

**CHAPTER – 4**  
**STATE PARTY DOMINANCE:**  
**CASE OF SIKKIM SANGRAM**  
**PARISHAD**

## **State Party Dominance: Case of Sikkim Sangram Parishad**

### **1. Merger of Sikkim Janata Parishad**

Immediately after the assumption of office on 18/10/1979, Bhandari found Sikkim politically, economically and socially backward. There was no planning process for rapid development of Sikkim and there was no communal harmony. His government first took steps to meet the basic needs of the general public and refurbished the entire administrative set up in accordance with the change needed (*Nar Bahadur Bhandari, 2011*).

The Parliamentary election took place in Sikkim on the 3rd January, 1980. It was the first such election in Sikkim. In 1977 there was no election, since the candidate was returned uncontested. The bye-election to Sikkim Legislative Assembly (SLA) for Khamdong and Chakung was also held along with Sikkim Parliamentary constituency election in 1980. (*Sengupta N. , State Government and Politics:Sikkim. , 1985, p. 113*) Sikkim Janata Parishad won all the seats and at the centre, Congress (I) returned to power with overwhelming majority. (*ECI, Statistical Report on the Elections to the Lok Sabha, 1980*)

Politics in Sikkim assumed an interesting shape after the change in leadership at the centre. All the major political parties were in the rat race over the issue of getting recognition of the Congress (I). Whereas the opposition parties- SPC, a section of SCR as well as Janata Party wanted to join hands and come to power by getting support of Congress(I). The ruling party, SJP wanted Centre's

recognition to secure its power position and ultimately it was recognized by the Central leadership in July 1981. Thus shedding its 'separate identity of State Party' the SJP merged itself with the Congress (I) (*Sengupta N. , State Government and Politics: Sikkim. , 1985, pp. 181-183*) Bhandari thus became the second Congress (I) Chief Minister of Sikkim despite the fact that he was against the Congress at the time of merger. Bhandari held that since merger of Sikkim was fait accompli, in order to achieve demands and development in Sikkim, his party had to compromise with the Congress at the centre and took a bold decision to merge on 14/07/1981 and became the state unit of Congress (I). (*Nar Bahadur Bhandari, 2011*) But the fact is that the local ruling parties in the smaller states are vulnerable to such absorption due to the pressure exerted by the centre.

## **2. The Arbitrary Dismissal**

In the midst of this growing healthy political signs in Sikkim under the leadership of N.B. Bhandari there occurred the most unfortunate and undemocratic dismissal of Bhandari as Chief Minister of Sikkim in May 11, 1984 by the then Governor of Sikkim H.J. Taleyarkhan supposedly under article 164 (1) of the Constitution stating that Bhandari ceases to command his pleasure. (*Chakaravarti, 1994*) It was the most unexpected and surprising move taken by the then Governor. The very event once again changed the political scenario in Sikkim.

In his press statement of 11<sup>th</sup> May 1984, Bhandari stated that the tussle between him and the Centre was already brewing for quite some time regarding Bhandari's three demands: seat reservation for Nepalese in the Assembly, grant of citizenship to "stateless persons" and recognition of Nepalese language. (*Bhandari, 1984*) His confrontation with the Centre reached its peak and surfaced during

his party Convention at Karfectar, Jorethang, and south Sikkim where he openly challenged the Centre to yield to his three demands and invited Centre to take immediate action against him which compelled Centre to do so.

It is said that on 10<sup>th</sup> May, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, P. Venkatasubbaiah and the State Governor asked him to give up his demands on reservation of seats for Nepalese in the Assembly and grant of citizenship to “stateless persons” or else resign. When Bhandari did not compromise with his demands, he was dismissed with no reason. (*Bhandari, 1984*)

Some seasoned politicians hold that Bhandari’s dismissal was because of his continuous defiance against the norms and directives of the party high command. By this time Bhandari was said to have become autocratic in his functioning and dealings with his colleagues and corruption had reached a new height. As such centre was looking for an opportunity to arm twist Bhandari and clip his wings, the Karfectar Convention served the purpose. (*B.B. Gurung, 2011*) (*C.D.Rai, 2012*) The Centre justified its stand thus: “Bhandari was removed as a majority of the State Legislators had lost confidence in him against whom several corruption charges had been leveled.” (*Kazi, Sikkim for Sikkimese Distinct Identity within the Union , 2009, pp. 63-64*) He was asked to step down from chief minister ship and when he refused, he was dismissed by the Governor. (*Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 145*)

The dismissal of Bhandari government did not evoke any resentment from the people or the political leaders. The opposition parties in the state welcomed the exit of Bhandari Government. It is said that Bhandari himself wanted to be dismissed rather than resign. His open confrontation with the Centre was viewed as his ploy of winning back the support and sympathy of the people to

come back to power in the next election as he had lost credibility among his colleagues and people by this time. Rift within the party was already created regarding the issue of merger of SJP with Congress (I) in 1980. The rift was further widened because of Bhandari's arrogance and autocratic style of functioning. He had no hope with the minority Bhutia-Lepcha electorate too after he failed miserably on his slogan, "bring back Sikkim" and "Sikkim for Sikkimese". Therefore, he was banking on majority Nepalese by appealing to their sentiments. There were other factors like corruption charge against him and uncertainty of victory of national party like Congress (I) in the coming Assembly elections. (*B.B. Gurung, 2011*), (*C.D.Rai, 2012*) Hence, it is assumed that this dramatic exit was most desired and welcomed by Bhandari.

Although Bhandari by then had lost the respect and support he enjoyed before the merger of SJP with the National Party, Congress (I), people cannot ignore Bhandari's struggle and sacrifice in the pre-merger era. He had to suffer a lot and was beaten almost to death for his pro-Sikkim, anti-merger stand. Bhandari gained sympathies from the people for his arbitrary dismissal. His dismissal was; therefore, regarded unprecedented and undemocratic in the annals of constitutional democracy.

### **3. 13 Days Wonder**

After the unfortunate dismissal of Bhandari on May 11, 1984 the same Governor under the same provision of the Constitution of India appointed Mr. B.B. Gurung from Congress (I) who had defected into the ruling party from the Congress (R) and who was the Finance Minister in the Bhandari Cabinet as the Chief Minister of Sikkim on the same day. Thus, B.B. Gurung assumed the office as the Third Chief Minister of Sikkim. (*Chakaravarti, 1994, p. 102*) Gurung stated

that he became the Chief Minister by an accident as no body could dare say no to the party High Command then. *(B.B. Gurung, 2011)*

After coming to power, Gurung stated that his Government would continue to fight for the just demands of the people, but stated that his approach with the centre in dealing with various problems of the state would be of “co-operation and consultation and not confrontation”. *(Kazi, Sikkim for Sikkimese Distinct Identity within the Union , 2009, p. 76)*

But Bhandari was not a silent spectator. He started to mobilize his supporters and threatened to quit the Congress (I). It was alleged that Mr. Bhandari was spending huge amount of money to win over some of the MLAs to destabilize B.B.Gurung’s Ministry. Unfortunately, due to constant changes of loyalty and unpredictable moves by the MLAs, 17 MLAs defected from the ruling Congress Party. *(Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 145)* This made a situation in which the Government of the State could not be carried on in accordance with provisions of the Constitution. As a result, Assembly was dissolved on 25<sup>th</sup> May. Gurung’s Government hardly survived for a fortnight owing to lack of support and instability. Due to the failure of the constitutional machinery, the then Governor of Sikkim recommended for imposition of President’s Rule in the State under Article 356 of the Constitution of India on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1984 till the next State Legislative Assembly elections which were held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1985. *(B.B. Gurung, 2011), (Chakaravarti, 1994)*

#### **4. The Birth of Sikkim Sangram Parishad**

Bhandari’s dismissal from the chief minister ship acted as a mid-wife for the birth of new state political party. No sooner Bhandari was dismissed; he left Congress (I) in disgust along with his majority of legislators. The toppling of duly elected government was not only considered undemocratic and unconstitutional by

Bhandari, but considers it as 'the closure of Congress' political career in Sikkim.' (*Nar Bahadur Bhandari, 2011*) After this event, the need for the regional party was strongly felt. In an interview with Bhandari, he stated that small state like Sikkim get submerged in the ocean and as such their existence in such ocean becomes insignificant. The central government will be more interested promoting the interest of the bigger states with larger number of MPs. Sikkim suffered the same fate of a smaller state. But sections of people were convinced that the local interest and the local sentiments could best be promoted under a strong regional party government. As a result, Bhandari came out with a new state political outfit called SSP with his own red and white flag and an elephant as its election symbol in 1984 (*Nar Bahadur Bhandari, 2011*)

### **5. Aims and Objectives of the Sikkim Sangram Parishad**

According to the constitution of SSP, the party pledged to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India as by Law established and to the principles of Socialism and Secularism and Democracy and would uphold the Sovereignty, Unity and Integrity of India. It believed in de-centralization of administration through the Institution of Panchayati Raj and adhered to the Gandhian philosophy. The Party was committed to fight against all anti national activities to uphold the Constitution of India. It was also committed to fight against any policy of Exploitation, Suppression and Oppression and always endeavor to preserve unity and national integration of the country. It sought to endeavor for peace, progress and communal harmony and give priority to the preservation and promotion of backward communities and particularly the ethnic scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It believed in equality of opportunity to all and fight against all forms of discrimination on grounds of caste, creed, gender and religion. It sought to foster unity,

friendship and harmony amongst all sections of the people in Sikkim and sought to give priority to the welfare of youth, women and children. It also sought to preserve, protect and promote the age-old customs, traditions and the cultural heritage of the people of Sikkim and preserve Sikkimese identity and pursued the 'son of the soil' policy.

