, national integration, secularism and the development of Sikkim with a focus on 'safeguarding freedom and democracy'. The party (SSP) contested the Sikkim Legislative elections of 1985 mainly on the following issues:

- Restoration of seat reservation: To restore and preserve, and maintain reserved seats for Sikkimese Nepalese as originally contained before the merger under article 371 F (f) of the Constitution of India.
- Citizenship: The Party promised the grant of Citizenship to those people whose names were not included in the electoral roll of 1979 General Assembly election in Sikkim. The party promised to declare the cut off year to 1970 and grant

¹⁴ During the rule of Sanchaman Limboo, the central Act of OBC was enforced in Sikkim.

30,000 people citizenship those were left out from the list of electoral roll. (Sengupta, 1985).

- A son of the soil policy: To preserve local identity, to give all government jobs and trade licence to the Sikkimese people only.
- Constitutional recognition: Constitutional recognition to Nepalese language in the VIII schedule of the Indian constitution. Nepali language is commonly spoken by the majority of the people in Sikkim.
- To alter centre-state relations: For demanding more financial and political freedom for the states of the Indian Union and to extend support for constitutional amendment to materialize the concept that the state government should continue in power at the pleasure of the Governor (SSP, Election Manifesto, 1984).

After its formation, the Bhandari government had brought reforms in the socio-economic condition of the Sikkimese people. During his tenure many changes took place in Sikkim in all the fields. Developmental activities took a new shape. Various incentives and infrastructural developments were carried on under the SSP government. Secretariats of District and various State Govt. Departments, Rural Electrification Scheme at Singyang-Singdrang village in West Sikkim, RDD complex at Jorethang, State Bank of Sikkim at Pakyong and Soreng, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Bridge at Melli, Akar Bridge at Jorethang were built during the Bhandari Government.

The government followed policies for the development of the society. It promised to safeguard the freedom and democratic rights of the people. It promised to improve the living standard of

the people through poverty alleviation programmes, through improvement in agriculture, by providing educational facilities, health care, social welfare schemes, safe drinking water facilities, rural electrification and rural housing schemes (Sikkim Herald, Jan. 21, Vol-27, No-2, 1984).

To improve the educational system in the state the government promised free education, upgrade existing schools and mid day meals for the children up to class V. Pre-matric and post-matric scholarships to ST and SC candidates were to be provided. In the health sector it promised to increase the number of hospitals, primary health centres, sub-centres, and free medical facilities. The government also promised the establishment of Old age Homes, Disabled and Destitute Homes in the state. Roads and bridges were to be constructed to give people easy and fast access to communication. It promised housing loans at highly subsidised rates and promised to impart training for capacity building and promised skill development programmes to the unemployed people (Sikkim Herald, Jan. 19, 1985).

The party also promised to look into matters like development in communication (roads and bridges), health care, education, agriculture and solving the unemployment problems by creating different facilities in different sections. The party focused its attention on the agricultural sector as well. It also gave much attention to the grassroots (Sharma, 1999, p.279).

During the course of its rule, the government under the SSP made attempts to fulfil the promises which it has laid down in its party manifesto issued during the elections. The main achievement of the government was the recognition of the Nepali language as one of the national languages in the Eighth Schedule of the

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Constitution in 1992.¹⁵ An attempt was also made for reservation of seats for the Nepalese, but no solutions could be reached. Some improvements in the agriculture sector were made in the period from 1985-1990. Tools and fertilizers were provided which resulted in the increase in food grains production like rice, wheat, maize and other products. Similarly by the end of the year 1991, 22 hospitals and 37 primary health centres were established in different villages. Free education up to college level was provided. The number of schools in the state went up to 1286. The government invested 27,00 Crore rupees in the field of education. Scholarships were provided to the students studying outside the state. Literacy rate was increased from 17.74 percent in 1971 to 34.05 percent in 1981 and 56.94 percent in 1991 (Sikkim Pragati Paathira, Gangtok, 24th May, 1990).

