

Chapter III

LINGUISTIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES UNDER SSP LED GOVERNMENT

Sikkim is a multi-ethnic society inhabited by different ethnic communities belonging to different racial and linguistic groups. There are more than 25 different tribes and communities and more than 13 different languages belonging to different linguistic stock are spoken in the state. There is an age-old co-existence of different religions such as Yumanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity etc and faith and belief system among the different ethnic groups.

Of these different tribes and communities of Sikkim, 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo, three indigenous communities constitute both linguistic and religious minorities in Sikkim. According to Thapa (2002, p.33) until 1951, there were 39397 (28.70%) Buddhist and 15991 (11.65%) Limboo Yumanist. Rest, 81872 (59.64%) of the total population of Sikkim were Hindus. While the census of 1981 affiliated to the language, records 192891 (62.57%) Nepali speakers while 22391 (7.26%), 21548 (6.9%) and 17922 (5.8%) the Lepcha, Bhutia and Limboo speakers respectively (Singh, 1993, pp. 10-11). According to the Census of India, 1991 out of 406457 total population of Sikkim, 256418 (63.08%) were the speakers of Nepali language. Meanwhile Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo speakers recorded only 32593 (8.01%), 29854 (7.34%) and 28174 (6.93%) respectively which constituted 36.93%. The census of 2001 also records 390170 (72.14%) Nepali speakers of the 540851 total population of Sikkim and on the other, Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo speakers constituted 41825 (7.19%), 35728 (6.14%) and 34292 (5.89%) of the total population of Sikkim respectively. On the basis of religious and linguistic aspects; Limboo, Lepcha and Bhutia constituted the linguistic and religious minorities of Sikkim at the point of time when Bhandari led government ruled Sikkim (1985-1994).

In this chapter, we try to analyse whether the SSP government protected the interests and rights of the linguistic and religious minorities. This chapter has been divided into three sections. Section I seeks to understand the ethnographic composition of Sikkim especially the historico-linguistic, socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects of different ethnic communities that distinguish each community from one another. In section II, attempt is made to understand the political situation of Limboos in the pre-merger SSP era (1642-1984) and the role of various social organisations of Limboos in ventilating their interests, aspirations, urges and demands. It also attempts to understand and analyse the policy of SSP led government towards the Limboo community of Sikkim. In Section III, we analyse the policies of Bhandari towards the two linguistic and religious minorities, Bhutia-Lepchas of Sikkim. It studies whether there were demands and urges from those two minorities for the protection of their interests and rights and if SSP led government could fulfil it.

I

SIKKIM: THE ETHNIC COMPLEXITY

Among the Indian states, Sikkim represents complex ethnographic composition. In 1642 AD when Namgyal dynasty came into existence, Sikkim was represented by the popular Tibetan phrase '*Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum*', the three aboriginal people of the newly emerged Himalayan kingdom (Chaudhury, 2006, pp. 23-26). The '*Lho*' 'southern' refers to the Bhutias who settled in the southern part of Tibet i.e. Sikkim and Bhutan, '*Men*' 'foothills' refers to the Lepchas inhabiting the lower slopes of the eastern Himalayas and '*Tsong*' refers to the Limboos who are believed to have migrated originally from Tsong one of the central province of Tibet (Sprigg, 1999, p. VI).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The other tribe who were one of the group mentioned among those celebrating the coronation of the first Chogyal of Sikkim, Phuntsok Namgyal along with the '*Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum*' were the Mangers.

According to Richard Temple the total population of Sikkim during the seventies of the 19th century was very small, about 5000. Out of which 2500 were Lepchas, 1500 Bhutias and 1000 Limboos (Sengupta, 1985, p.27). But ethno-demographic structure of Sikkim appeared to be more complex and diversified in 1890s when H H Risley the British Officer conducted the first population census in 1891 on Sikkim dividing the whole demography of Sikkim on the basis of caste and race. Risley had listed more than 14 communities with the total population of 30458. Of which 5762 were Lepchas, 4894 Bhutias, 3356 Limboos, 2921 Gurungs, 2867 Murmis, 2020 Rais Jimdar, 1963 Khambus, 1670 Kamis, 1414 Brahmins, 829 Chhetris, 901 Mangars, 727 Newars, 326 Slaves, 287 Dorjis and 521 miscellaneous including troops. The table below indicates the composition of demography of Sikkim in the early 1890s.

Table-B: 1
Showing the population of Sikkim as on 1891

Sl No	Race/Caste	Male	Female	Children	Total
1	Lepcha	2362	2399	1001	5762
2	Bhutia	1966	1960	968	4894
3	Limboo	1255	1159	942	3356
4	Gurung	1108	1047	766	2921
5	Murmi	801	778	1288	2867
6	Rai Jimdar	726	691	587	2020
7	Khambu	726	648	589	1963
8	Kami	626	464	580	1670
9	Brahmin	521	372	521	1414
10	Mangar	363	346	192	901
11	Chhetri	303	253	273	829
12	Newar	240	183	304	727
13	Slaves	124	99	103	326
14	Dorji	102	92	93	287
15	Miscellaneous including Troops	350	72	99	521
Total		11589	10563	8306	30458

Source: Risley, H H, (1894), The Gazettee of Sikkim, p. 27, Low Price Publication, Delhi-110052.

Since then there has been a rapid increase of population in Sikkim.⁶⁸ At present, the total population of Sikkim is 607688 (Census, 2001, Govt. of India). With the rapid growth of the population in Sikkim, the dominance of 'Lho-Men-Tsong' was changed in due course of time adding more diversified races, language and culture to the ethnographic composition of Sikkim.

The People of India, Sikkim, Vol-XXXIX by K S Singh (1993) enumerated altogether twenty-five tribes and communities in Sikkim. While the Report of the Commission for Review of Environmental and Social Sector, Policies, Plans and Programmes (CRESP, 2008) records different ethnic communities and tribes of Sikkim such as Bhujel, Bhutia, Bahun, Chhetri, Dewan (Yakha), Damai, Gurung, Kami, Kirat Khambu Rai, Lepcha, Limboo, Mangar, Pradhan (Newar), Jogi (Sanyasi/Giri), Sarki, Sherpa, Mukhia (Sunuwar), Tamang, and Thami. The Bhutias constitute 8.57%, Lepchas 7.94%, Limboos 9.79%, Tamangs 6.8%, Sherpas 4.45%, Mangars 2.69%, Rais 13.4%, Gurungs 5.87%, Dewans 0.003%, Jogis (Sanyasi/Giri) 0.46%, Mukhias (Sunuwar) 0.65%, Thamis 0.09%, Bhujels 0.6%, Bahuns 6.96%, Chettris 12.22%, Pradhans (Newar) 3.73%, Kamis 4.25%, Damais 1.96%, Sarkis 0.2% and others 9.34% of the total population of Sikkim. The Rai is the single largest community in Sikkim followed by the Chettris. Among the Schedule caste, Kami is the largest community followed by Damai and Sarki. The community with lowest population in Sikkim is Dewan followed by Thami.

On the basis of historical affiliation, socio-cultural and linguistic affinities and akinness of their faith and belief, these different communities and tribes can be further grouped under four different stocks viz Lepcha, Limboo, Bhutia and Nepali. The first three are more or less single entities and fourth one comprises of several castes, sub-castes and tribes. Therefore, for understanding different aspects of these different ethnic communities, brief discussion is made on each caste and community under different sub-heads.

⁶⁸ In 1901, the population of Sikkim increased to 59,014, in 1911 to 87, in 1921 to 81,721, in 1931 it went upto 109,808, 1941 to 121,520, 1951 to 1,37,725, in 1961 to 1,62,189, in 1971 to 2,09,843, 1981 to 3,16,385, in 1991 to 4,06,457 and in 2001 to 5,40,851.

The Lepchas: The Lepchas who love to call themselves as '*Mutenchi Rongkup*' are said to be the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim. Their population in Sikkim is 46174 i.e, 7.94% of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). They are mostly concentrated in Dzongu, Mangan and Kabi-Tingda in the north district, Rakdong-Tintek, Rumtek, Ranka, and Assam Lingjay in the east district, Wok and Rateypani in the south district and Dentam, Daramdin, Tashiding and Rinchenpong in the west district of Sikkim (Subba, 2008, p. 252). In the rural areas, they are mostly dependent on agriculture. Those in the urban areas are businessmen and government servants and 1.98% of Lepchas are government contractors (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p. 194). Their language called '*Rong Chhyo*' belongs to Tibeto-Burman of Sino-Tibetan family stock. It is one state official language of Sikkim recognised in 1977 by the government of Sikkim and being taught upto under-graduate level in the colleges of Sikkim. Of 46174, total population of Lepchas in Sikkim, 35728 (77.37%) of them speak Lepcha language in Sikkim.