## **6. Organization of the Sikkim Sangram Parishad**

The SSP had two types of membership – Primary and Active membership. Primary membership was given to persons who were above the age of 18 having firm belief and faith in policies, aims and objects of the Parishad and who was not a member of any political party and think of interest of the organization above anything else. Persons fulfilling those above qualifications were considered eligible for Primary Membership of the party and had to fill up the membership form and pay Rs1/- minimum as annual membership fee. Membership had to be renewed every year failing of which his membership was automatically terminated. Active Membership was given to primary members who must have remained primary member of the Parishad at least for two years and must have been actively involved in the implementation of the policies and programmes of the SSP. Such persons had to fill up Active Membership form and pay an annual membership fee of Rs.125/- which had to be renewed every year. But the President of SSP had the power to grant Active Membership to any primary member who may not have fulfilled above conditions.

The SSP had the following Committees:

- a) The All Sikkim Sangram Parishad Committee (ASSPC)
- b) The Central Working Committee (CWC)
- c) The District Working Committee (DWC)
- d) The Working Committee at Panchayat Level.(WCPL)

The All Sikkim Sangram Parishad Committee consisted of all the office bearers and members of the CWC, the District Working Committee and all the Party MLAs and MPs. The strength of this Committee should not have exceeded more than 151 members. The Committee elected the President for three years term. It met once in a year at a time decided upon by the President. The meeting could have been called by the President at short notice if he so desired to discuss some very important and urgent matters. The meeting of the Committee could also have been requisitioned by one third of its members by sending a signed one month's notice to the President. The Committee deliberated on many important issues included in the agenda for discussion by the CWC. Members could ask for inclusion of any item in the agenda by sending a request to the General Secretary of the CWC at least fifteen days in advance from the date of the meeting. All decisions of the committee were taken either unanimously or by majority opinions of the members present and voting.

The CWC of the SSP was a high power body consisted of one President, one Vice President, Four General Secretaries, two Publicity Secretaries, one Treasurer and four Joint Secretaries. Beside these, one Office Secretary and all Party MLA's and MP's were the members of the Committee. The strength of the committee should not have exceeded forty-five members. The CWC deliberated on all the matters and take decisions regarding the activities of the SSP. It met at least once in two months. Decisions of the Committee was either unanimous or by majority opinion of the members present. The Committee kept in touch with District and Panchayat Committees of the Sangram Parishad and guided them in all their activities. The quorum was one third of the total membership of the Committee.

The President of the Party was placed at the top of the Committee. He presided over all the meetings of the All SSP

Committee and the CWC. He appointed the Vice President, the General Secretaries, the Treasurer, the Joint Secretaries and the Publicity Secretaries of the CWC. He appointed the Presidents of the DWC and the Committee at Panchayat level. He also had the power to remove any office bearer and suspend or remove any member from the party. He called the meeting of the All SSP Committee once in a year and the meeting of the CWC at least once in two months or any time he found necessary. The President had the power to constitute any committee for any specific purpose; he guided and directed all the activities of the SSP and nominated persons to fill up the vacancy in the All Sikkim Sangram Parishad/CWC.

The President could submit his resignation on grounds of ill health or voluntarily without assigning any reason. He had to resign if 2/3 majority of members of the SSP adopts a motion of no confidence against him at a special meeting convened for the purpose. He had to submit his resignation to the Vice President. The President was automatically removed if he/she was mentally unsound, he/she was declared insolvent by a Court of Law and if he/she was convicted for murder. In the event of death, resignation or removal of the President, the Vice President acted as the interim President for a period not more than forty days and within this period, a special meeting of the All SSP had to be held to elect a new President.

Under the supervision of CWC was DWC. It consisted of President, Vice President, 2 General Secretaries, 1 Treasurer, 2 Joint Secretaries, 1 Publicity Secretary and 14 other members. The President at the District level was appointed by the President of SSP. The Committee met at least once in two months. It deliberated on all matters and take decision regarding the activities of the SSP in its district. Decisions of the Committee was either unanimous or by majority opinion of the member present. The decision of the

Committee received the approval of the President of the SSP before implementation. The quorum was half of the total membership of the Committee. The Committee had to be in constant touch with the head office of the SSP and the Panchayat Committees of the Organization. It had to guide the Panchayat Committee in their activities. The term of the Working Committee was for three years. Under DWC was the Panchayat level Working Committee. It had the same functions like District Level Working Committee at the village level and was smaller than DWC in terms of membership.

There was a Parliamentary Board for the selection of candidates for elections or by-elections to the State Assembly and Parliament. The meeting of the Board was presided over by the President. The President nominated 4 members in the Board. In case of any difference of opinion about the selection of candidate or candidates, the decision of the President was final. There was Youth Wing and Women's Wing to harness the enthusiasm of the Youth and Women for the welfare of the people of Sikkim. These Wings discharged such functions as were assigned by the President. They functioned Constituency-wise and Panchayat-wise under the direction of the President. The President nominated 4 representatives each from the Youth Wing and the Women's Wings in the All Sikkim Sangram Committee. There was a legal cell to look after legal matters pertaining to the Party. There was a Secretary who was in charge of the Legal Cell. There was also a Disciplinary Committee to look into anti-party activities by any member of the Organization. The Committee consisted of not more than 5 members. The Committee gave show cause notice to any member including in anti-party activities to explain in writing within 15 days. If no explanation came his membership was terminated in consultation with the President. The President of the SSP could also take disciplinary action on his own against any member including in anti-party activities.

There was no place for any rival /splinter group in the SSP. The ASSP and the CWC was considered relevant organs/bodies by the Election Commission for the determination of the relative strength of the rival splinter groups of the party in the event of a dispute or split taking place in the party. The ASSP had to decide on the merger of the organization with another party in its session to be specifically called for this very purpose. One month's notice was given to all members by the Head Office Secretary about the agenda of the session. The decision regarding merger was taken by 2/3 majority of the members present and voting. The Constitution of the SSP had to be amended if any amendment moved at a special meeting called for the specific purpose was adopted by 2/3 majority of members present and voting. To move any amendment one month's notice had to be given in writing by one third of the members of the ASSP. Notice for the amendment had to be addressed to the President of the SSP. (*The Constitution of Sikkim Sangram Parishad, 1984*)

The newly founded SSP contested both December 1984 Lok Sabha election and March 1985 Sikkim Assembly election with a new manifesto. (*Nar Bahadur Bhandari, 2011*) In the opening line of its election manifesto it stated, "The SSP was born at a time when the whole fabric of democratic institutions and constitutional norms was endangered following the undemocratic and illegal dismissal of Nar Bahadur Bhandari's Government in May, 1984." (*Election manifesto of SSP for Lok Sabha Election, 1984*) It contested the 1984-85 elections on the following five main issues.

- i. Restore parity and maintain reserved seats for Sikkimese Nepalese as originally contained before merger and under article 371 F (f) of the Constitution of India.
- ii. Citizenship for people rendered stateless in Sikkim and to fix the cut off year at 1970.

- iii. A son of the soil safeguard: to preserve local identity to give all government jobs and trade license to the Sikkim people.
- iv. Constitutional recognition to Nepali language under VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
- v. To alter Centre-State Relations: for demanding more financial and political freedom for the States of the Indian Union.