TABLE: 5

LITERACY RATE IN SIKKIM 1971-1991

YEAR	Literacy rate in %
1971	17.74
1981	34.05
1991	56.94

Source: Census of India, 1991

¹⁵ Limboo language was recognised as one of the official language of Sikkim in 1983.

Table: 6**COMPARATIVE FIGURE OF NUMBER OF LITERATES IN THE FOUR DISTRICTS OF THE STATE**

		Persons	Male	Female	Total %	Male %	Female %
SIKKIM	TOTAL	188940	117226	71714	56.94	56.94	46.76
	RURAL	163092	101430	61662	44.4	51.94	35.4
	URBAN	25848	15796	10052	69.85	74.69	63.4
NORTH	TOTAL	13255	8690	4565	42.43	50.85	32.26
	RURAL	12738	8336	4400	41.85	50.27	31.76
	URBAN	517	352	165	64.38	69.29	55.93
EAST	TOTAL	96279	58672	37607	53.95	61.13	45.6
	RURAL	73802	45028	28774	50.35	57.83	41.87
	URBAN	22477	13644	8833	70.52	75.28	64.25
SOUTH	TOTAL	43254	26923	16331	43.87	51.67	35.12
	RURAL	41473	25813	15660	43.19	34.46	43.19
	URBAN	1781	1110	671	68.50	63.42	68.50
WEST	TOTAL	36152	22941	13211	36.82	44.77	28.16
	RURAL	35079	22251	12828	36.39	44.29	27.79
	URBAN	1073	690	383	60.90	68.93	50.33

Source: SIKKIM STATISTICAL PROFILE 1991-1992.

The SSP swept the assembly elections for three consecutive terms. Several political parties existed and functioned but these parties were engaged in solving their own problems instead of standing as a strong opposition to the ruling party. There were defections and dissidents in the political parties. National Political

parties like the CPI and the Congress (I), tried to establish their hold in Sikkim and took an active part in the elections. Political parties like the Rising Sun Party under R. C. Poudyal formed an alliance with the National Front and the Left Front. Bharat Basnett contested the election as the candidate of Indian National Congress. For the first time in 1991, the CPI (M), a National political party entered the electoral fray in the Lok Sabha elections in Sikkim. The poll was won by SSP candidate D.K Bhandari with 103970 votes. Nearest to SSP was the Independent candidate Sri Phur Tshering Lepcha with 3759 votes and the CPI (M) candidate Duknath Nepal with 3372 votes. Out of a total of 201704 electorates, 118502 voted in the poll with 115373 valid votes and 3129 votes were rejected. It is clear from the election results that not only in the Legislative Assembly election but also in the Lok Sabha Elections the regional political parties have become dominant and prominent in the state.

SSP was successful in maintaining its strong hold from 1984-1989 as it was the only regional political party in the state which represented the people of all sections of society. But after his victory in 1989 Bhandari became quite different than what he was earlier. He was more powerful and confident and somewhat authoritative and autocratic. He wanted complete submission to his authority and did not tolerate any kind of dissension and criticism from both within and outside the party. The right to Press was curtailed, there were assaults, threats and constant pressure on press and the media and there was use of force and commandos to suppress the opposition in the state.¹⁶ In June 1993, the leaders of the Opposition Political Parties like Biraj

¹⁶ In October, 1994, Amnesty International Report entitled "India" and sub-titled "Sikkim: Torture of an opposition politician" highlighted the details on how Bhandari government tortured political leaders in the state.

Adhikari was illegally detained and tortured. According to newspaper report of Sikkim Express, dated November, 3, 1990, Hem Lall Bhandari, Convener, Citizens for Democracy, was physically assaulted by a group of persons allegedly belonging to the ruling party. In October 12, 1991 the state unit of the Congress (I) alleged that the judiciary in the state is thoroughly corrupt and functions under the dictates of the Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari. The party unit presented a memorandum to Human Resource Development Minister, Arjun Singh during his visit to Sikkim. A. K Subba, President of the SPCC (I) said that justice is being denied to the people as the judiciary is completely dominated by the government. The Bhandari government ruled Sikkim in an undemocratic manner due to the fact that in Sikkim there was an absence of strong and effective opposition.