The Lepchas, once along with the Limboos had strong hold in Sikkim but lost their control over Sikkim after the arrival of the Tibetans (Dasgupta, 1992, p. 10). The Lepchas originally belonged to the race of hunters and food-gatherers along the foothills of Great Himalayas. They lived as the free rulers of the immense forests (Sengupta, 1985, p. 54). However, different scholars put their different opinions regarding the original homeland of Lepchas. Some scholars have traced their homeland originally to be Mongolia from where they are considered to have migrated to Sikkim via Tibet and Burma through the foothills of Assam and Nepal (Sengupta, 1985, p. 53).⁶⁹ Chaudhury locates the original homeland of Lepchas to be the land in Sikkim bounded by the rivers of Teesta in the east and Rangit in the west (2006, p. 23). The Lepchas were ruled by their

⁶⁹ But the Lepchas of Sikkim do not accept this notion and consider themselves to be the original inhabitants of Sikkim.

Chieftains over the century and the first Chieftain was Turvey Panu (Siinger, 1967, pp. 26-28)⁷⁰.

The Limboos: The Limboos, one of the Kiratian races of Mongoloid physiognomy are other aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim (Wangchuk & Zulca, 2007, p. 61 and Chaudhury, 2006, p. 25). They share very close socio-cultural akinness with the Lepchas and linguistic affinity with the Bhutias of Sikkim. They are quite often called as 'Subba' and sometimes 'Tsong' by the Bhutia and Lepchas in Sikkim. They called themselves as 'Yakthungba' meaning 'Hillman' (Subba, 1999, p. 32). They inhabited the land of Sikkim along with the Lepchas (Sanyal, 1979, p. 7) even before there was Sikkim for them to live in (Sprigg, 1999, p. V). Once upon a time, the Limboos were ruled by their Chieftains called 'Thebo:ng Yakthung' but could not develop a full fledged state (Datta, 1994, p. 70). They finally along with the Lepchas lost their control over their principalities in the late medieval times when Namgyal dynasty was established in Sikkim (Sankrityayana, 1994, p. 209 & Das, 1992, p. 10). Prior to the establishment of Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim, there has been free intercourse between the Lepchas and Limboos and strong ties existed between them (Basnet, 1974, p. 16).

In the ancient time the Limboos inhabited the landmass called *Limbuwan* which encompassed the area extending right from Arun Valley in the west of present Nepal to Teesta River in the east in Sikkim, from Great Himalayas in the north to Great Indian Plains in the South (Sanyal, 1979, pp. 6-7). But when Sikkim emerged as an independent sovereign state in 1642 AD after accepting Phuntsok Namgyal as the first king of Sikkim by the Lhoree, Menree and Tsongree (Tulku,

⁷⁰ In the primitive age, the Lepchas were primarily animist like those of the Tsongs of present Sikkim. They acknowledged the existence of good and bad spirit and do lot to appease the bad one. They were superstitious and believe in witchcraft. Even today they have their priest, *Bongthing* and *Bon* generally called 'Monn' who acts as exorcist in Lepcha community and social and religious functions depending upon the nature of the rituals. The Lepchas of Sikkim at present follow three distinct religious faith and belief- animism/Hindu, Buddhism and Christianity. According to CRES Report (2008, p. 180) 84.06% are Buddhist, 12.73% Christian and 3.21% are Hindus. The Lepchas considered Kanchanjonga as their elder brother, the first creator of their mother Creator, 'Itbu Mu' (Wangchuk & Zulca, 2007, p. 29).

1991, pp. 50-55) through the formation of Council known as 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' and emergence of Nepal in 1770s under Prithvir Narayan Shah, Limbuwan was straddled into two nations viz Sikkim and Nepal (Wangchuk & Zulca, 2007, pp. 68-79). Number of Limboo villages falling within the fold of the territory of Sikkim thereafter became a part of Sikkim and Limboos of those villages coming within the fold of modern Sikkim became the bonafide and permanent citizens of Sikkimese origin (Khamdhak, 2003, pp. 276-284).

The Limboos are mostly concentrated in Singpheng, Darap, Nambu, Lungang, Lingbit, Timlon, Daramdin, Tharpu, Sombaria, Soreng, Timburbung, Khanisirbung, Samdong, Martam, Bermoik, Hee-Pangbhay, Uttarey, Lingchom, Tikject, Langang, Changay, Lungjik, Yaksum, Gerethang, Thinling, Mangsabung in the west district, Sokay and Rabitar in south district, Mangsila in the north district and Aho, Assam Lingjay, Biring and Losing in the east district. Their total population in Sikkim is 56650 (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). Their literacy rate in Sikkim is 69.94% of their own population and 9.79% of Sikkim (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p. 195).⁷¹

The Limboos have patriarchal social structure. Both male and female enjoy equal status in the family and society. Daughter cannot inherit parents' property unless she remains unmarried at parents' house and take care of them and shoulders sole responsibility of son in the family. The Limboos, though officially recorded as Hindus, yet their religion is neither Hindu nor Buddhist as Chaudhury (2006, p. 28) and Hooker (1855, p. 128) accord. Dalton (1872) records their religion as paganism (Gurung 2011, p. 127) and H H Risley (1894) as animism. But the Limboos claimed themselves to have their own religion and ancestral faith

⁷¹ By profession Limboos of Sikkim are agriculturalists (60.73%) depending mainly on their own land and land based activities. The land is owned by individual proprietors and is mostly a land owning community. Their main source of income is drawn from terrace cultivation of agricultural and horticultural crops and livestock rearing. Some are engaged themselves in government as well as in private jobs.

and belief system known as 'Yumaism' or 'Yuma Samyo' which is akin to the Bonism of ancient Tibet. The worshipping place of Limboo is called 'Manghim'.⁷²

The Limboos language 'Yakthung Sappa:n' belongs to Tibet-Burman language family. It is one of the state official languages of Sikkim recognised by the State Government in 1981 and being taught upto under-graduate level in the Government Colleges of Sikkim.⁷³ It has rich literature and independent script called 'Srijonga Script'. Out of 56650 total population of Limboos in Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim) 34292 (66.20%) of their population and 5.89% of the total population of Sikkim speak Limboo language

⁷² They are Shamanist and social functions like marriage ceremony, pre-natal worship, 'Sapok Chomen', birth purification ceremony 'Yangdang Pho:ngma' and rituals are officiated and performed by the their shamans called *Phedangmas, Sambas, Yebas* or *Yemas*. The Limboo Shamans also act as exorcist and do medications in the society.

The Limboos believe in Almighty, *Tageraningwa?phuma* who is considered to be an omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, infinite, eternal and creator of the universe and all sentient beings according to Limboo philosophy. They also *Yumamang, Okwanama, Himsamang, Sammangjyangs* and *Tapsammangs* who are believe to have supernatural power. *Yumamang* as the Limboos believe is the manifestation of *Tageraningwa?phuma*. The Limboos also believe in the nature like mountains, caves, rivers, springs, lakes etc as the manifestation of different deities and divinities and worship and propitiate them on various occasions. *Tumyanghangs* are the most respectable persons in Limboo family and society. The religions and social functions and activities are carried out under their supervision and advice. The Limboos have their own oral mythology called *Mundhums*, around which whole Limboo socio-cultural activities revolves. The Limboos hardly use Hindu priest, Pandits and those who are influenced by the Buddhist culture use monks sometimes but not always.

The Limboos have number of social and seasonal festivals; *Kokfekwa Tongnam, Sisekpa Tумыen Tongnam, Srijonga Sawan Tongnam, Bolihang Tongnam, Tongsum Tongnam* or *Chesok-Theesok* and *Yokwa* or *E:mang* observed by the Limboos. *Kokfekwa Tongnam* specially marks the beginning of New Year for Limboos. *Sisekpa Tумыen Tongnam* one of the major festivals of Limboo is celebrated in the month of *Sise:kla* (mid-July). *Srijonga Sawan Tongnam*, the birth anniversary of Tyeongsi Srijonga is observed on the full moon day of December every year. *Bolihang Tongnam*, another important social festival of Limboos falls on the new moon day of October-November. *Theesok-Chesok* or *Tongsum Tongnam*, harvest festival is celebrated during the month of November-December. While *E:mang* is the festival of worshipping nature divinities among the Limboos in the pre-involvement of agricultural activities. It is marked by the blooming of peach plant and during this, entire village men assemble on the top of the hillock and nature divinities of wind, rain, sun are invoked for the favourable season and bumper crops, avoidance of accidents, wounds, epidemics and other natural calamities.

The Limboos also bear uniqueness in their food habits, dresses, ornaments, family pattern, kinship and social organisation. Their folksongs like *Hakparay, Khyali, Pa:llam, Phungwachangma, Yehang Samlo, Tумыang Samlo, Mering Samlo, Tamkay O:kma, Samlo, etc.* and folkdances- *Kellang, Ya?rak, Tambrangay, Panthoray, Sirthapay, Kengjori, etc.* as well as the folk musical instruments clearly indicates the distinctiveness of their identity.

⁷³ Frequent use of diacritical marks, glottal stops, coda-consonants and vowel-length and placing verb at the end of sentences is the peculiarity of Limboo language.

There are altogether 279 Limboo language teachers working in the various government schools of Sikkim. In 2003, they were included in the list of Schedule Tribe.