Moreover, the SSP with a promise to protect and preserve the interests and rights of Sikkimese pledged itself to foster communal harmony, national integration, secularism and development of Sikkim with a focus on safeguarding the edifice of the hard won freedom and democracy. (*Election manifesto of SSP for Lok Sabha Election, 1984*)

### **7. Ticket to Dominance: The 1985 Election**

In the one day poll of March 1985, four national political parties such as Congress-I, Janata Party, CPI, CPI(M) and two regional parties viz., SSP and SPC, an unregistered political party in poll alliance with Himali Congress and the Gorkha League and a number of independent candidates contested the election. Congress -I had 32 candidates, JP -20, CPI-2, CPI (M)-1, SSP-32, SPC -14 and there were 94 Independents. All together there were 195 candidates in the fray. In the most prestigious Gangtok Constituency, 12 candidates including Smt. Dil Kumari Bhandari (SSP) who was the first lady of Sikkim were fighting election. Besides there were three former Chief Ministers, 14 ex-ministers, an ex-IPS officer, an ex-Chairman of Gangtok Municipal Corporation, 2 ex-Secretaries of Government of Sikkim and 10 Women candidates who contested from various constituencies. (*Chakaravarti, 1994, p. 104*)

As compared to 1979 and other previous elections, the 1985 elections demonstrated sophistication in campaigning and a distinct political maturity of both the people and political parties. The SSP led

by the former Chief Minister N.B. Bhandari swept the polls by winning 30 out of 32 seats. He was the only former Chief Minister to win this fiercely contested election. All the ten women candidates, an ex-IPS, two ex-Secretaries and eight ex-ministers had to bite the dust. (*Chakaravarti, 1994, p. 104*) There were 1, 55,041 numbers of electors but only 99435 numbers of electors voted in the election. The number of valid votes were 97057 and 2378 (2.39% of total votes polled) number of votes were rejected.

**Table: 3 Electors and Their Votes in the Assembly Election, 1985**

No. of electors	No. of electors who voted	No. of valid votes	No. of votes rejected
155041	99435	97057	2378

(*Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim, 1985*)

Out of these votes, SSP bagged 60371 votes which constituted 62.20% of the total votes polled. It helped SSP to sweep 30 out of 32 seats in the Assembly election leaving its rivals far behind. The performance of political parties which contested in the 1985 elections is given below:

**Table 4: Party Performance in the Assembly Election, 1985**

Party	No. of candidates	No of candidates elected	No. of votes	%
CPI	2	0	25	0.03%
CPI(M)	1	0	336	0.35%
INC	32	1	23440	24.15%
Janata Party	20	0	913	0.94%
SPC	14	0	438	0.45%
SSP	32	30	60371	62.20%
Independents	94	1	11534	11.88%
Total	195	32	97057	

(*Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim, 1985*)

A noteworthy feature of the election of 1985 in Sikkim was the victory of a plainsman Balchand Sarda (ex-Chairman of Gangtok Municipality) from the prestigious Gangtok constituency. The voters in the constituency were equally divided among the Nepalese, tribals and the plainsmen. There was also some humiliation and embarrassment for Bhandari, who claimed himself to be the undisputed leader of the people of Sikkim. Sarda an influential businessman from the Marwari community in Gangtok, fought as an independent candidate and defeated the SSP candidate Smt. Dil Kumari Bhandari, a first lady of Sikkim and one of the strong architects of Bhandari's SSP. This was the first time that the member from a community, other than the three basic ethnic groups (Bhutia, Lepcha, Nepali) had been elected to the State Legislative Assembly. (*Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 155*) There were 8 males and 4 females candidates who contested from Gangtok Constituency. The number of electors were 9321 (3605 females and 5716 males) but the electors who voted dropped to 4727 which was only 50.71% of total electors.

Out of 4727 votes polled from Gangtok Constituency, 4656 were valid votes and 71 votes (1.50% of total votes polled) were rejected. The independent candidate Balchand Sarda was able to secure 2010 votes while SSP candidate Mrs. Dil Kumari Bhandari secured second position by winning 1749 votes. Hence Balchand won the prestigious Gangtok constituency by the slender margin of 261 votes which was 5.61% of total valid votes.

**Table 5: Votes Polled in Gangtok Constituency in the Assembly Election, 1985**

Constituency- 31 Gangtok	
Number of candidates	12
Number of electors	9321
Number of electors who voted	4727
Number of valid votes	4656
Number of votes rejected	71
Number of votes secured by independents	2010
Number of votes secured by SSP	1749
Margin	261

*(Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim, 1985)*

The Congress (I) which toppled the Bhandari Government in May 1984 suffered a humiliating defeat with just one candidate, Kalzang Gyatso returning from Kabi-Tinda, Scheduled Tribe Constituency of north Sikkim. There were 6 male and 1 female candidates and 3644 electors. Of those electors, 2408 electors voted in the election but only 2263 votes were valid and 145 votes (6.02% of total votes polled) were rejected. Congress (I) secured 1102 votes leaving behind its primary contender SSP by 339 votes (14.98% of Total valid Votes)

**Table 6: Votes Polled in Kabi Tingda Constituency in the Assembly Election, 1985**

Constituency-25 Kabi -Tingda	
Number of candidates	7
Number of electors	3644
Number of electors who voted	2408
Number of valid votes	2263
Number of votes rejected	145
Number of votes secured by Congress(I)	1102
Number of votes secured by SSP	763
Margin	399

*(Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim, 1985)*

Except these two constituencies SSP won all the seats. Bhandari for the second time assumed office as fourth Chief Minister of Sikkim with his 11 members' cabinet team. There were many factors why Bhandari's newly formed SSP captured 30 of the 32 seats in the House. Bhandari's triumphant return was as much due to his own popularity as to the totally confused and disorganized state of the Congress (I). *(Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 155)* The SSP depended on Bhandari's popularity and the party's "pro-Sikkimese" propaganda, which was based on the three basic demands-seat reservation in the State Assembly for all the three ethnic communities in Sikkim – Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese; grant of citizenship to state less person in Sikkim with 1970 as the cut-off year and inclusion of Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and the 'sons of the soil' policy. Bhandari projected himself as the sole spokesman of the Sikkimese people, whose rights were trampled down by the Centre. He could garner the support and sympathy of the masses by projecting that he was thrown out of office because of his uncompromising stand on the three demands of his party. *(Gyamtsso, 2011), (B.B. Gurung, 2011), (C.D.Rai, 2012) (Pradeep Yonzon, 2012)* SSP's emergence to power with landslide

victory proved his allegation of unjustified dismissal of his government just a couple of months back.

Due to the untimely assassination of the Congress President and Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi who knocked down Bhandari led to the taking over of his mother's place by Rajiv Gandhi who was a naïve leader. His attitude towards Bhandari and Sikkim's politics was uncertain which proved to be beneficial for Bhandari and harmful for the Congress (I) unit in Sikkim. The situation could have been different had Indira Gandhi not been assassinated as Rajiv Gandhi did not play any political card with Bhandari. In a way he had been lucky. *(C.D.Rai, 2012) Jigme N Kazi in his book Inside Sikkim Against the Tide writes, "Bhandari won because he had no opposition in the State united enough to ensure that he did not make a comeback. He won because he had the necessary resources to defeat his adversaries." (Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 158)*

Allegations were also made of grave irregularities in the revised voter's list of the Assembly elections. The voters list had increased from 1.18 lacs in 1979 to 1.55 lacs prior to the Lok Sabha by-elections in December 1984, showing an increase of about 37,000 names in the period of five years. Many of those listed in the revised list were alleged to be "bogus voters" which voted for SSP and helped Bhandari to come to power. *(Kazi J. N., 1993, pp. 158-160)* Apart from the basic reasons, Bhandari's comeback was also because the majority of Nepalese, irrespective of whichever party they supported wanted anyone from their community to take the top post than someone from the minority Bhutia-Lepcha community because in the erstwhile Kingdom under the Bhutia rule, Nepalese were to play secondary roles. *(C.D.Rai, 2012)* The last hour propaganda of the polling was that if the Congress (I) came to power, the next chief minister would be from the Bhutia-Lepcha community, *(as most of the defected MLAs who toppled the Bhandari Government were*

*Bhutia-Lepchas*) and if the SSP formed the government, the chief minister would definitely be a Nepali. This type of communal and emotional appeal sold well to the Nepalese electorate, particularly in the rural areas. This was one of the main reasons why many BL leaders including Kazi lost in the elections. (*Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 162*)

The defeat of prominent tribal leaders, some of them ex-ministers and office bearers of the Congress (I), in the March 1985 Assembly elections, justified the apprehension that though 13 seats in the Assembly, including the lone Sangha seat, were reserved for the BLs, genuine tribal candidates, who had some standing amongst the people, could not be voted as the majority of the voters in the reserved constituencies of the tribals were Nepalese. (*Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 164*)

Bhandari after coming to power in March 1985 emerged as a new politician. He was more powerful, confident, authoritative and somewhat cocky. He demanded complete submission to his authority, and he got it. He did not tolerate any criticism from both within or outside the party. Political parties and social organizations had to either join him or face being silenced forever. The press was told to behave or face the consequences. The opposition parties in Sikkim completely disappeared from the political scene after their debacle in the Assembly elections. By then, it was clear to everyone that the era of "one-man-rule and one-party system" had begun. (*Kazi J. N., 1993, pp. 163-164*)

The charges of corruption against Bhandari by his own Congress (I) legislators took an interesting turn after he came back to power in March 1984. Although the CBI had already registered several corruption cases against Bhandari soon after his ouster from chief minister ship in May 1984, the Centre failed to take appropriate action against him during the President's Rule in Sikkim which

lasted till his comeback in March 1985. (*Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 173*) During the entire term Bhandari had to live under the shadow of CBI scare.