One of the main reasons for a setback to Bhandari government was that it failed to implement the recommendation of the Mandal Commission to include various communities like Rai, Bhujel, Manger, Gurung etc. in the list of Other Backward Classes. Pawan Chamling, one of his cabinet colleagues strongly opposed Bhandari on the OBC issue. He blamed Bhandari for not taking interest in implementing the OBC system in Sikkim. Objecting the move made by the ruling government regarding the implementation of Mandal Commission Report, Pro- Mandal Commission Body headed by Chandra Das Rai was formed. The body opposed as it feels that the government rejected the report as Newars, Bahuns and Chettri were excluded from the list (Sikkim Observer, Oct, 13, Vol. V, No. 12, 1990). Despite the fact that the SSP ruled the state and certain progress was made, certain developments and achievements in the state fractions erupted in the party. The Bhandari government was levelled with corruption charges. The decision to register criminal cases against Bhandari came during a

meeting held in the former Chief Minister B. B. Gurung's residence on May 19th, 1984 (Gaunley, 2002). Many cases against Bhandari were registered. Several corruption cases against Bhandari were registered in February, 1986. For example, the case relating to contract of water supply in rural areas was registered. In this Bhandari gave the contract to his party men and not to the people at the lowest level. The second corruption case was against the construction of houses in Gangtok and Ranipool, East Sikkim.

The Denzong Sherpa Association was dissatisfied with the state government regarding the transfer of land belonging to the Sherpa's in the state. Association President Passang Sherpa said that the Sherpa's were declared Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1978 but they do not enjoy the same privileges enjoyed by the Bhutia-Lepcha Tribal's regarding transfer of land. Besides this, the Sherpa's are also feeling aggrieved over non-representation of their community in the state Legislative Assembly even though 12 of the 32 seats in the Assembly are reserved for the tribal's. The Association challenged the Sikkim Transfer of land (Regulation) Bill, 1989, stating that the provisions of the Bill is inconsistent with the 1978 Scheduled Tribes Order. (Sikkim Observer, Oct, 8, 1990. The Bhandari government was accused by the state unit of Congress (I) of inflicting communal tensions and dividing the Sikkimese people on ethnic lines. James Basnet, Member of Sikkim Pradesh Congress Special Committee (I), "the SSP government is spreading communal and casteism trend among a handful of Sikkimese people who had lived for ages.

In the press release in April 13, 1991, the Congress(I) which was a strong opposition to the ruling SSP in the state demanded the resignation of the CM, Nar Bahadur Bhandari as the ruling

party failed to maintain law and order in the state. A Joint Action Committee was formed by the leader of all the opposition political parties against SSP rule in Sikkim. Considering the complete failure of constitutional machinery in the state and because of the series of repressive measures adopted by the SSP government, the leaders of the opposition political parties unanimously constituted the Joint Action committee (JAC) in June 1993, consisting of several political parties and organizations functioning in the state for the restoration of democracy, preservation of the constitution and for rule of law. The parties and organisations were the following:

- Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), a registered and recognized opposition party.
- Congress (I)
- Communist party of India (Marxist)
- Citizens for democracy, Sikkim
- A Human rights organisation in Sikkim. (Gaunley, 2002, p. 423)

The JAC mobilised public opinion and tried to seek the support of the people and democratic organizations for the realisation of the following demands:

- Unconditional release of all the opposition leaders and workers of the aforesaid parties and withdrawal of illegal warrants issued by the government against the prominent leaders.

- The Joint Action Committee demanded the immediate withdrawal of political leaders and persecution of the leaders of the opposition political parties and other organisations.
- Restoration of democracy and the preservation of the Constitution and the rule of law.
- Imposition of President's rule in Sikkim by invoking article 356 of the Constitution.