The Bhutias: The Bhutias who addressed as '*Lhopas*' originally migrated from '*Bhot*' place of Tibet from which their tittle '*Bhutia*' has been corrupted. Their total population in Sikkim is 49873 (8.57%) of the total population of Sikkim (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, pp. 140-147). They are highly concentrated in Lachen-Mangsila and Kabi-Tingda constituencies of North district, Gangtok, Ranka, Assam-Lingjay, Rumtek, Rakdong-Tintek, Pathing, Rigu, Khamdong, Sang Martam in east district, Ralong, Kewzing, Wok, Timi-Tarku, Damthang in the south district and Yaksum, Tashiding, Geyzing, Rinchenpong in the west district of Sikkim (Subba, 2008, p. 269).

Initially, most of the Bhutias were traders and herdsmen but later on they were accustomed to cultivation (Sengupta, 1985, p. 57). In the record of Sinha (2008, p. 31), 'the Bhutias were traders, farmers and lamas searching for new land long before the 15th century for colonisation. Sikkim at that time was very sparsely inhabited by Rong (Lepchas) and Tsong (Limboos). Those grazers and Buddhists missionaries were possibly the earlier immigrant to Sikkim in search of new pastures and potential converts to their religion. The traders in the pursuit of bartering their goods followed them and farmers came in search of rich rice field called Denjong, the '*Valley of rice*'. During later half of the 15th century, an important Tibetan patriarch named Khye-Bumsa from Phari⁷⁴ came to Sikkim presented ceremonial offerings to the then Lepchas Chief, Thekong Thek and established a blood brotherhood. Meanwhile his followers and kinsmen migrated and settled in Sikkim subsequently as pastorals and traders'.

In 1642 AD, the three prominent Buddhist Chempos arrived in west Sikkim at a place Yaksum which was dispersly inhabited by the two indigenous

⁷⁴ Phari is located in Chumbi Valley, Tibet.

inhabitants, Rongs and Tsongs at that time. The three superior Buddhist monks with the core intention to spread 'Cho' installed Phuntsok Namgyal as 'Chogyal' means 'Dharma Raja'. This event marked the beginning of full control over Sikkim with an effective propagation of Buddhist dharma and culture in Sikkim. Large part of Sikkim came under the sway of Tibetan family. Since then there had have been subsequent migration of Tibetans to Sikkim in due course of time.

The Bhutias are the offshoots of 'Nyorpog-Phutsos. *Shangdarpa*, *Tsechudarpa*, *Guru Tashi* and *Nyimagyalpo*, are the descendent of Khye-Bumsa while *Bonpas*, *Gonsarpas*, *Tsungyapas*, *Namtsangtors*, *Tagchungdarpas*, *Karsorpas*, *Gyontopas* and *Topas* or *Dokhangpas* are the descendent of *Beb-Tsan-Gyat* (Subba, 2008, pp. 267-268). The twelve clans (4+8=12) of Bhutias are eligible for entrance into Pemayangtse monastery as priest (Risley, 1894, p. 28). Their language is called 'Lhokhey' and the script 'Thomi Sambota'.

The Nepalese: The fourth ethnic group which constitute the demography of Sikkim is Nepalese. It is composed of different tribes and castes with distinctive sub-cultural and linguistic stocks, considerable physical character, tradition and customs. The most important castes and communities are Rai, Manger, Tamang, Sherpa, Gurung, Bhujel, Dewan, Thami, Newar, Sunuwar, Sanyasi, Chhettri, Bahun etc. Among the low caste, there are Sarki, Damai, Kami, Majhi etc.

The Rais: The term Rai which amounts to the status of Chief is known to be a tittle given to the Khambus by Prithivir Narayan Shah after capturing their land, *Khambuwan* (Subba, 1989, p. 26). The total population of Rais in Sikkim is 77954 (13.4%) of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt of Sikkim). They are scattered all over Sikkim except in the north

district of Sikkim (Subba, 2008, p. 319). They are divided into several clans⁷⁵ and each clan have their own dialect almost intelligible to others.⁷⁶

The Mangers: The Mangers are historically recorded as one of the earlier settlers of Sikkim. They were one of the groups mentioned among those celebrating the coronation of the first Chogyal, Phuntsok Namgyal (Roy, 1980, p. 4). They share very close affinity with the Gurungs and Tamangs. Their total population in Sikkim is 15635 (2.69%) of the total population of Sikkim. Mangers mostly inhabit Kamling, Suldung, Tinzerbong, Takhuthang, Mabong, Khanisirbung, Budang, Ribdi, Barthang, Berfok, Chinthang, Bermoik, Dhupidara, Karzi, Mangnam, Norkhola in west Sikkim, Assangthang, Ahley, Mamley, Kamrang, Koteng, Magarjong, Chiyadara, Maniram, Bhanjyang, Namthang in the south, Kadamtam, Pachekhoni, Subaneydara, Rongli, Sodunglakha, Rhenock, West Pandam, Rumtek 9th Mile, Pakyong, Gangtok, Duga, Sirwani, Khamdong in the east district of Sikkim (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p. 92).

The Gurungs: The Gurungs are of Mongoloid origin. They called themselves as 'Tamu' meaning 'Thundering Sky'. In Sikkim, their population is 34130 (5.87%) of the total population of Sikkim. They are mostly concentrated in Dodok, Buriakhop, Chakung, Rinchenpong, Dentam, Sardong in the west district, Chhuba, Nagi, Borang and Pathing in the south district and Rigu in the east district of Sikkim (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, pp. 67-162). They have their own language, 'Tamu Kye' and script 'Tamu Kye Lippi'. They are divided into two branches; Char Jat and Sora Jat.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Those clans of Rai are Atharay, Bantawa, Chamling, Thulung, Kulung, Lohorung, Baying, Dungmali, Nechereng, Khaling, Chaurasaya, Rungchenbung, Dumi, Chinthang, Sangpang, Lambichong, Sotang, Thilung, Yaku, Mewahang, Puma, Waling, Khersang etc.

⁷⁶ In Rai community marriage is allowed within the same clan but the *pachha* of the girl and boy must be different.

⁷⁷ The Char Jat or Four Clan is divided into four classes; Ghole, Ghanday, Lama and Lamichanay (Sengupta, 1989, p. 43). Other Sora Jat or Sixteen Clan are Ghyabre, Kyabche, Kurumchhe, Jangre, Tharje, Dorjali, Rilami, Poju, Chormi, Pom, Thim, Migi, Khatra Yog, Paingi, Kholali, Sogun and Thorjami. The Char Jat has a superior social status to Sora Jat (Subba, 1989, p. 43 and Subba, 2008, p. 357).

The Tamangs: The Tamangs belong to Mongoloid racial stock. The word Tamang means 'Horse Trader' in Tibetan language. They are also called as 'Murmi' or 'Dhamang', 'Ishang' and 'Sain' (Subba, 1989, pp. 43-45). Like the Gurungs and Sunuwars, Tamangs also have hierarchical division of their thars or clans which is divided into two groups- 'Bara Jat' or twelve clans and 'Athara Jat' or eighteen clans. The former enjoy the higher social status over the later, 'Athara Jat' or eighteen clans (Sengupta, 1985, p. 59). In Sikkim, they are mostly concentrated in and around the area of Teesta and Rangit Valleys of west, south and east Sikkim. In the west, they are concentrated in Soreng, Rinchenpong and Chakung, in the east, Central Pandam, Assam Lingjay, Ranka and Gangtok and south, Namthang, Jorethang, Melli, Ratepani, Damthang and Timi-Tarku (Subba, 2008, p. 365). Their total population in Sikkim is 39523 i.e, 6.8% of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). They were included in the list of Schedule Tribe in 2003 along with the Limboos.

The Sherpas: The Sherpas are of Tibetan origin of Mongoloid race. Originally, they inhabited eastern part of 'Kham' region of Tibet. This is the reason why they are called Sherpas which means 'the people of the east' in Tibetan language. They have very close cultural and religious affinity with the Tibetans, Bhutias and Drukpas. Most of them are Buddhist. Their total population in Sikkim is 25894 (4.45%) of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). They are mostly concentrated in Ribdi, Bhareng, Okhray, Upper Rumbuk, Bega, Upper Bermoik, Siribadam, Singling and Buriakhop in the west district, Ralong, Nayabasty, Damthang, Wok and Parbing in the south district, Regu, Pathing and Khamdong in the east district and Kabi-Tingda in the north district of Sikkim (Subba, 2008, p. 281).⁷⁸

The Mukhias: The Mukhias are also known as 'Sunuwars' by other name. The Mukhia title is believed to have been conferred to them by Prithivir Narayan Shah.

⁷⁸ They have their own language, recognised as one of the state official languages and is being taught upto primary level in the schools of Sikkim. They use Tibetan script.