The 'sons of the soil' policy formulated and propagated by the Bhandari Government did not make much development. Selling of reserved seats for Sikkimese students non-locals, indiscriminate allocation and distribution of building sites and trade licenses, discrimination regarding grant of scholarships to students, refusal to allot work for local contractors on tender basis, favoritism and red-tapism concerning jobs in the Government service, and back-door leverage for non-locals to share in the State's administrative and economic development plans were a few examples of the Bhandari Government's various activities, which did not reflect the 'sons of the soil policy' they so passionately propagated before coming to power. (*Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 201*)

By the time the 1989 election approached, Bhandari gradually lost the support of his own party colleagues. They claimed that they were Bhandari's genuine supporters, who were with him 'through thick and thin' during his political wilderness experience when he was constantly harassed by both the Central and State governments for his anti-merger stand (*Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 201*).

### **8. The Sweep: Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election 1989**

In the election to the SLA held in the year 1989, Indian National Congress (I), two regional parties namely SSP and the Rising Sun Party of R.C. Poudyal and many independent candidates contested. It was therefore, a four cornered contest. SSP and the Rising Sun Party (SCR) were the main rivals as both were regional parties. There were altogether 118 candidates who contested in the 1989 elections. Rising Sun Party had 31 candidates, SSP-32, Denzong peoples Chogpi-4 and there were 20 Independent

candidates. There were minimum 2 and maximum 6 contestants contested from different constituencies. The total registered voters were 1, 92,619 (1, 00,942 males and 91677 females) and 139227 (76874 males and 62353 females) number of electors voted in the election. The polling was 72.28%. The number of valid votes were 133619 and 5608 (4.03% of total polled) were rejected.

**Table 7: Electors and Their Votes in the Assembly Election, 1989**

Number of Electors	Number of electors who voted	Number of valid votes	Number of votes rejected
192619	139227	133619	5608

*( Statistical Report on General Election to The Legislative Assembly of Sikkim, 1989)*

All political parties in the state of Sikkim contested elections more or less with the same programs based on the basic issues of Sikkim such as seat reservation, recognition of Nepali language and to promote cordial Centre – State relations. But in all the constituencies, Bhandari's SSP was declared elected securing all 32 seats in the State Assembly. This was a record in the Government and politics of not only Sikkim but also in the country. *(Chakaravarti, 1994, p. 105)* Though the Rising Sun Party tried its best under the leadership of Poudyal but all efforts went in vain. It could not secure a single seat. It secured only 11472 votes which is 8.59% of votes. SSP secured 94078 votes which was 70, 41% of the total votes polled. Following table explains the performance of different political parties in the election.

**Table 8: Party Performance in the Assembly Election, 1989**

Party	Number of Candidates	Number of elected	Number of votes	%
1)INC	31	0	24121	18.05%
2)SCR	31	0	11472	8.59%
3)SSP	32	32	94078	70.41%
4) DPC	4	0	298	0.22%
5)Independents	20	0	3650	2.73%
Total	118	32	133619	

*(Statistical Report on General Election to The Legislative Assembly of Sikkim, 1989)*

An interesting feature to note in this election was absence of National parties other than Congress. In the 1985 election, there were as many as four national parties viz, CPI, CPI (M), Janata Party and INC contested the election but in 1989 election these parties were absent. In 1985 election there was as many as 195 candidates but in 1989 there were only 118 candidates although the number of total registered voters were increased by 37,578 members. Yet another important feature of this election was the sharp decrease of Independents from 94 to 20. Whereas in 1985 election an independent candidate Balchand Sarma was able to win from the prestigious Gangtok constituency from amongst 12 contenders including the first Lady Dil Kumari Bhandari. In 1989 election independent had no place in Sikkim's politics. It could not secure a single seat and could win only 3650 votes which was 2.73% in total number. The number of women candidates also slashed down from 11 to 5 but this time one women candidate could secure her position by winning from Gangtok constituency.

SSP's soaring victory in the 1989 Assembly election was once again because of lack of effective opposition parties. Although R. C. Poudyal, after several year of political hibernation made a comeback and emerged once again, as the number two contender for the race

to Mentokgang in 1988 but his party, the Rising Sun<sup>1</sup> could not capture even a single seat in the election. Though the RSP had a large number of staunch and dedicated supporters, due to financial constraints, the party's organizational work suffered a lot. . (*Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 235*)

The Congress (I) on the other hand had better candidates for the polls, many of whom were ex-ministers and MLAs, and had the needed political experience and base as compared to the RSP and the SSP but the party could not turn this into an advantage. Financially too, Congress (I) was in better position than the RSP but due to internal dissension and squabbling within the party leadership and lack of direction hampered the party's poll prospects. (*Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 235*) The identity of Congress (I) which was otherwise weak was completely smashed in the 1989 election.

During the elections of 1989 all the political parties had raised the issue of seat reservation along with others of ethnic sentiments and of social significance. Bhandari projected himself as pro-Nepali leader and demanded seat reservations for the Nepalese of Sikkimese origin. At the same time he was in favour of keeping the reserved seats for the BL intact. In this election, R.C. Poudyal also projected himself as pro-Nepali and demanded more reserved seats for the Nepalese at par with their numerical strength. As a result he lost the faith of the BL community. The third political force the Congress remained as a party of the plainmen. Bhandari emerged as the only choice for his non-communal image appealed to the large section of the Nepalese as well as Bhutia-Lepcha people of Sikkim. (*Chakraborty, October, 2000*)

Though the SSP had a well knit party unit, its victory in the election was as much because of the power-money power, manpower

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<sup>1</sup> It was basically a revival of his old party, the Congress (Revolutionary) which actually merged with the Congress (I) in 1984.

and the government machinery at its disposal as because of the various weaknesses of the opposition parties. Both the Congress (I) and the RSP leaders complained about the misuse of official machinery and intimidation of their supporters by the ruling party. (Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 244)

Allegations were also made about the massive rigging of the election and the opposition's main complaint was that none of the ballot boxes had the seal marks of the Congress (I) and RSP candidates. The Congress even boycotted the counting and walked out of the counting hall in protest. (Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 245) Most of the senior politicians and the senior bureaucrats are of the view that Bhandari won the 1989 election because of rich resources, muscle power and due to the strong emotion created by the Sikkim merger issue which was successfully campaigned. (Pradeep Yonzon, 2012) (Sonam Wangdi, 2012) (Subba, 2012)

Nevertheless, the SSP set a new record by capturing all the 32 seats in the Assembly. The SSP candidates won the election by huge margins in almost all the 32 constituencies in the State. The lone Lok Sabha seat also went to the SSP candidate, Nandu Thapa who defeated his rivals with convincing margin.

A paragraph from Jigme N Kazi's *"Inside Sikkim Against the Tide"* speak volumes about the election and after. He writes, *"Despite the opposition's humiliating defeat, the ruling party found it difficult to convince the people that their spectacular victory was because of the party's popularity in the State. Instead of joy and excitement over the outcome of the elections, there was gloom and disappointment everywhere. The streets of Gangtok bore a deserted look and were devoid of the spirit of jubilation and excitement one normally witnesses after the elections."* (Kazi J. N., 1993, p. 247)

## 9. Sikkim Sangram Parishad and the Opposition Parties

SJP (SSP was known as SJP then) won 16 out of 31 seats. (one Khamdong constituency being vacant due to the death of contesting candidate) in 1979 election. In 1985 Assembly election, SSP came to power winning 30 out of 32 contested seats. 2 seats, one from prestigious Gangtok constituency and one from Kabi-Tingda constituency went to Balchand Sarda an Independent candidate and Kalzang Gyatso an Indian National Congress candidate respectively. And in the third Assembly election which was held in 1989, SSP came to power with soaring victory, sweeping all the 32 seats.

SSP formed a government in 1985 taking the support of the independent Sangha candidate with which the total strength of Parishad rose to 17.14 members remained in the opposition. Opposition was rather strong in the SJP Government. It was in fact the strongest ever in the democratic history of Sikkim. Opposition then in Sikkim consisted of two political parties those are SCR with B B Gurung as its leader and SPC with N.B. Khatiwara as its leader. They had the strength of 11 and 3 respectively. These parties maintained their distinct identity as an opposition and did not form a coalition but they were united in their stand as an opposition.

There was a presence of healthy opposition at least in the first term of the SJP Government which criticized the Government not just for the sake of criticism but their criticisms were objective criticisms. As an active opposition they provided some suggestions and alternative to Government's actions and policies where appropriate (*PSLA, 1981, pp.81,91*) and sought to hold them accountable for their decisions. They constantly questioned the Government's actions, reasons for slow implementation and non-delivery of policies and plans. (*PSLA, 1981, pp.100,260*) They put the spotlight on serious issues by moving calling attention notice and had them resolved quickly. (*PSLA, 1981, p.434*) The opposition parties debated legislation vigorously in the house to ensure the

legislation receives careful consideration. Although no bills in this term was ever rejected or sent to Select Committee but some bills were not voted by all the members and most of the bills were put to vote only after long and intensive discussion about the particular bill so that the public gets the benefit by causing government to adopt positive policies.