The Joint Action Committee resolved to launch a peaceful movement for the realization of these demands both inside and outside Sikkim. The Committee issued a press release in June, 1993 and declared that the government led by the SSP has been ruling Sikkim in an undemocratic manner for the past thirteen years. It has persistently denied the political and democratic rights of the people and suppressed the voice of all opposition parties in the state and also the mass media (Gaunley, 2002).

JAC appealed to all the democratic organisations and associations in Sikkim to join hands with the JAC and cooperate in the struggle for the restoration of democracy in Sikkim. Describing the N. B. Bhandari's ministry as a "Dictatorial Regime" the party leaders said the people had been denied the rights to form trade unions, hold public meetings and rallies to express their resentment over the misrule (Gopal, 2002, p. 425).

Pawan Chamling, a cabinet minister strongly opposed Bhandari in the Assembly mainly on the OBC issue and the mal-administration of the state. On 16 July, 1992, Chamling was dismissed from the cabinet. The political climate dramatically changed in Sikkim with the dismissal of Chamling from the cabinet as well as from the party. For the first time in many years an alternative to Bhandari was seen. Chamling was seen as a man of

good rapport with the masses and was able to capture the imagination of the people and make the right moves. He was a man able to become a leader in his own making.

SECTION III

The Initial Success of the Sikkim Democratic Front

In this section we analyse the origin and growth of the SDF as a regional political party. The section also looks at its initial success in the state after its formation.

In 1993, as we have stated earlier a new political turmoil took place in Sikkim. Pawan Chamling was dismissed from the party and the cabinet. Chamling was a Minister in the Bhandari Government.¹⁷ He was dismissed on the ground that he opposed the ruling government for its misgovernment and anti-people activity in the state. Meanwhile the opposition groups in the state charged the government with many corruption cases, anti-democratic and anti-people activities in the state. Dismissal from the (SSP) was a blessing in disguise for Chamling. In a conversation with the party workers Chamling said that he wanted to be free from the ruling party (Bali,2003).

After his dismissal, Chamling travelled to different parts of the state and met people from different walks of life. After meeting the people, he claimed that the people felt that there was a need for a new leader and new party which would be an alternative to Bhandari. He further felt that it was the people those who wanted

¹⁷ Pawan Chamling was a Minister for Industries, Printing and Information and Public Relations under Bhandari led SSP Government.

a new leader who would drive Sikkim into a new progressive dimension. With the aim of establishing democratic principles, Pawan Chamling formed a new political party- "SIKKIM DEMOCRATIC FRONT" on March 4th, 1993, with the following aims and objectives. These objectives were spelt out in the constitution of the party

The party declares that the SDF is a political party within the meaning and provisions of the Representation of People's (Amendment) Act, 1988 and states that the aims and objectives of the party shall be as follows:

- a) SDF shall bear true faith and allegiance to the sacred constitution of India as by law established and to the principles of Socialism and Democracy and shall uphold the Sovereignty, Unity and Integrity of the Indian Union.
- b) It shall fight to uphold the political, social and economic rights and privileges of the Indian constitution.
- c) It shall strive hard for the uplift of the socially and economically backward sections of the people of Sikkim.
- d) Sikkim Democratic Front shall ceaselessly work to promote peace, progress and communal harmony among the people of Sikkim and shall make utmost endeavour to promote fraternity tolerance and harmony with all other communities of our country.
- e) The party is committed to give equal opportunity to all Sikkimese people and shall ceaselessly work for the emancipation and uplift of Sikkimese women and other sections of the oppressed people.

- f) The party shall be ever ready to fight against all forces that threaten to disrupt the unity and integrity of the nation.
- g) While giving due recognition to the principle of human dignity, this party shall pledge to fight against all kinds of injustice and inequality perpetrated on the ground of caste, creed, religion and gender.
- h) The party shall specially not yield back from working for the interest and welfare of the backward and depressed communities, constitutional rights of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes and security and prosperity of the entire Sikkimese people.
- i) The party is committed to uphold, preserve and promote the age old traditions, customs and rich cultural heritage of different ethnic communities of the state who have been living in perfect communal harmony down the ages.
- j) The party holds enduring faith in the "Son of Sikkim" policy and sincerely safeguard the interest of the Sikkimese people.
- k) SDF shall tirelessly wage a struggle against poverty, illiteracy and internal backwardness in the state and work justly for the poor and depressed people of Sikkim.
- l) The party is predetermined to bring upon improvement in the existing situation in Sikkim and will resort to all possible means to raise the average condition of Sikkimese of all levels so as to make them educationally, socially and above all, economically self-reliant and self-sufficient (SDF, Constitution, 13 May, 1993).