The Sunuwars called themselves as 'Koinch'. They are divided into two hierarchical clans; Bara Thars or Twelve Clans and Das Thars or Ten Clans. There is not much of social difference between the members of two groups of clan and intermarriage is permissible among them (Subba, 1989, p. 42). The Sunuwar in Sikkim are numerically less with only 3795 (0.65%) total population. They inhabit Nandu Gaon, Chumbung, Ongchu, Geyzing, Rinchenpong, Khechopalri, Rameng, Maj Rameng, Tingmu, Kitam, Polok, Tinjir, Najitam, Tirkulan, Chandmari, Rongyek and Burtuk (Subba, 2008, p. 340). They have their own language, 'Koinchlo' belonging to Tibeto-Burman family. Their language is one of the state official languages of Sikkim and is taught upto primary level (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p. 56).

The Dewans: The Dewans or Yakha are the descendents of Kirats. They share their close affinity with Rais and Limboos in terms of cultural and social way of life. Not much is known about the Dewans of Sikkim. They are in negligible demographic size in Sikkim. Their total population in Sikkim is just 193, i.e, 0.03% of Sikkim's total population (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). They are found in Ghum Yakha Village in south district and Tadong in the east district of Sikkim (Subba, 2008, p. 332).⁷⁹

The Bhujels: The Bhujels also called 'Khawas' or 'Ghati' are very less in number i.e, 3516 (0.6%) of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). They are found mostly in Daramdin, Salangdang and Soreng in West Sikkim district, Ghum-Kitam, Turuk, Tokal, Bermoik in the south district and Jitlang, Pakyong, Rhenock and Tadong in the east district of Sikkim. The Bhujels speak Nepali language and they are not known to have their own language (Subba, 2008, p. 45).

The Jogis: The Jogis are called Sanyasis by other name meaning 'Saint'. The total population in Sikkim is 2725 constituting 0.46 % of Sikkim's total population (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). They are found in

⁷⁹ The name of their organisation is Akhil Kirat Dewan (Yakha) Sangh (Subba, 2008, p. 332).

Rhenock, Central Pandam in east Sikkim, Upper Bermoik, Dorong, Hatidhunga, Kamling, Rinchenpong, Lingchom, Soreng and Tatopani in west district, Jorethang and Ralong in south Sikkim (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p. 170).

The Thamis: The Thamis are one of the several communities of Nepali constellation. In Sikkim, they are thinly populated and are scattered in all the districts of Sikkim. Their total population in Sikkim is 503 constituting 0.09% of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). Most of the Thamis live in Rhenock, Rongli, Sang Martam and around Gangtok (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p. 114 & 256). Linguistically, they share very close affinity with Rais and socio-religiously with the Tamangs. Their main occupation is agriculture. Most of them are landless (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p. 114). The Thamis are divided into Rishmi, Angkami, Dolakhe, Dumpali, Ishirishmi, Dangurishmi, Shirishmi etc (Subba, 1989, p. 41).

The Newars: The Newars generally referred to as 'Pradhan' are supposed to be the inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley. Religion-wise, they are divided into Shivamargis of Hindus and Buddhamargis of Buddhist (Subba, 1989, p. 34). In Sikkim, there are few numbers of Newar Christians alongside of Newar Hindus and Buddhist (Subba, 2008, pp. 420-421). The total population of Newar in Sikkim is 21713 (3.73%) of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-06, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim).⁸⁰

The Bahun-Chettris: The Bahun-Chettris are the main component of Nepali constellation. They belong to the Aryan stock. They share very close kinship with Kamis, Damais, Majhis and Sarkis of Aryan race in terms of culture, religion,

⁸⁰ They are mostly concentrated in Melli, Namthang, Jorethang and Timi-Tarku in the south district, Regu, Rhenock, Central Pandam, Gangtok, Ranka, Rumtek, Sang Martam and Khamdong in the east district, Soreng, Daramdin Dentam, Geyzing in the west district (Subba, 2008, p. 412). The Newars are mostly businessmen.

language and physical appearance. The Bahun-Chettris belong to the higher caste while rest three castes belong to low caste (Gurung & Lama, 2004, p. 282).⁸¹

Bahuns are Brahmins among the Nepalis. They are major groups Saraswati, Kanyakubja, Gaud, Maithil, and Utkal Bahun. The names are adopted after the place of origin (Subba, 1989, p. 30). Saraswati Bahuns have migrated from river Saraswati, Kanyakubja from Kannauj, Gaud from Bengal, Maithil from Mithila and Utkal Bahun from Orissa. The five major divisions are further grouped into Purbia and Kumai (Gurung & Lama, 2004, pp. 282-283).⁸² On the basis of social hierarchy, Bahuns of different clans are divided into Upadhaya Bahun and Joshi Bahun (Subba, 1989, pp. 30-31). The former teaches the principle of Hindus Vedas and latter studies astrology or Jotish (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p. 50). The Bahuns in Sikkim are 40483 (6.96%) of the total population of Sikkim (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p. 126).

The Chettri is a corrupted form of the Sanskrit word 'Khatriya' which refers to a fighting class (Subba, 1989, p.32). In Sikkim, they are second largest single community next to Rais community. Their total population in Sikkim is 71089 (12.22%) of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). Their main language is Nepali and the script used by them is Dewnagari. The Chettris are divided into Adhikari, Baniya, Basnet, Bista, Bohra, Bura or Burakothi, Gharti, Karki, Khada, Khatri, Khulal, Mahal, Rant, Rana, Roka, Thapa etc. Each of the clans are divided into several sub-clans (Subba, 1989, pp. 33-34).

⁸¹ The Brahmins, in the ancient times, were professionally priests or Brahmins and Chhettris were the defenders of the administration. The two social sects are believed to have become Bahuns and Chhettris of present Nepali society.

⁸²The Purbia Bahuns are of several clans such as Acharya, Aryal, Adhikari, Baral, Baskota, Bastola, Bhandari, Bhatta, Dhital, Dhungel, Chamlagain, Chapagain, Dahal, Debkota, Dhakal, Ghimire, Gotame, Guragain, Kharel, Khanal, Lamichhane, Nepal, Neupaney, Ojha, Parajuli, Paudyel, Pokhrel, Purtel, Regmi, Rimal, Risal, Sigdel, Silwal, Subedi and Timilsina and the Kumai Bahuns are Bhatta, Bista, Dotel, Joshi, Khatiwada, Lohini, Pankey, Pant Upreti etc.

The Kami, Damai and Sarki (Schedule Castes): The Kami, Damai and Sarki are single most untouchables castes. They have Aryan features and considerable cultural affinity with Bahun-Chettris (Subba, 1989, p. 48).

The Kamis, also called as *Biswakarma* are blacksmith by profession. The term 'Kami' is believed to have originated from 'Kamuannu' meaning to earn (Subba, 1989, p. 49) or make things (Gurung & Lama, 2004, p. 284). Their total population in Sikkim is 24721 (4.25%) of the Sikkim's total population. They mostly inhabit the areas of south, east and west districts of Sikkim (Subba, 2008, p. 396). They are divided into Khati, Gajmer, Kalikotay, Rijal, Mangranti, Ghatani, Lohar, Tiriwa, Baraily, Sapkota, Sashankar, Diyali, Dural, Lahagum etc. (Gurung & Lama, 2004, p.284).

The Damais are tailors by occupation. The term 'Damai' is derived from the word 'Damaha' the chief musical instrument of the 'Damai' (Subba, 1989, p. 49). They are musicians who lead the marriage procession and play those musical instruments in any auspicious functions. Their population in Sikkim is 11370 (1.96%) of the total population of Sikkim. They are scattered all over the district of Sikkim. They are divided into Sundas, Das, Pariyar, Bagdas, Mothey, Ranpaheli, Sewa, Darnal, Karkidoli, Bhitrikoti, Suji, Thingmong, Maley, Bardewa, Labar, Thatal, Naubag, Ghimiray etc. (Subba, 2008, p. 398 and Gurung & Lama, 2004, p.285).

The Sarkis are Nepali cobblers and concerned with the work of animal leathers. Their population in Sikkim is 1157 (0.2%) of the total population of Sikkim. They are found rarely in all the districts of Sikkim. Like the other castes, they are also divided into several clans Dukroka, Mungranti, Rurkuti, Khilinge, Bogeti, Achani, Tokangi, Roka, Mijar, Lamjel, Rumtel (CRESP, Govt. of Sikkim, 2008, p.100 and Gurung & Lama, 2004, p.285). Of the three castes, Kami is considered to be superior to Damai and Sarki. The three are treated as Schedule Caste in Sikkim. Special privileges such as reservation of seats in Sikkim Legislative Assembly,

higher educational institutions and government services are provided by the government.

Majhis are also one of the communities recorded in K S Singh's '*The People of India, Sikkim*' (1993). But in the account of CRESP Report of 2008, Government of Sikkim they have been left out. Their population in Sikkim is 466 (0.14%) of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim).⁸³ They are concentrated in a few localities like Majhigaon near Jorethang of south district and Majhitar near Rangpo of east district of Sikkim. They mostly lived in the river banks of the Rangit and Teesta; a warm region with moderate rainfall. The language of Majhi is not so far known but they use Nepali language for the communication. They have a single thar called 'Kusuwar' which is an endogamous unit. The nuclear family is very common to the Majhis. They are superior to the Kami, Damai and Sarki but inferior to the other communities in the social status (Gangopadhyay, 1993, pp. 12-117).