Being in opposition is not just about opposing the government. The then opposition parties thoroughly understood this responsibility. They did not fail to appreciate the good works of the government. (PSLA 1981 pp. 64-65,74,263) There were occasions when oppositions agreed with the Government when there was wider public interest in the proposal of the Government and when it had wide support of the public. The opposition was strong as well to create a furor when one of the ministers, Sherab Palden while replying the opposition member, Mr. N B khatiwara stated that "*Till the Article 371 F is there, according to clause (k) the Indian Constitution is not applicable to Sikkim unless and until these old rules are repealed or changed by the competent legislature or competed authority.*" (PSLA,1981, pp.331-332) The opposition leader Gurung charged the minister as the statement meant that the Chapter III pertaining to Fundamental Rights were also suspended for Sikkim. Therefore, he was asked to give clarification and was asked to withdraw the statement he had made as it was found to be misleading the house. (PSLA,1981,pp.348,499)

The opposition leader B.B. Gurung from SCR also put forwarded the motion of No Confidence against the Government after only 10 months of formation of Government in the Autumn Session of Assembly on September 9, 1980. It was based on three main grounds. First, the failure of Parishad Government to fulfill the pledges given to the people of Sikkim during election. The Government had pledged that in case of their coming to power, it

would bring about efficiency in every department by uprooting corruption, nepotism and favoritism but the government had failed to do so according to the opposition party.

The second issue was that the Parishad Government had demonstrated corruption and misuse by encouraging favoritism and nepotism in the administration. The opposition alleged that ever since the Parishad Government came to power, monopoly and misrule had been perpetrated by the Government. There was an allegation of misappropriation of the wealth of Sikkimese people. The opposition cited some of the case of corruption to prove their allegations. Gurung pointed out that not only opposition but the members from the ruling party itself were not satisfied with the Government. This was made clear from the different resolutions and questions placed before the House by them. He also stated that the Parishad leader used to say that favoritism and nepotism was rampant in the Kazi's Government and if voted to power, the parishad Government would not allow any form of nepotism and favoritism but it was alleged that those pledges were never translated into action. Many backdoor appointments had been made by the Parishad Government even after coming to power. The opposition leader also provided proofs of such nepotism and favoritism and stated that this issue had become so large that provided topic in the newspapers.

Another allegation made by the opposition leader, Gurung against the ruling government headed by N.B. Bhandari was that the Government was responsible for various omission and commission resulting in complete breakdown of law and order in the state. He stated that crimes had so much increased that had been reported in the "*Eastern Express*" daily and also in the crime report. People were being murdered, children were being raped and robberies committed and no enquiry had been made. It was also pointed out that the

crime were committed by police themselves and cases of beating by the police were countless in the Parishad Government.

Another opposition member Mr. N B Khatiwara from SPC also added in the failure of the Government to fulfill its promises made to people during election speeches. He stated that the Parishad Party used to declare that *"Our beloved mother Sikkim and the Sikkimese people have been sold out by battisays<sup>2</sup>. In order to restore the lost rights, dignity and the self respect of the Sikkimese and to bring back the lost identity of Sikkim, help us with your mandate etc."* (PSLA, 1980, p.169) Those promises according to him had completely vanished.

Both the leaders of the opposition parties, that is, B B Gurung and N B Khatiwara however admitted that the motion of No-Confidence was not against all the members of SJP nor it was against the Parishad Party. It was due to irresponsible work by some of the Ministers and the motion was intended to create an ideal Government. The motion was put to vote. Ten members voted in favor and nineteen against. The motion was defeated and passed in negative.

Unlike the first term, in the second term, the opposition party in Sikkim was very weak. There were only two opposition members; Katuk Bhutia from Indian National Congress and Balchand Sarda, an Independent candidate in the Sikkim Assembly. Katuk Bhutia won from Kabi Tingda, a Scheduled Tribe constituency of North Sikkim despite the fact that he did not have much strong local political support as the party he was associated with and contesting from was not a regional party and did not have strong political base. He secured 1102 votes leaving behind his primary contender SSP by 339 votes. Balchand Sarda won from the prestigious Gangtok

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<sup>2</sup> Referred to 32 legislators of Kazi's Government who passed the resolution to merge Sikkim with India

constituency. The victory was quite remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, it was a victory of a plainsman; secondly, his primary contender was the SSP candidate Smt. Dil Kumari Bhandari, a first lady of Sikkim. He secured 2010 votes leaving behind the SSP candidate by the slender margin of 261 votes.

In the previous term the opposition members were almost equal in number with the ruling one. They were only one member weaker to the ruling government at least in the beginning\*. In this term it was almost opposite. Although weak, the opposition leaders did not stay away from their roles and responsibilities to hold the government answerable for their actions and performed their usual duty to ask questions and hold government responsible to people. They did not shed away their duty to point out the weaknesses and the failures in the working of the government and provided alternative policies and suggestions to the Government. In one of the sessions in 1985, the opposition member Balchand Sarda raised a question on the misuse of VIP lights. He asked the Chief Minister to clarify the House as to why the nominated chairmen who were not the elected public representatives were using VIP lights. His argument was that those chairmen were not the voice of people and if the VIP lights were used in that manner by all the chairmen of corporations then Sikkim would be called red light city with nearly 200 VIPs. (*PSLA, 1985, pp.24-28*) There was a long discussion on this matter. Another opposition leader, Kalzang Gyatso in the same session suggested for establishment of Sikkim University for the educational benefit of Sikkimese students. He also suggested that for good results and quality education, training for teachers should be mandatory. 'Son of the Soil' policy should be followed in the appointment of teachers. (*PSLA, 1985, pp.60-64*) He reiterated the same point in the next Assembly session of 1986. He stated that teachers were being appointed from the plains for the lower primary schools who studied in Hindi medium. Instead of teaching students,

they end up learning local languages. This acted as a handicap in education system. Therefore, appointment of local teachers was suggested. He also suggested for facility of staff quarters so that the teachers posted at the interiors may not have difficulty of accommodation. A play ground and toilets in each school was a must, he suggested. (*PSLA, 1986, pp.80-82*). Another important area he discussed while showing the weakness of the Government and offering some valuable suggestion was the Health department. He discussed about lack of beds in the hospitals and power failure at operation table etc. He opined that if the old and senior compounders and nurses were sent to Public Health Centers in the villages, local patients could be treated there which in turn would lessen the rush at main hospitals and the problem of scarcity of beds could be taken care of. (*PSLA, 1986, pp. 160-161*) Thus, the Assembly sessions were held as usual but the demanding attitude of the opposition members which was remarkable in the 1st term was missing in this term. They were more polite and compromising. This however could be attributed to the size of the opposition.

Comparatively, the opposition in this term was very weak but considering their size, they played their part well. Although they were too weak to make a remarkable difference, they endeavoured to make their presence felt. In the third session of Assembly in 1985, all the questions and supplementary questions in question hour were asked by the opposition members. The opposition member, Kalzang Gyatso asked the minister-in-charge of Food and Civil supply as to why there was scarcity of essential items like rice, edible oil, kerosene, sugar, petrol etc. at the time of Durga Puja when they were most required. He demanded the ministry concerned to keep sufficient stock for at least 2/3 months to meet up emergency needs. (*PSLA, 1985, pp.5-6*) He also highlighted the weakness of the government by pointing out incomplete work of the rural water supply schemes sanctioned and works started during the previous government's time.