The Sikkim Democratic Front born on March 4th, 1993, aimed mainly at changing the social and political life of Sikkim. Its main

objective was to fight against the anti-people policies pursued by the SSP government and replace it by a pro-poor policy and programmes (Bali, 2003). The first priority in Chamling's political agenda was to restore the lost identity of the Sikkimese people and the economic and political development of the OBC's in Sikkim. The party was committed to restoring and strengthening the principles of democracy in the state. It also committed itself towards eradicating poverty in all forms. It also promised decentralisation and also promised for safeguarding the economic interest and well being of the deprived sections. Freedom of the press was also a promise of the new party. The party promised to safeguard the cultural, social and constitutional law of the Sikkimese people (Bali, 2003).

For the peaceful co-existence and friendly relations with the centre, the party promised to promote national and emotional integration of the Sikkimese people. The issue of women empowerment was raised for the first time which gave due honour and dignity to the women. With the pro-democracy and pro-poor policy of the party, it started getting support from all parts of the state. In the Party Literature, Part I, Sikkim Democratic Front, 1993 it mentioned the need for party education and the worker to understand that the party is a new form of party which enjoined upon its workers to be active and develop a sound moral character (Bali, 2003).

After its formation on the 1st of May, 1993, the party celebrated the Labour Day at Maniram Bhanjyang, South Sikkim. The party promised to stand for labourer's right, welfare and safeguard of the working people because these working people earned their living by labour. It was able to hold public meetings in different parts of Sikkim. The first public meeting was held at Jorethang, a

gateway to south and west Sikkim in April 18, 1993. Despite the ruling party's effort to stop the SDF meeting large number of people attended the meeting. Subsequently public meetings were held at Rabongla, Soreng and Rhenock in the three districts of the state.

The party formed several frontal organisations and Committees within the party for its functioning. The party (SDF) formed and had the following committees:

- All Sikkim Democratic Front Committee.
- Central Working Committee.
- District Committees.
- Constituency Level Committees.
- Block Level Committees.

To the party, the All Sikkim Democratic Front Committees shall have sixteen hundred members including the members of Central Working Committee. As per the Constitution the committee shall meet at least once a year and such meetings will be convened, conducted and presided over by the party President. The meeting can also bring necessary amendment or improvement in its policies as per the need of the changing time. It is compulsory that all concerned members should attend the meeting. The party President may call for an emergency meeting of the committee.

The Constitution provides for that there shall be 1600 members of the All Sikkim Democratic Front Committee including the President, Vice President, General Secretary, Office Bearers, and 50 members each from different constituency besides Office Bearers of the Central Working Committee.

The Central Working Committee is constituted of the following office bearers:

i. President	01
ii. Vice President	08
iii. General Secretary	10
iv. Joint Secretary	10
v. Publicity Secretary	05
vi. Treasurer	01
vii. Asst. Treasurer	01
viii. 2 Representatives from each district	08
ix. Executive members	14
Total	58

The central Working Committee consists of the representatives from among the members of All Sikkim Democratic Front Committees. The committee is headed by the party president who has the special power to nominate members for the Central Working Committee. All the meetings of the Central Working Committee shall be convened and presided over by the President and in his absence by the Vice-President (Party Constitution, Sikkim Democratic Front, 1993, p.6). The committee shall meet at least once in three months and the President may call for an emergency meeting under special circumstances by giving 24 hour notice to each members. The Central Working Committee takes the decision to hold the party convention and makes all necessary arrangements.