There are other communities like Bihari, Marwari and others who constitute about 9.34% of the total population of Sikkim (Socio-Economic Census, 2005-2006, DESME, Govt. of Sikkim). These communities have been residing in Sikkim since long back and have socio-cultural and religious ties with the people of Sikkim. They are mainly businessmen by profession and are mostly concentrated in the urban areas.

II

THE SSP GOVERNMENT AND THE LIMBOOS OF SIKKIM

The Tsongs (Limboos) are one of the indigenous inhabitants of Sikkim. The phrase '*Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum*' and other historical records go on to prove this fact. The Limboos are neither Nepalis by ethnicity and indigeneity nor Hindus by religion. Historically, linguistically and culturally they share close affinity with the Lepchas

⁸³ The word '*Majhi*' means boat driving which have been corrupted from their profession.

and Bhutias of Sikkim. As such, they are a separate ethnic community with distinct identity. But despite of this fact, they were denied and deprived of genuine political rights and economic benefits. They are the worst sufferers and victims even after Sikkim's merger with the Indian Union. Their 'Tsong Seat' granted by the Chogyal of Sikkim in 1966 was abolished in 1973 and clubbed with the Nepalis. When Schedule Tribe and Schedule Caste (Sikkim) Order, 1978 was implemented in Sikkim they were left out. While the Bhutia-Lepchas who were also the members of 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' had been granted 13 seats reserved for them in the Sikkim Assembly and in 1978, they were included in the list of Schedule Tribe.⁸⁴ So this is the reason why the case of Limboo is taken up separately for discussion in section II. Secondly, till date no study has been made on the Limboos' struggle for ST status and restoration of the seats in the Sikkim Assembly despite of their strong historical, linguistic, religious and cultural hold deeply rooted into the soil and history of Sikkim.

LIMBOOS IN SIKKIM IN PRE-SSP ERA

According to the agreement, 'Lho-Men-Tsong-sum', the 'threesome', Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo were supposed to be the members of the same family. The Bhutia was considered to be a father, Lepcha a mother and Limboo a son. Through the council, called 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' the kingdom of Sikkim was to be ruled. They all equally had to be represented in the council. They were not supposed to fight among themselves. If one tribe thinks ill of any other tribes, the culprit was to be vexed by the promise (Gurung, 1985, pp. 69-74). The main reason behind this agreement was to establish 'Communicracy' and consolidate unity and co-operation among the Lhoree (Bhutias), Menree (Lepchas) and Tsongree (Limboos) who inhabited Sikkim at that time (Kazi, 1983, pp. 1-29 & Basnet, 1974, p. 16).

But the policy of the successive Chogyals of Sikkim towards the Limboos was sometimes ambiguous. Sometimes, the Chogyals of Sikkim treated the

⁸⁴In other words, they were politically protected and economically benefited.

Limboos as original inhabitants of Sikkim with reference to '*Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum*' and sometimes discriminated against because of cultural and linguistic reasons and differences (Gurung, 2011, p.208). Sometimes they (Limboos) were clubbed with the Bhutia-Lepchas with the use of popular expression '*Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum*' and sometimes with Nepalis in terms of revenue or tax payment. So, the Limboos did not receive equal treatment from the successive rulers of Sikkim as the Bhutias and Lepchas received from the Chogyals of Sikkim. Even there is no record of Limboos being appointed as Dzongpans (Governors) as well as Kalons (ministers) like that of the Lepchas and Bhutias in the Royal Palace. They were granted mere Decrees '*Lahalmor*' permitting the Limboo chiefs to look after the affairs of their '*thums*', administrative centres and to use their customary drums like *Negra* (royal kettle drum) and *Kay* (Chyabrung) while observing their religious gathering, rituals and festivals (Gurung, 1985, pp. 69-74). According to the oral history narrated by Yap Sonam Yongda, a famous social worker and founding Chairman of Moyal Liang Trust (MLT), the Limboos during the time of Tensung Namgyal (1670-1700) were even '*Charinangmoos*' of the Royal Palace.⁸⁵

In 1917, when Revenue Order No 1 was implemented, the Limboos were not protected as one of the members of the Chogyal's citizens. They were unequally treated with Bhutia-Lepchas but at par with the Nepalis and had to pay higher revenue (Gurung, 2011, p. 129). Even when the Sikkim State Council was constituted in 1925, none of the Limboos were included in the Sikkim Council. In 1952, the Darbar of Sikkim introduced Parity System according to which, 6 seats were allotted to the Bhutia-Lepchas and 6 seats to the Nepalis in the Sikkim State Council. But no seat was allotted to the Limboos of Sikkim. Henceforth, the Limboos continuously made representations and put constant pressure upon the Chogyal of Sikkim for the grant of '*Tsong Seat*' in the Sikkim State Council reiterating the historical record of the treaty '*Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum*' and aboriginality of Limboos of Sikkim.

⁸⁵ The word '*Charinangmoo*' in the statement of Yap Yongda means '*pro-national as well as loyal of the Palace*'.

In 1958, in due respect and recognition of their historical records, the Chogyal of Sikkim nominated Indra Prasad Tsong as a Tsong councillor to represent the Limboos in the Sikkim Council. In 1961, on the basis of the Tripartite Agreement 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' the Limboos were provided citizenship⁸⁶ through the Sikkim Subject Certificate along with the Sikkimese Bhutias and Lepchas (Sikkim Government Notification No 5/277/61, dated: 3rd July 1961, Rao, 1978, Datta, 1994, Kharel, 2002, p. 33). In 1966 under the Royal Proclamation, the Twelfth Chogyal of Sikkim, Palden Thendup Namgyal, provided the Tsongs (Limboos) one separate seat, 'Tsong Seat' in Sikkim Council for the restoration of their political rights and protection of their distinct identity (Sikkim Darbar Gazette, Gangtok, 21st December, 1966). Therefrom, Harka Dhoj Tsong became the councillor to represent the Limboos in the Sikkim Council in 1967. This change, however, was not welcomed by the leaders of Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim State Congress and was constantly objected to by them. In counter, the Chogyal Palden Thendup Namgyal reiterated that the Tsongs were not Nepalis and in fact they were separate and distinct identity in themselves since ancient times, as such they were granted a 'Tsong Seat' (Kazi, 1983, pp. 1-29). In 1968, after the Chogyal's approval on 11th March, 1967, teaching of Limboo language in the schools of Sikkim was also started as an optional subject upto class-II (Notification No 36/62/990/Edu 11th March 1968).⁸⁷ The Committee consisting of five members under the Chairmanship of Queen, Hope Cook was also constituted to study the deficiency of the Limboo text book in Sikkim (Subba, 2005, pp.3-12).

The separate seat for the Tsongs (Limboos) in the Sikkim Council continued to remain until it was abolished on 8th May 1973 when a tripartite agreement was signed between the Chogyal of Sikkim, the leaders of the major political parties of Sikkim and the Government of India. Thereafter, the Limboos were merged with Nepalis. While abolishing the 'Tsong Seat' none of the Limboo was consulted or no consent of the Limboo was taken. This undemocratic act of

⁸⁶ The status of aboriginality, i.e, aadibashi haak in Nepali language.

⁸⁷ Within six years of duration (1968-1974), altogether 9 Limboo language teachers were appointed.

abolishing 'Tsong Seat' paved the way for the gradual erosion and dilution of Limboos' distinct identity.

The act of clubbing the Tsongs with the Nepali community became indigestible. They were of the opinion that the Limboos of Sikkim are separate and distinct community with strong historical, linguistic, religious and cultural aspects deeply rooted into the soil and history of Sikkim. Thus submergence of Limboos with Nepalis was against their interest. As a reaction of this, in 23rd May, 1973, Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limbu Chumlung (ASKLC) was established at Tharpu, West Sikkim. In its first meeting held on 19th July 1973 at Soreng Bazar, West Sikkim, under the Chairmanship of Harka Dhoj Tsong, the Chumlung passed a resolution declaring that the 'Tsongs (Limboos) were not Nepalis but one of the indigenous tribes of Sikkim' (Gurung, 2011, pp. 129-131 and Chaudhury, 2006, p. 25). Since then Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limbu Chumlung time and again kept on highlighting the concept of historical testimony, 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' and vocalising their aspirations and demands.

On 19th August 1973 under the Presidentship of Badhu Lepcha a general meeting of 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' was held at Gangtok and following declarations were made in favour of the Limboos.

'Before the inception of Chogyal Phuntsok Namgyal and its Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim, Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum were the original inhabitants of Sikkim as proved by the history of Sikkim. But due to the manipulation, self centred and one sided policy of Thikadars and political leaders the Tsong (Limboo) community was downtrodden in the political, social, educational and other fields. We expressed our concern to declare that Tsong community is also one of the original communities of Sikkim. The meeting further appeal that the original communities of Sikkim and for the integrity of the three communities let our brotherhood remain strong.'