He stated that the commitment given to cover entire state with drinking water scheme in each speech had not been materialized. (PSLA,1985,p.9) He also pointed out that there was lack of essential items like a generator in the state hospital for emergency purpose and made the House realize the consequence of lack of arrangement for power failure during operation and emergencies. He demanded that there must be one by the next session. No other member, ruling and opposition raised questions in the question hour. It was also remarked by the Speaker and stated "*Only Hon'ble Kalzang Gyatso has got questions.*" Gyatso in turn requested the members from ruling party to start bringing questions from next session and lend their co-operations in question hours (PSLA,1985.pp.20-21)

The budget session of 1986 did not have question hours. In the discussion on the 'Motion of Thanks to the Governor's Address', the opposition member Kalzang Gyatso could not place his view as the discussion was declared over by the Speaker when he desired to speak. He then staged a walk out in protest. (PSLA,1986.pp.40-41) Since one of the opposition member walked out, other members, both ruling and opposition did not participate on discussion on general budget. Other affairs of the session remained as usual. No major activity which could be termed important from the researcher's point of view occurred. In the next session of the year opposition members asked questions related to Health, Education etc. For instance, the reason for poor performance of students in examination and the steps taken by the Government to improve it were asked. Questions were also asked to Health minister as to whether there were enough beds available for patients in the government hospitals and whether qualified personnel and modern equipments for diagnosis and treatment of major illness available in the hospitals. (PSLA,1986,pp.10-11,18)

But from 1987 onwards, the opposition started declining, slowly shedding their responsibilities and making only lukewarm efforts. Most of the grants in budget session of 1988 were passed without any discussion and there were not much to comment in the budget too. Even for the important departments like that of Education, Agriculture and Finance, the demands for grants were passed without any discussion whereas in the previous year these departments were discussed intensively. In the question hours, few questions were asked by the opposition members. Those questions were nothing but a usual exercise. There was nothing important in their arguments to take note of. In some sessions, there were no questions at all. Even if there were some, they were raised by the members of ruling party only. In the latter part of the term, the opposition member B.C. Sarda often remained absent from the Assembly Sessions. And in the last day of the session, both the opposition members were absent. They were not present even to give their consent in the important matters like election of committees. Their consent were sought later. (PSLA, 1988, pp. 146-150, 157-158, 203, 221)

The August session of 1988 lasted hardly for half-an-hour. The members both from ruling and opposition did not take part in any of the Assembly business. All the 10 bills except one, introduced in the House were passed unanimously without discussion. The situation became such that in one of the session, the speaker urged the members to speak and participate in the budget discussion to keep the Assembly affairs going. He said, "*If you do not discuss on the Budget, what should be the reply from the Finance Minister?*" (PSLA, 1989, p. 73). As there was nothing much to discuss the sessions were very short they lasted not even for 1 hour.

In the third term, since SSP captured all the seats, there was no place for opposition. The party members themselves played the

dual role of opposition and ruling group. The assembly sessions were healthy with debates and discussion. In the previous term, especially from 1987, the members both from ruling and opposition showed a much laid back attitude towards the assembly affairs. They did not take part in many of the debates and discussions. Surprisingly in this term, we find more involvement of members in the affairs of the house. The absence of opposition did not handicap the assembly affairs and did not end within an hour. The sessions were very busy with intra-group questions and discussions in effort to keep different departments in check and to hold them accountable. Unlike the previous term, almost all the members took part in the question hours and discussions of the Assembly. The progress and performance of all the important departments like that of Education, P.W.D, Animal Husbandry, Health, Forest and Transport etc. were discussed in the Assembly. The members pointed out the faults and weaknesses of one another and offered suggestions for improvements. For instance, one of the member in 1990 Assembly Session complained about the total negligence of P.W.D. He stated that in some of the constituencies, link roads were not constructed even in ten years of formation of the government although those people had equal contribution to form the government, build the party, ministers and MLAs. He also suggested that fund should be used for needful purposes and should not be misused. (PSLA, 1990, pp.203-205) While discussing on Education department, one member pointed out that there were no basic amenities like better school buildings, laboratories, play grounds, latrines and even teachers in many of the schools. It was also pointed out by another member that in one of the school no examination was held for more than four years. It was suggested that serious action was to be taken by the concerned ministry to solve those problems. (PSLA, 1990, pp.347,364) Likewise in the Health ministry, many important suggestions were made by the members. One of the

members suggested that in Primary Health Centres, out of two doctors, one has to be a female doctor for the check-up and treatment of female related health problems. It was also suggested that experienced doctors should be sent to remote areas so that the poor people might be treated there instead of coming all the way to district hospitals. (PSLA, 1990, p.403)

The successive Assembly sessions of 1990 were also very active and busy. All the members participated in the Assembly affairs. Various ministries like Education, Tourism, Information and Public Relations, PWD and Forests etc. were discussed in this session. In the field of education, one of the members suggested that in schools, vocational education should be given importance. In his view, once the student passes out school and completes degree college, he should be able to earn his living and be self-dependent with the help of vocational education even if he does not get a government job. Therefore he suggested that such education must be given priority to tackle unemployment problems. (PSLA, 1992, p.302-303). In the Tourism department, questions were asked whether the profits earned by the hotels under the department were satisfactory and steps taken by Minister-in-charge to improve it. (PSLA, 1992, pp.36-40) The members were strict enough to keep various departments in check. The minister-in-charge of Information and Public Relations was questioned and charged when his department failed to cover the winter session of 1991 in the Government journal 'Sikkim Herald'. It was pointed out by one of the member that it was the duty of department in question to inform the mass about different policies and programs adopted by the Government in the Assembly for the welfare of people. (PSLA, 1992, pp.416-417) A fuss was created when the minister-in-charge of Mines and Geology could not answer precisely to the questions raised by the members. (PSLA, 1992, pp.347-348). However in this term also no bill was rejected. They were passed unanimously without discussions. The

demands for grants of some of the ministries viz. Health, Family Welfare and Social Welfare; Sikkim Nationalized Transport and Motor Vehicles; Land Revenue Survey and Settlement; Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe Welfare and the Chief Minister's own ministries, that is, Home, Finance, Establishment, Planning and Development were passed without discussion.

The year 1992 was a very eventful year indeed. Quite a few events occurred which had strong impact on Sikkim's politics. These events were the precursor for change as politics in Sikkim never remained the same then after. Pawan Kumar Chamling, who held the portfolio of Information; Public Relation and Printing department was removed from the SSP cabinet on 16 June 1992 and also from the party on the ground of ideological differences between him and the Chief Minister and SSP Supremo Nar Bahadur Bhandari. Chamling's expulsion gave birth to the opposition in the Assembly which was non-existent in this term till then. He became the lone opposition member against all others in the 32 member Legislative Assembly.

A dramatic moment followed after his expulsion in one of its session which underlined the fact that the real opposition was an essential organ in democracy even if there was just one in the entire House. It was the Zero hour in the Assembly Session of September 9; Chamling was vocal from the very start of question hour and demanded time to express his views. He rose to his feet, took out a candle from his pocket and lighted it. The Speaker said that it was unacceptable by the Assembly norms but Chamling charged that 'there was utter darkness and confusion in Sikkim, there was no democracy and that he was constrained to search out any leftovers in the Assembly Hall. He walked around with the candle and finally stopped, facing the then Chief Minister. Turning to the Speaker, he said, *"I am looking for democracy, Sir, in this august gathering. Does it exist here? Or is it in the pocket of Chief Minister!"* Then, he said, *"I*

*will go to every nook and corner of Sikkim in search of democracy and I will search till I find it.”* He then walked out of the house with the candle still aflame. (*The Statesman*, 6 April 2001), (*Bali*, 2003, p. 116)

The 1993 Assembly sessions remained calm. The lone opposition member remained absent in all the sessions. The sessions witnessed short question hours as compared to previous years. The question hours had barely two to four questions of which some of the questioners were absent. In fact from 1993 onwards many members started remaining absent. The demands for grants of important departments like Health, Family Welfare, Social Welfare, Tourism, Education, PWD and Finance where large amount of grants were earmarked were discussed as usual but the intensity and length of discussion as found in previous years was lacking. But the sessions in 1994 were equally contrasting to 1993. It was dramatic and disturbed. Chamling, who abstained himself from attending the 1993 Assembly sessions after the zero hour episode of 1992 made his comeback in 1994. From the beginning of his journey as an MLA in 1985, he displayed an impression of a man of few words. He hardly raised any question in the question hours and hardly participated in the debates and discussions in the House in his political career of almost a decade. But it was a different Chamling in 1994. There was a complete transformation in his attitude and approach after his expulsion and formation of his political party called Sikkim Democratic Front on March 4, 1993. A silent listener once he was, flooded the question hours with many questions. As a lone but responsible and strong opposition member, he put the spotlight on every faults and failures of SSP Government and brought in front of the House.