The Central Working Committee has some important powers and functions. The following are its powers and functions:

- The committee has the responsibility of formulating all policies of the party and accomplishment of its aim and objectives.
- The committee, by following the party policies, can make necessary amendments and changes to the prevalent customary rules and regulations.
- The committee shall prepare the annual report of Sikkim Democratic Front and present it for the approval of the front committees.
- The committee shall have the responsibility of conducting day-to-day affairs of the party and smooth functioning and maintaining discipline within the party.

District Working Committee: As per the Constitution each district of the state shall have the District Working Committee with the following office bearers:

One (1) District President

Two (2) District Vice Presidents

One (1) District General Secretary

One (1) District Joint Secretary

One (1) District Publicity Secretary

One (1) District Treasurer

Twenty-five (25) District Executive members

The District President is appointed by the party President. The other office bearers are appointed by the President of the party in consultation with the Central Working Committee and District

President. The District Working Committee holds office for a period of three years and the party President shall have the power to dissolve the committee before its term.

The District Working Committee has the following powers and functions. It is stated that:

- The committee shall look after the working and organisation of party within the district.
- With the consultation of the Central Working Committee, the District Committee shall constitute the Block Level Committee in all the districts of the state.
- It shall prepare and safely keep the district level documents of the party.
- The committee will follow the orders and advice of the Central Working Committee and the Constituency level Committee.
- It shall submit applications for the party membership to the president for its approval.
- It shall renew the party membership in consultation with the Central Working Committee and collect annual membership fee by issuing proper receipts.
- The District Working Committee shall meet once in every two months. It is compulsory for one-third members to attend the meeting.

The party also has Constituency Level Committee. The Constitution of the party (SDF) 1993 lay down that the party shall have Constituency Level Committees. The president shall be appointed by the president of the party in consultation with the respective

district Presidents. The total number of members will be based on the number of Block Level Committees in the constituency. The lowest Level of committee is the Block Level Committee. The constitution lay down that all the rural areas in Sikkim shall have Block Level Committee with the following office bearers:

- i) One President
- ii) Two vice-President
- iii) Two Secretary
- iv) Four Joint Secretaries
- v) One Treasurer
- vi) Twenty executive members.

These office bearers are appointed with the consultation of the Central Working Committee; District Working Committee is given the power to constitute Block Level Committee with the consent of the Central Working Committee for the term of two years.

The Sikkim Democratic Front has frontal organisations which are directly under the control of the party President. These are Women Wing, Youth Front, Labour Front, Students Front, Cultivators Front, Schedule Tribe Welfare Front, Ex-Service Front and Schedule Caste Welfare Front. The party was able to make a direct contact with the people through these fronts. The Constitution of the party lay down that these frontal organisations will serve to represent the Sikkimese people who live below the poverty line. The power and functions of all these frontal organisations are determined by the Central Working Committee from time to time. The President of the party has the power to dissolve any frontal organisation to safeguard the interest of the party (Party Constitution, SDF, 1993, pp.19-20).

The inspiring leadership of Pawan Chamling who claimed that his principal objective was to develop Sikkim and uplift the poor, deprived and the disadvantaged section of the society was the main factor behind the party's initial success in Sikkim. SDF came to power in December 1994 after receiving an overwhelming support from the people who had laid their complete faith on the new party. The party established frontal organisations like women wing, youth wing, schedule tribe fronts etc. which helped the party in conducting party meetings in different parts of the state and more precisely these organs helped in the election campaigning's during the Assembly elections in the state.

The earlier government had deprived the rights of some sections of the society. The communities like Rai, Mangar, Gurung, Bhujel etc, were not included in the OBC list as per the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. SDF promised in its election manifesto that it would safeguard the rights of the people and include these groups in the OBC list. The new party was successful in convincing the people that the party will strive to uplift socially and economically backward sections of the society.

As an opposition leader, Chamling was successful in exposing the failures and weaknesses of the ruling party and its leaders. With Chamling's opposition in between 1992-1994, the Assembly was a forum of debate. He said that, 'Till today Bhandari spoke and the Sikkimese people listened. Now it is the time that Sikkimese people spoke and Bhandari listened' (Bali, 2003, p.125). He relentlessly worked towards educating and training the people to stand, speak and safeguard their freedom and democracy. These included training the people for participation in the democratic system and make the people conscious of their democratic rights and duties.