As per the Revenue Act No: 1 of 1917, the land belonging to the Bhutia-Lepcha cannot be purchased by the other communities. Similarly under the above Act, the law should be made in such a way that the land of the Tsong community cannot be sold to the other communities. However, three communities can purchase land among themselves. Thus the resolution is passed.

The resolution was adopted that the political, social, education, culture, language and literature of Bhutia, Lepchas and Limboo should establish its own institution and render possible assistance in order to develop and remain committed and forwarding.

The resolution passed that in the newly constituted Assembly, seats should be obtained by Limboos of the state. The Tsong, Limboo, Subba, Yakthungba are the same community. Yu-Tsong and Khor-Tsong are surname given to cause fraction within Limboo community. Thus the meeting strongly oppose it and resolution is hereby passed that above community are same community' (Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum ko ghosana Patra, 19th August, 1973).

In April 1974, the General Election to the Sikkim Assembly was held for the first time on the basis of 'one man one vote' according to the 8th May Agreement of 1973 and Representation of Sikkim Subject Act of February 1974 of the Chogyal of Sikkim. In the election, 16 seats each were kept reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepali respectively in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. But no separate seat for the Tsongs (Limboos) was allocated.

In connection with seat reservation and tribal status, the Limboos of Sikkim on 15th June, 1976 submitted a memorandum to the President of India, New Delhi claiming; *'the Limboos of Sikkim are one of the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim having their own distinct culture, tradition, religion and language'*. It was further stated, *'Limboos of Sikkim along with the Bhutia and Lepchas have accepted and installed Phuntsok Namgyal as the first king of Sikkim and very name of Sikkim originated from the two Limboo words- 'Su' and 'Khim' meaning new house'* (Memorandum submitted to the President of India by Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung, dated: 15th June 1976).

In the representation, they requested the Indian Government to consider the Limboos of Sikkim as one of the backward classes and make allotment of necessary fund for their upliftment, reservation of seats and scholarships for higher studies in both within and outside the state, reservation of seats in Government services with relaxation in age and qualification, reservation of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly for their adequate representation, alienation of agricultural land as done in the tribal areas of other states and extend facilities for a minimum period of 20 years at the initial stage (Memorandum submitted to

the President of India by Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung, Dated: 15th June, 1976).

In response to the representation made by the Limboos of Sikkim to the President of India, Director General (BCW) O K Moorthy, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India wrote a letter to T S Gyaltsen, Chief Secretary of Sikkim stating; *'there is another primitive tribe namely the Limboos who have social affinity with the Lepchas and some of them are animists. The Limboos have been mentioned as autochthonous inhabitants of Sikkim and are sometime considered as Limbuwan Lepchas as is in the case of muglan Lepchas from Darjeeling District. The status of the Limboos will have to be spelt out clearly and if necessary they may be grouped with Lepcha and their entry could be Lepcha-Limboo'* (Letter from the Director General (BCW), O K Moorthy, Ministry of Home Affairs to the Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, dated: 21st July, 1976, No. 12016/24/ 75-SCTV).

On October 17th 1977, Akhil Bharatya Kirat Limboo Chumlung held a meeting at Singtam. In the meeting, two main issues; reservation of four seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly for those belonging to the Limboo community and official status for the Limboo language were raised (An Express Reporter, 3rd December, 1977). Following this, the said Chumlung on 31st October 1977 submitted representation to the Chief Election Commissioner, Government of India when came to Gangtok, Sikkim. On 5th November 1977, the Governor of Sikkim, Bipin Behari Lall also wrote the Central counterpart T C A Srinivasavaradan, Government of India demanding restoration of seats reserved earlier for the Limboos in Sikkim Legislative Assembly in concurrence to Article 371F (f) of the Indian Constitution. The letter reads:

'The Tsongs/Limboos/ Subbas of Sikkim are well defined community who have their own language, oral as well as written and have a distinct culture, customs and tradition which are not exactly similar as to the rest of the Nepali community. It was apparently in recognition of their separate identity that a Proclamation was issued on 21st December 1966 relating to the election and composition of the Sikkim Council provided for one seat in the Council being reserved for the Tsongs. This reservation of one seat in the Sikkim Council for the Tsongs was maintained in the Proclamation of 31st December, 1969 also. However, for some unknown reason, in the Government of Sikkim Act of 1974 under which the present Assembly was

elected there was no provision for the reservation of any seat in favour of the Tsongs.

The Tsong/Subba/Limboo community has the strength of about 50000 in the state. Educationally, economically and socially however they are a very backward community and in my opinion, they need protection and encouragement in order to bring them to the level of other communities in Sikkim within a reasonable period of time. Article 371 F. (f) of the Constitution lays down that 'Parliament may for the propose of protecting the rights and interests of the different sections of the population on Sikkim make provision for the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the State of Sikkim which may be filled by candidates belonging to such section and for delimitation of the assembly constituencies form which candidates belonging to such section alone may stand for election to the Legislative Assembly of the state of Sikkim'.

Reservation of some seats for the Limboos/Tsongs/Subbas can apparently be made under this provision and such reservation in my opinion, will be thoroughly justified, particularly in view of the fact that both in the 1966 and the 1969 Proclamation, relating to election to the Sikkim Council the need for some reservation in favour of the Tsongs/Limboos/Subbas was considered necessary. A copy each of the Proclamation of 1966 and 1969 are also enclosed already for reference' (Letter written by the former Governor of Sikkim, B B Lall to T C A Srinivasavaradan on 5th November 1977).

On 1st February 1978, the delegation led by the President of Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung called on the Prime Minister of India, Maroji Desai in New Delhi and submitted a memorandum demanding to accord recognition of Limboos as a Schedule Tribe and reserve at least four seats of the 32 Sikkim Legislative Assembly seats. The delegation also met the President of India, N Sanjiva Reddy and presented the memorandum incorporating similar demands (Indian Express, 2nd Feb, 1978 & Hindustan Times, 2nd Feb, 1978). On 18th May 1978, two-man delegation representing the Limboo community of Sikkim met the Home Minister, H M Patel and demanded that four seats be reserved for the Limboos in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. The representation stated:

'the Limboos of Sikkim were not part of Nepali community but actually were an ethnic minority tribal community having a separate language, script, culture customs and tradition' (Hindustan Times, May 18th 1978).

In 1978; Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe (Sikkim) Order was implemented in Sikkim. But unfortunately, the Limboos were not included despite of their continuous effort and demand for their recognition and inclusion in the said list. They were left out although the central government and the Governor intended to recognise and include them in the list of Schedule Tribe. They, along with the Bhutia and Lepcha, could have been included in the list of Scheduled Tribes under ST and SC (Sikkim) Order of 1978, but were excluded for some unknown reason. However, other communities such as Sherpas, Drukpas, Chumbipas, Yalmos, Tibetans, Kagatay, Tromopas and Dophthapas who were Buddhist by religion were recognised as Schedule Tribes under ST and SC Order (Sikkim), 1978.

The Presidential Ordinance seeking to amend the Representation of People Act 1950 and 1951 was issued in 1979 and accordingly allocation of seats in the Sikkim Assembly took place. The 16 each seats which were reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas and Nepalis were rearranged. The 16 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas were reduced to 13 including 1 Sangha seat. The Eight communities Sherpa, Drukpas, Chumbipas, Yalmos, Tibetans, Kagatay, Tromopas and Dophthapas were brought within the fold of Bhutias for both economic benefit and political share. The 16 seats which were reserved for the Nepalis was increased to 17 and left unreserved as General seats and 2 seats were allocated for the Schedule castes. But no separate seat for the Limboos was allocated for their political safeguard. Thus, the Limboos were neither provided any separate seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly under People's Representation Act 1950 and 1951 in 1979 nor included in the list of Schedule Tribe in 1978. They were deprived of both political rights and economic benefits. In 1976, the Central Home Ministry had asked for clarification from the Kazi Government as to why the Tsongs (Limboos) could not be included in the list of Schedule Tribe of Sikkim, but still then Kazi was reluctant to recommend the Limboos as one of the Schedule Tribes

of Sikkim (Gurung, 2011, p. 130).⁸⁸ This ultimately resulted to a great predicament among the Tsongs (Limboos) of Sikkim. The Limboos of Sikkim, restlessly through various forums and organisations kept constantly demanding for their inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe and restoration of their seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

The Sikkimese Tsongs were disappointed with the attitude and administration of Kazi. For the Tsongs Kazi was a mere hijacker of democracy rather than the architect of it. For the sake of democracy the Tsong seat was abolished on 8th May 1973 and Kazi himself was one of the signatories when the Tripartite Agreement was signed between the Chogyal, the Government of India and the leaders of the three major political parties of Sikkim on that particular event. Furthermore, during five years of his rule in Sikkim, he did never honour the aspirations and urges of Limboos and was reluctant to include the Tsongs in the list of Schedule Tribe in 1978. It was during his regime, that Sikkim became a part of the Indian Union in 1975 and 16 seats reserved for Nepalis including the Tsongs in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly was abolished and 16 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha was reduced to 13 including 1 Sangha seat in 1979.