Chamling was very vocal from the beginning of the session. He expressed his dissatisfactions and accused SSP with many allegations. The main reason for opening of this Pandora's Box was

on February 28, 1994 when the SDF party had called a peaceful all Sikkim strike to protest against the unusual price hike in the entire nation and also against corruption, decline of democracy and human rights in Sikkim. The then Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari declared a shootout order to those who observed and participated in the strike. The statement of instructions given by the then Chief Minister to his party workers was published in one of the leading daily of Sikkim on February 27, 1994 and was also recorded. Chamling read out the statement in the zero hour of the Assembly session. Bhandari stated, *"Whoever does not go to their duty, I will terminate him. Sikkim is just one, no body except I have the right to call on strike. Open the shops and offices; burn them with kerosene and petrol if they do not comply. For the first time in Sikkim's history I am giving the shootout order to my party workers. Police, do not arrest my party men."* (PSLA, 1994, pp.71-73). Chamling regarded it a black history of Sikkim and destruction of democracy. When Chamling was confronted and asked to stop by the members of ruling party, he claimed his right to explain in the Assembly. He asked, *"There is terrorism in the state already, has it started in the Assembly too?"* (PSLA, 1994, p.72). He continued that there was failure of law and order in Sikkim and urged that legal action should be taken against Bhandari. He again pointed out that police force was replaced by Military in Sikkim, many illegal arms and ammunitions were supplied and demanded that the Chief Minister should be answerable and there should be an enquiry commission. He also stated that SSP Government could not secure life and property of Sikkimese and that it was proved that the Government was a terrorist Government which was to be dismissed immediately. (PSLA, 1994, pp.74-75)

A silent listener who used to listen while others spoke became very outspoken opposition member. In this session others listened to him while he spoke. In the discussion of Governor's Address, he

ridiculed and made the mockery of the contents of the Address. He regarded it misguiding and illusionary to the people of Sikkim. In the Address it was stated *“The Animal Husbandry has assured an important role in raising living standard of the people especially in the rural areas. There has been specific increase in production of milk and other Livestock products during the year.”* Chamling refuted the statement and alleged that the existing government could not progress in this sector even in fifteen long years. He pointed out that there was a home market of seven crores of animal products per year which the government failed to tap. Instead, the market demands were fulfilled by bringing stock from outside. This was regarded as a greatest failure of the government. Next was the Forest department. It was stated in the Governor’s Address that *“massive a forestation program has been carried out in order to increase the forest covers in the state. Special attention has been given to rejuvenation of degraded forest areas, social and rural fuel wood plantation including a wasteland development effort.”* Chamling rejected it .He regarded it totally false and stated, *“Today, there has been deforestation, not forestation. Here is ministry of deforestation not forestation.”* (PSLA,1994,pp.78-79) It was also mentioned in the Address that *“In order to bring democracy to the grassroots, steps were taken by the Government.”* Chamling asked, *“Where is democracy? How can we take it to the grassroots when the Panchayats as per the rule of SSP is busy working on how to make SSP win the election, construct gates to welcome the Chief Minister wherever he goes, pasting posters and to gather public for party meetings?”* He said, *“Panchayats in Sikkim are used only for keeps and convenience of the Government. Today, Panchayats are weak so is the society of Sikkim.”* (PSLA,1994,pp.80-81)

Another statement of the Governor which stated, *“Special attention has also been given to rural sanitation with the construction of household and institutional latrines in order to improve village*

*sanitation.*” Chamling criticized it and ridiculed the policy of the government which according to him was just opposite. He said, *“Today in Sikkim, the Government should provide food and improve economic condition of Sikkimese. People are starving and struggling for their hand-to-mouth but the Government has provided the latrines first. What is the use of latrines when their stomachs are empty?”* He argued that people in Sikkim were still below poverty line which meant that Sikkim and Sikkimese did not progress in real sense. Government had failed to increase purchasing power of the people. The government was only for handfuls in power but the mass was living under poverty line with difficulties. The statement of the Government on giving special emphasis on employment generation and employment generating programs was also refuted by Chamling. He argued, *“If there is any development in Sikkim, it has been the development of ‘unemployment’ ‘corruption’ and ‘terrorism’.”*

He argued that Government talked big and blew own trumpet about the progress in education and distribution of free text books but the government did not even have its education policy. *“Distribution of books does not mean distribution of education.”* He said. He further stated that it was very saddening not to have the state university even in fifteen years. Because of lack of education policy, the Government could not develop competitive attitude and could not give quality education. All that the Government could give was unemployment. The statement of the then Governor in the concluding part of his budgetary speech *“My Government’s commitment to maintain communal harmony and peace, promote and protect the interest of the weaker section, women and children and to work assiduously for the development of the state,”* was ridiculed and criticized by Chamling. He argued that in the SSP Government, communalism was rampant and casteism was encouraged by asking people to form associations based on castes. He also highlighted that the very government had sent a memorandum to Delhi on 21

October, 1993, stating that Christians should be punished. (PSLA, 1994, pp.81-89) Other members of ruling party also participated over the discussion of the Governor's speech. Few supported Chamling and others condemned his remarks. The question hours were active with healthy and constructive discussions. Different problems and demands of public were placed by respective MLA's. The lone opposition member, Chamling came up with many questions. His questions were related to almost all the departments. He held every minister-in-charge accountable for their actions and pointed out their weaknesses. Unlike other sessions, not a single demand for grants was passed without discussion. The party members themselves discussed and assessed different departments when opposition member was absent and when the opposition member was present he burdened the role and responsibility of opposition group by himself. He stood to represent the entire opposition party in the house not just theoretically but practically too.

In the discussion over the demands for grants of different department, he placed his views and pointed out the weakness and failure of different departments. In the discussion over Industries, he stated that the department was not concerned about how to increase industrialization in Sikkim so that its economic condition could be improved and people could be employed. He stated that the department could not make industries viable to produce and grow because of its failure to provide home market for the industrial products even though there was potential home market in Sikkim. (PSLA, 1994, pp.378-379) Next, he asked the Minister-in Charge of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe Welfare whether the fund allotted for tribes were actually used for progress of tribe. He also, placed his view that tribal could not be progressive and wealthy just by giving donations and sympathies by the Government. They should be given their rights and privilege which the Government had denied

for fifteen years. He pointed out the condition of Scheduled Caste were even worse in Sikkim. They were the victims of evils of untouchability still practiced in Sikkim. He stated, they should be given social justice, economic and political rights not just sympathies (PSLA, 1994, pp.378-379) In the Agricultural department he suggested that Government should give primary importance to agriculture as Sikkim was an agricultural state where 80 per cent of population was dependent on agriculture. The Government should endeavor to make Sikkim and Sikkimese self-dependent in agricultural sector. (PSLA, 1994, pp.378-379) Chamling stated that there was nothing productive in the budget and that the budget was in fact beggar budget which had more expenditure and loss than income and benefits. He pointed out that the financial discipline and economic discipline was lacking in the Government .The budget was in fact not in favor of poor Sikkimese but in favor of handful riches and businessmen of plains. (PSLA, 1994, pp.143-146)

He also tabled a resolution in favour of government employees which read: *“The government has miserably failed to constitute Pay Commission for the last eight years or more which needs to be done every five years to safeguard the economic and social condition of the government employees of different categories. The wages of the different categories of labors also need to be raised and revised in the wake of unusual hike in prices of essential commodities and very high cost of living. It is therefore resolved that the government takes urgent necessary step in this direction to ensure relief to those sections of the employees and labors which is long overdue.”* The resolution was put to vote. 2 votes were in favor and 23 against. The resolution was defeated and passed in negative. (PSLA, 1994, pp.475-480, 485)

The Assembly session of 1994 was indeed most dramatic and disturbing since the inception of State Legislative Assembly. Events followed one after another in the House. Question hours and

budgetary discussions were not enough for Chamling to point out faults and failure of the Government and place his ideas in the House. He used Zero Hour of the house to point out that because of corruption, gift racket and misdeeds of some of the people of Sikkim, the centre government had decided to impose income tax on Sikkim from 1.4.1995. He argued, because of those irresponsible people the entire public of Sikkim was made to bear the brunt for whole life. (*PSLA, 1994, pp.501-503*) The members of ruling party did not remain quiet either. They said that Chamling should not have kept quiet. The members argued that when Chamling knew all the weaknesses of the Government he should have been responsible enough to highlight and bring the issue when he was in the treasury bench, a year and a half back. They again questioned Chamling about his responsibility as a representative of the people. The budgetary discussion went berserk and turned into chaos. The Speaker had to request the members to be seated in their place, calm down and confine themselves within budget discussion (*PSLA, 1994, pp.535-538*). This was the last Assembly session of SSP. By the next session of the 1994, SSP was voted out. A new government by the SDF Party led by Pawan Kumar Chamling was formed.

Hence, in the SSP Government, the opposition was very strong in the first term. The roles played by them in the Assembly which any active opposition party in a healthy democratic government should, we can definitely say that a strong opposition was present in the first term of SJP Government which played the role of 'watchdog', 'check and balance' and 'government in waiting' in real sense of term. But with the passage of time, the SSP continued strengthening its position and opposition continued to decline till it became non-existent. In the first half of the first term, the opposition was strong enough to provide an alternative government that it tabled a motion of No-Confidence against the Government. But later in the second half, many opposition members shifted allegiance and joined the

ruling SSP by way of floor crossing. By the end of the term, that is, 1985, the SSP's strength rose to 29.

In the second term, there were two opposition members amongst the 32 members Assembly. For not more than two years, they performed their responsibilities and made their presence felt, later they became non-functional and ornamental, performing only those tasks which were mandatory and in the third and last term, there was not a single opposition member in the House initially. However, the sessions were active with healthy debates and discussions but were a one party show. The one party show however soon ended in June 1992, when Pawan Kumar Chamling, who was the cabinet minister of SSP Government was removed from the cabinet and the party. He became the lone opposition member amongst the 31 odd ruling members in the Assembly. After this event, politics in Sikkim took a different course. Assembly sessions once again became lively and dramatic with the presence of real opposition which had been missing since early 80's. In terms of number, the third term of SSP had the weakest opposition. There was just one but in terms of strength it was perhaps the strongest. It could not have provided an alternative government then in the Assembly but it replaced the Government soon after its formations.