Chamling became the first politician in the state to coin the slogan "Janta ko Raj ma Jantai Raja". The slogan gave the people the feeling of empowerment. He was successful in getting massive support to stand against the ruling government. In its first election manifesto of the Assembly election of 1994, the SDF promised to safeguard the democratic rights of the people and promised to give political, social and economic justice to the people. The party claimed that in Sikkim freedom of press and media was under the control of the Bhandari government so the party promised to restore the constitutional rights of the press and restore back the freedom of speech and Rule of Law.

The party in its initial stage was successful in conducting party meetings in all the four districts of the state. After its formation the first party meeting was held at Jorethang in 1993. Then party meetings were held at Rabongla in the South district, Soreng in the west district and Rhenock in the east district. The party was able to establish strong party offices in all the four districts of the state. The party formed Committees at the district level, constituency level and at block level in the four districts of the state. Right from the beginning the party could maintain frontal organisations like Youth wing, Women's wing of the party which helped in convincing the people and enabling party policies and messages reach the rural people in the state. The committees paved the way for greater participation of the people at all levels from district to the rural level. The Committee system was absent in the organisation and functioning of other political parties in Sikkim.

The Bhandari government was charged with various corruption cases by the C.B.I and the government was challenged by the opposition political parties for its anti- democratic and anti-

people activities in the state. The Joint Action Committee (JAC) was formed in June 1993 under the leadership of SDF. The JAC mobilised public opinion and tried to seek the support of the people to end the long and undemocratic rule of Nar Bahadur Bhandari in Sikkim. The SDF promised to replace the anti-people policies of SSP with its Pro- people policy and programmes. And with this despite the fact that the party (SDF) was only one and half year old, it could win support of the people which helped it in capturing 19 seats out of a total 32 seats in the Assembly election of 1994.

After its formation the party for the first time participated in the Assembly elections of 1994 in the state. There were six political parties that competed. Among the national political parties it was the BJP, Congress (I), and CPM and the regional political parties like Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) and the newly formed registered (unrecognised) party, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) contested the election.

As per the report BJP contested 3 seats but won none, CPM contested 2 seats and also won no seats, Congress (I) contested 31 seats and secured only 2 seats from Dzongu constituency in north district and the Sangha seat. Among the regional parties, RSP contested 11 seats and won no seats, SSP contested 31 seats and secured 10 seats from Tashiding constituency and Soreng constituency in west district and Rakdong Tentek in north district and the rest seven constituencies from east district. These constituencies are Rehnock, Pathing, Martam, Rumtek, Assam-Lingjey, Ranka and Gangtok constituencies. There were 76 independent candidates who contested the election, out of which only one from Yoksum constituency in west district won the

election. Except for three seats won by Congress (I) and Independent, and two seats in west district by SSP, all the remaining constituencies in west district and all south district was won by the SDF. The SDF won from two constituencies in north district namely; Lachen- Mangshila and Kabi Tintek and won from three constituencies in the east district; Central Pendam- East Pendam, Regu, Loosing Pachekhani and Khamdong constituencies. Thus, it is clear that the newly born political party-SDF won the elections and formed the government in December, 1994.

The following table shows the performance of the party in the election of 1994.

Table: 7

Assembly Election 1994

Political Party	No. of Candidates	No. Of Elected	No. of Votes secured	% of votes secured
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	03	00	274	0.16
Communist Party of India (CPI) M	02	00	270	0.16
Indian National Congress	31	02	26045	15.02
Revolutionary Socialist party	11	00	2906	1.68
Sikkim Democratic Front	32	19	72856	42.00
Sikkim Sangram Parishad	31	10	60851	35.08
Independents	76	01	10255	5.91
Total	186	32	173457	

Source: Statistical Report, Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election, 1994, Election Commission of India.