In April 1979, the election to the Sikkim Assembly was held. Sikkim Janata Parishad led by Bhandari won 16 of the 32 seats and formed the government with the support of one Sangha candidate, Lachen Gomchen Rimpoche. During the election, the Bhutia-Lepcha and Limboo votes had been very crucial for the victory of Bhandari; firstly, Bhandari had fought an election on anti-merger plank which was supported by the majority of Bhutia-Lepchas, especially royal families and secondly Bhandari had contested and won from Soreng constituency which was a Limboo dominated area in west Sikkim.

⁸⁸ During Kazi led government rule (1974-1979), only teaching of Limboo language which was started upto class II during the reign of Chogyal was further upgraded to VII.

After the formation of the government, Limboo, Bhutia and Lepcha languages received good deal and witnessed rapid growth and development in Sikkim. In 1980, Textbooks on these three languages were prepared up to the standard of Class VIII and teaching of these languages was started in the same year in the schools of Sikkim. In 1981, Limboo language was recognized as one of the state official languages of Sikkim by the Government of Sikkim (Notification No 6/LD/81). The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) also accepted and introduced Limboo as one of the core subject for the class IX and X in the government schools of Sikkim in 1981. On 3rd March 1983, All India Radio, Gangtok started broadcasting Limboo songs and news bi-weekly composite programme for 15 minutes. In the same year, December 1983, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), New Delhi introduced Limboo language as core subject for class XI from academic session 1984 and class XII in 1985 (Notification No D.D.No academic 11/F1 (2) 83/49983). In 1984, Limboo script was selected for National Award and Sanchaman Limboo then the Minister for Education, Health and Social Welfare of Sikkim was conferred the award for designing the Limboo letter.

We have seen that, since 1973, the Limboos of Sikkim had been continuously demanding for their inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe and for restoration of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. As a reaction of the abolition of Limboos' seat on 8th May Agreement 1973, Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung (ASKLC) was established at Tharpu, West Sikkim on May 23rd 1973 and the first meeting of the Chumlung was held on 19th July 1973 at Soreng Bazar, West Sikkim declaring that the Tsongs (Limboos) 'were not Nepalis but one of the indigenous tribes of Sikkim' (Gurung, 2011, pp. 129-131 and Chaudhury, 2006, p. 25). Since then, time and again Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung kept on highlighting the concept of historical testimony, 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' and vocalising their aspirations and demands of Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe and restoration of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. On 11th March 1980, Sikkim Legislative Assembly was summoned to discuss the 45th Amendment Bill, 1980 seeking to validate the Presidential Ordinance of 1979.

During this session, Dorjee Tshering Bhutia of Ranka constituency raised the issue relating to the Limboos of Sikkim and demanded their inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe. While P L Gurung stressed on the need to include only the genuine Sikkimese in the ST/SC list of Sikkim (Gurung, 2011, p. 278). By virtue of being representative from the Limboo dominated Assembly constituency, Soreng since 1979, Bhandari time to time raised the issue of Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe from 1981. However, on the other, he remained quite silent regarding the issue of Limboos' seat reservation in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

On 14th November 1981, the Limboo representation consisting of sixty signatories including three Limboo MLAs of Sikkim submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India (Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India, dated: 5th November 1981) through the Chief Minister of Sikkim. Nar Bahadur Bhandari took the issue very seriously and forwarded the representation to the Prime Minister of India, Indra Gandhi. It read:

'The Limboos do constitute a sizable portion of the population of the state. It is true that there is certainly strong historical date to show that the Tsongs or the Limboos of Sikkim were one of the earlier tribes of this state. The mention of 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' to bear out the earlier close ties between Bhutias, Lepchas and Limboos (Tsongs) in the representation is yet a clear undeniable indication. That the Limboos or Tsongs were given separate reservation in the pre' 74 elections in Sikkim is based on the fact of this community's distinct and older ethnic background in Sikkim. It is quite true that the Limboos are not well placed educationally in Government services and in other spheres as mentioned in the representation. In the circumstances this representation from the Limboos of Sikkim deserves most sympathetic and favourable consideration from Government of India' (Letter of the CM of Sikkim to the PM of India relating to the demand for Scheduled Tribe Status by Limboos of³ Sikkim, dated: 14th November, 1981). This initiative of Bhandari indicated his willingness and possible attitude towards Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe.

On 29th July 1983, the Prime Minister of India, Indra Gandhi had visited Sikkim. In the evening of the same day the Limboos of Sikkim submitted a memorandum to her in the Rajbhawan requesting her to recommend Limboos'

inclusion in the Schedule Tribe (Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister, Indra Gandhi by the delegates of Limboos, dated: 29th July, 1983). The Government of Sikkim also submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India which contained 5 points such as; Restoration of Seats in the Sikkim Assembly for the Bhutia-Lepchas and Nepalis, Grant of citizenship to the stateless persons, Delimitation of the Constituencies, Economic Programme and Peoples' faith in Congress (I) leadership. However the issue of Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe was not mentioned in the memorandum (Memorandum submitted by the Government of Sikkim to the Prime Minister of India, Indra Gandhi dated; 29th July 1983). With regards to the Tsong (Limboo) seat in the Assembly, the Chief Minister submitted a memorandum demanding the restoration of seats both for the Tsongs and Nepalis which was unanimously approved in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly on September 1983. The copy of the same proposal was also sent to the then Minister of the State for Home Affairs, Nihar Ranjan Laskar. Following this on 14th December 1983, the concerned Minister informed the Lok Sabha stating that *'there have been proposals for the reservation of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly for the Tsongs and Nepalis communities of Sikkimese origin which had been passed and approved in the State Assembly'* (Gurung, 2011, p. 279).⁸⁹

THE LIMBOOS UNDER THE SSP REGIME

Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) which emerged as one of the strongest regional political party in Sikkim after 24th March 1984, made a historic comeback in the Lok Sabha election of December 1984 winning the lone Lok Sabha seat with a

⁸⁹ Since the merger of Sikkim to the Indian Union, the issues like merger of Sikkim, Bill No 79, Rights of the Sikkimese vis-a-vis Non-Sikkimese, Son of the Soil Policy, issue of citizenship and reservation of seats continued to dominate the political arena of Sikkim. After the BJP government assumed power in 1979, the whole administrative structure of Sikkim was reorganised. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) which was set up in 1973 was replaced with the Sikkim Armed Police (SAP). Considerable reduction was made for the central government officials on deputation to Sikkim. Even the name of the Sikkim Janata Parishad was changed to Sikkim Parishad to keep the distinct identity of Sikkim and party. Bhandari was also extremely critical of plainsmen being a Governor of Sikkim. This resulted in the growth of bitterness between B B Lal, the Governor of Sikkim and Bhandari, the Chief Minister of Sikkim.

thumping majority. This victory of Bhandari confirmed that in the state politics of Sikkim local issues and regional parties mattered more importantly than that of the national issues and national political parties.

During the third Assembly election of March 1985, the SSP had raised issues such as restoration of seats in the Sikkim Assembly for the Bhutia-Lepchas and Nepali including the Tsongs, grant of citizenship for the people rendered stateless in Sikkim, preservation of local identity and implementation of son of the soil policy, constitutional recognition of Nepali language, to maintain cordial Centre-State relations (SSP, Election Manifesto, 1984, pp. 1-10), fixation of 1970 as the cut off year for granting of citizenship and amendment of the provision of the constitution which justifies the dismissal of the state government by the governor on one's pleasure (Gurung, 2011, p. 238). Hence, here it is worth mentioning that Bhandari in the election manifesto (1984) of SSP did neither mention Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe nor reservation of their seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. It only promised to launch various schemes and programmes for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes which included both the Bhutia and Lepchas of Sikkim since 1978 (SSP, Election Manifesto, 1984, P. 7). There was a vast difference between old and new Parishad.⁹⁰ The SJP and SSP greatly differed on political issues and stands. Though the formation of the new Parishad (SSP) over the old Parishad (SJP) was just like changing a bottle with the same wine. However the dropping of the issues like inclusion of the Limboos in the list of Schedule Tribe's and reservation of seats for them in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly and anti-merger of Sikkim in the election manifesto of SSP (1985) indicated a shift in Bhandari's in the 1985's general Assembly election from that of the Assembly election of 1979. During this time, Bhandari was more concerned with the idea of 'Son of the Soil' policy and 'Sikkim for Sikkimese' rather than anti-merger issue of Sikkim. The main issues were reservation of seats in the

⁹⁰ This is because the old SJP was formed on anti-merger platform by Bhandari. In its initial stage, leader and supporters had to suffer from humiliation and torture in the hands of Central Reserve Police. Bhandari was imprisoned in the Central Jail, Behrampur for his anti-merger position. His party was not allowed to hold any public meetings. Hence it took years to get its concrete shape and triumphant success in the 1979 Assembly election while SSP was the foster child of SJP.