## **10. Winds of Change**

For the three consecutive terms that is from 1979 to 1989, the SSP's rule in Sikkim was unchallenged. In fact, with each term, it became stronger. In 1979, it came to power with 17 seats; in 1985 with 30 seats and in 1989 it gained absolute majority with 32 out of 32 seats. With the unchallenged power of SSP, came challenging problems too. The first and second terms of SSP's rule in Sikkim remained comparatively peaceful than the third one. Although there were murmured dissatisfactions and passive oppositions earlier, the

disturbance in the party started becoming intense towards the end of 1980's to the early 90's culminating in the important event in 1992 when Pawan Kumar Chamling who held the portfolio of Information, Public Relations and Printing department was removed from the SSP party. With this event the wind of change started blowing in Sikkim's politics which was otherwise calm.

The wind of change was strongly felt in Sikkim's politics when it started blowing in the opposite direction. Its strongest blow which had a far reaching effect not only in Sikkim's politics but also at the Centre was when the 15 MLAs of SSP who constituted more than one third of the original strength of the SSP Party had unanimously decided to split and formed the SSP (Sanchaman) headed by Sanchaman Limboo who was also a minister in the Bhandari cabinet till a month earlier. The confidence vote was scheduled for May 17, 1994, in which Bhandari was voted out.

The grievances of defected members were many. Their pent up anger and matters of dissatisfaction were expressed in their speeches in the Assembly Session of 17 May, 1994. One of the reasons of dissatisfaction was that Bhandari was alleged to have a dictatorial attitude. He was said to have ruled undemocratically. There was a widening gap between himself and with his ministers and MLAs. They could hardly get appointments. Their suggestions were never taken into consideration and their grievances, never redressed. (PSLA, 1994, p.137) His rule was alleged to be one man autocratic rule. Bhandari was alleged of ruling the state on a divide and rule policy. By his double speak and his double standard policies, he instigated one community against the other. By playing communal cards, the three communities, that is, Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepalese were pitted against each other for his personal political benefit which led to communal tensions and clashes among the people of Sikkim (PSLA, 1994, p.127). Because of this very attitude of his and his

policies, allegations were made that Sikkimese people were never integrated and united as one.

His Government was alleged to be characterized by lawlessness, injustice and oppression. Bhandari had suppressed law and order, rules and regulations to ensure his monopoly in the government. Any dissenting voice was not permitted and any step to oppose his misdeeds and misrule was faced with dire consequences. Dharmadatta Sharma, a front ranking leader of the Congress (I) in Sikkim unit who opposed Bhandari's government had to lose his life in 1988 (*PSLA, 1994, p. 102*)

The members also alleged that SSP was an institution of corruption. Bhandari would choose the so called influential members from different communities and together indulge in widespread corruption and exploitation of the state's resources. These kind of activities according to the dissenting members, provoked the imposition of Central Income Tax Act, Wealth Tax and Gift Tax etc. (*PSLA, 1994, p. 48*). The introduction of proposed finance Bill by the then Finance Minister, Dr. M.M Singh in 1994 became the immediate cause of defection.

The genesis of Direct Income Tax issue started long time back in 1983 when the then Governor Homi J.H. Taliyarkan wrote to Minister of Home Affairs for extension of Direct Tax Laws (covering Income, wealth and Gift Taxes) to Sikkim to supposedly address some anomalies in paying income tax under the state Act. (*White Paper Vol.I on the Direct Tax Laws in Sikkim, 1998*) The issue kept cropping up from time to time since then. It was alleged by opposition leaders that "Bhandari Government indulged in series of economic crimes including cigarette scam, gift racket and money laundering committed by some unscrupulous people in Sikkim further compounded the issue and hastened Center's decision to

extend the Central Income Tax to Sikkim” (*Telegraph, I-T Bills upsets Sikkimese, 29 March, 1994*). In a letter dated 4.11.1986 of the Department of Revenue, it was mentioned that one of the reason of extension of Direct Tax Laws was that the non application of Indian Income Tax Act 1961 in the State of Sikkim had provided means to unscrupulous tax payers to introduce their unaccounted money in India in the name of bogus concerns located in Sikkim.

Although efforts were made by Bhandari Government to resist the implementation of the Indian Direct Taxes in Sikkim in various forums in spite of its extension and enforcement since 1989-90. (Annexure-19) However on account of pressure from Government of India, all the members of SSP had to concede for its implementation from 1, 4, 1995. As a result the Finance Bill 1994 was introduced, which proposed enforcement of the tax laws to Sikkim granting exemption to Bhutia and Lepcha communities of Sikkim. But this bill had caused great agitation and resentment in the minds of all Sikkimese of Nepali origin. Nepali members of both ruling and opposition parties were of the view that they were discriminated by leaving out one of the tree ethnic communities including schedules caste from the provision of the Bill. The opposition, CPI (M) was of the view that taxes should not be introduced on communal lines. They stated “Nepalis here are just as poor as any other community. Therefore, there should be economic criteria for implementation of Income tax”. (*Telegraph, withdrawal of Sikkim I-T Bill fans discontent, 13, May, 1994*). Both ruling and opposition parties opined that the proposed Bill had violated the 1973 (pre-merger) Tripartite Agreement. As in the agreement, Nepalis and Bhutia-Lepchas were treated as par. And therefore they called for equal treatment and protection of all the communities under Article 371(F) of the Constitution. (*Telegraph, I-T Bill upsets Sikkimese, 1994*), (*Telegraph, withdrawal of Sikkim I-T Bills fans discontent, 1994*)

Things became unmanageable for Bhandari when some of his key Nepali aides, comprising former senior bureaucrats and SSP leaders floated the Sikkim People's Forum to demand tax exemptions for their community. Sensing growing resentment among other ethnic communities, Bhandari Government in his letter dated May 3, 1994 to the then Prime Minister, Shri P.V Narasimha Rao made a fresh request to treat Nepalese of Sikkimese origin in an equal footing with other ethnic communities on the basis of Article 371 (F) of the Constitution of India.

As the finance bill was at the consideration stage, Mrs. D.K Bhandari, M.P (Sikkim) also made a representation on May 4, 1994 requesting for some amendment in the bill which would be conducive in the interest of the people of Sikkim and of Nation as a whole.

As a result, the Union Finance Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, kept the Bill in abeyance for it needed closer scrutiny following "a fresh request" made by the Sikkim Government for exemption for all Sikkimese. It was also made clear that the proposal seeking to exempt tribals would also be withdrawn for the time being.

This immediately provoked the ruling tribal MLAs, who held Mr. Bhandari and his MP wife responsible for the Bill's withdrawal. Bhandari was accused of snatching away the rights and special privilege granted by the Central Government to Bhutia and Lepcha communities as also of failing to secure similar concession for other ethnic communities living in Sikkim. He was accused of playing with sentiments of Bhutia-Lepcha minority which constituted only 25 percent of voters. Despite the center's clarification that there was no political motive in his decision, the Sikkimeses still continued to be suspicious. Bhandari was accused to have played communal politics for his personal gains. Implementation of Income tax exempting only the Scheduled Tribes would have meant securing only 25 percent of votes and losing 75 percent majority votes of Nepali and therefore he

was accused to have made a 'U' turn and again opposed the bill to which he gave his consent earlier. (PSLA, 1994, p.87-88)

There was a vertical split in the ruling SSP because of this touchy issue of Income Tax as all tribal MLAs and their supporters deserted the Chief Minister under the leadership of Sanchaman Limboo, the then cabinet minister of SSP. The ruling SSP was divided into two groups: SSP and SSP (Sanchaman) the latter with the strength of 16 MLAs. (Old Tactics, 1994) Bhandari was to face a trial of strength on May 17, 1994 when the Motion of Confidence in favour of the Chief Minister, N.B Bhandari was brought in the Assembly to put to vote. 16 members voted against the motion and 1 member Pawan Kumar Chamling abstained from voting. Bhandari lost, as the motion was rejected by the House. (PSLA, 1994, pp.154-156) On that fateful day, Bhandari's absolute dominance received a death blow. It was his Waterloo. This change in politics of Sikkim was however not a sudden development but was an outburst of volcano, long simmering.

Once Bhandari lost, his one-time protégé Sanchaman Limboo occupied his chair and became the fourth Chief Minister of Sikkim on May 18, 1994. The then Governor, Admiral (retd) R.H. Tahiliani administered the oath of office and secrecy to the newly elected Chief Minister and seven of his cabinet colleagues. Since his ministry was in minority and as election to the Assembly was announced Sanchaman Limboo remained a caretaker Chief Minister from September 1994 to December 11, 1994.