Sikkim Assembly for the Nepalis, Grant of citizenship to the stateless and inclusion of Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The issues raised by Bhandari indicate that he was more concerned with the Sikkimese Nepalis rather than the Bhutia-Lepchas and Limboos of Sikkim. Bhandari also projected himself as the spokesman of the people of Sikkim, whose rights was trampled down by the centre (Kazi, 1993, p. 156). This shift might have occurred due to the political development of May 1984 in which Sanchaman Limboo belonging to the Limboo community and the tribal leaders belonging to Bhutia-Lepcha Sherab Palden, Loden Tshering, Sonam Tshering, Lachen Gomchen Rimpoche and Athup Lepcha were involved in the collapse of Bhandari's ministry (Gurung, 2011, p. 238).

In his earlier term under SJP (1979-1984) Bhandari sensitively dealt with the language policy of Limboos of Sikkim.⁹¹ Moreover, sometimes Bhandari also took up the issue of Limboos' inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribe and reservation of their seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. Therefore, the Limboos once again whole heartedly supported Bhandari in the 1985 Sikkim Assembly election with their inner hopes of being included in the list of Scheduled Tribe and restoration of their seat reservation in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

In March 1985, Sikkim Legislative Assembly election was held.⁹² The SSP led by Bhandari got a landslide victory securing 30 out of 32 Assembly seats.⁹³ In the election, two Limboo candidates, Sancha Man Limboo and Birbal Subba won from SSP party tickets. While forming the ministry, both of them were

⁹¹ In 1981, Limboo language was recognised as one of the official language of Sikkim by the Bhandari led government. In the same year (1981) Limboo language was also introduced upto class X as one of the optional subject in the government schools of Sikkim and by 1983, the same was accepted by Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and was introduced up to Class XI in 1984 and XII in 1985.

⁹² There were altogether 195 candidates of which 94 including 11 women were Independent candidates to fight an election. Four National political parties and two state political parties were in the election fray.

⁹³ One seat went to Indian National Congress (INC) candidate, Kalzang Gyatso Bhutia of Kabi-Tingda constituency and next one seat to Palchen Sardar, Independent candidate from Gangtok constituency. The Sikkim Sangram Parishad secured 60371 (62.20%) votes out of 99059 votes polled in 290 polling stations.

given the rank of Cabinet Ministers. So far as the representation of the Limboo community in the Bhandari's ministry is concerned, in 1985, out of 11 cabinet rank posts, Limboos had 18.18% of cabinet ministers and 6.25% of 32 representatives in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

After the March 1985 Assembly election, Bhandari emerged as a new politician. He turned more powerful, confident, authoritarian and somewhat cocky. He became intolerant of any criticism from outside and within the party. He demanded complete submission to his authority. Political parties and social organisations either had to join or face being silenced forever (Kazi, 1993, p. 163). It was alleged that the rule of Bhandari after 1985 was of worst type. He was accused of being more arrogant and corrupt. There was continual loss of democratic values both within the cabinet and in party functioning, spoil system, victimisation of the opposition (Gurung, 2011, p. 239). The only visible opposition political parties in Sikkim were the Congress (I) and Naya Sikkim Party of Yap Sonam Yongda. Others completely disappeared from the political arena of Sikkim after the Assembly elections. The social organisations which were more influential and actively prevailed during this time were; Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association, Sikkim Lho-men Youth Council, Rangjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarzum and Muye! Pronzom of Bhutia-Lepcha (Kazi, 1993, pp.155-172) and Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung of Limboos (Gurung, 2011, pp.219-314).

Bhandari did not favour the Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe and restoration of their seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly after the 1985 Assembly election. In fact he was opposed to it. Bhandari raised those issues with the centre only which were more concerned to the majority Nepalis of Sikkim. The Limboos' interest and aspirations was never highlighted to the Central Government on any occasion. As such, Bhandari's victory of 1985 Assembly election appeared as a slap on the faces of Limboos.

However, there was a continuous representation of the Limboo community to the Central Government even after the election of 1985. On 16th September, 1985, Sanchaman Limboo, the then Minister of Health, Family Welfare, Social Welfare, ST and SC Welfare, Government of Sikkim wrote to Rajendra Kumar Bajpai, Minister of State for Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi enquiring about the position of the file. In reply, on 27th January, 1986, Bajpai stated that the Government of Sikkim had have not recommended despite of their continuous request to the former (DO No.12016/17/81-SC3BCD-I [R/Cell]). On 21st August 1987, MP from Sikkim, L Soloman Sareng submitted Memorandum of Limboos to the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi along with the letter for the earlier inclusion of Limboos in the list of Schedule Tribe. In the letter he stated:

'the Limboos form a distinct community of Sikkim with their own social heritage, tradition, customs, religion and language... ..the Government of Sikkim had recommended their case in November 1981 and is pending with the Government of India till date.... The Limboos of Sikkim are tribes who are neglected and ignored and the memorandum is self explanatory on this. If Government their genuine demand is not considered by the Government of India then great amount of injustice would be done' (Letter from L Soloman Sareng, MP, Rajya Sabha to the PM of India, Rajiv Gandhi, Dated 21/8/1987).

Despite of continuous demand by the Bhutia-Lepchas and support for Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe and positive response from the Central Government, Bhandari did neither respond to the matter nor seriously dealt with it. When the central government wanted the Limboo community to be recognised as Schedule Tribes, Bhandari was reluctant to make a recommendation (Limboo, 2003, pp. 69-99).

On 13th August 1987, the meeting of the Group of Union Ministers chaired by Buta Singh was held for 16 hours in Room No 9 of the Parliament House, New Delhi in connection with the comprehensive revision of the lists of SCs and STs.

The agenda pertaining to Sikkim State was the inclusion of Limboos in the list of Scheduled Tribe. In the meeting, the chairman wanted to know whether the Limboos of Sikkim were Tribals? In the reply, Pasong Namgyal, Secretary to the Government of Sikkim noted; *'Limboos; they claim their existence right from the time of that of the existence of the Lepchas of Sikkim. They were one of the members of Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum. They have their separate language complete with script which, the state Government has described as one of the State official Languages and is began to be taught upto Class XII in the Schools. They have their different theory of God/Goddess and ritual indicating trait of distinct culture and tradition. Their case for inclusion in the list of ST has already been recommended by the State Government of Sikkim'* (Limboo, 2003, pp. 65-68). Thereafter the file was forwarded to the Chief Minister, Bhandari for the final recommendation. On 22nd August, 1987, in the file Bhandari noted four things under sub-head, 'Demand-I, Demand-II and Demand-III'. In Demand-I, he recommended the reservation of seats for all the communities of Sikkim in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly as per the distribution of seats suggested by Bhandari government in 1987.

Table-2:

Representing the distribution of seats for different communities of Sikkim as suggested by Bhandari led SSP government, 1987.

Communities	No Seats
1 Bhutia, Lepcha and Sherpa of Sikkimese origin including monasteries	13 Seats
2 Nepalis of Sikkimese origin	13 Seats
3 Scheduled Castes of Sikkim	02 Seats
4 Tsong(Limboos) of Sikkimese origin	02 Seats
5 General	04 Seats
Total Seats	34 Seats

Source: Gurung, 2011, p. 280.

In Demand-II, Bhandari recommended for the grant of citizenship to 54000 left out people of Sikkim and in Demand-III, he recommended the inclusion of Nepali Language in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. So far as the

recommendation of Limboos' inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe is concerned, Bhandari wrote; *'We cannot separate the demands. We do not want Divide and Rule policy. All Sikkimese are one'* (Noting of the Chief Minister on the report submitted by the Secretary, SC/ST Welfare Department, Government of Sikkim, dated: 22nd August, 1987). Such move of Bhandari indicated his unwillingness to include the Limboos' in the list of Schedule tribe. The Limboos became more disappointed and displeased. As a reaction, they revitalised their organisational activities and submitted a memorandum to the President requesting him to include the Limboo community in the Schedule Tribe list of Sikkim and restoration of their seats for the Limboos in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. The Limboo organisation, Akhil Sikkim Kirata Limboo Chumlung also demanded resignation of the Chief Minister, Bhandari (Gurung, 2011, p. 239).

On 4th November 1988, Denjong Tribal Yargay Chogpa a non-political organisation had organised First Level Convention at Gangtok in which eight points issues were adopted under the caption *'Saving the Red Penda. Saving Bhutia-Lepcha-Tsong'*. Of the eight Resolutions adopted in the convention, three resolutions (4, 5 & 7) were concerned with Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboos of Sikkim. In Resolution No-4: the organisation stated that, *'the early history of Sikkim abounds with instances of 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' unity and their glorious struggle in defence of their motherland. In the Sikkim Council also seats were reserved for the Tsong community. The Tsong like Bhutia and Lepcha should be included in the list of Scheduled tribe and accordingly 6 seats should be reserved for them in the State Assembly'*. In the Resolution No-5, *'the unchecked transmigration threatens the cultural, social and political life of the Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong minorities. Therefore, the Government should introduce the systems of Inner-Line permit to check the influx of people into the state'*. In the Resolution No-7, under; Clause (c), convention declared that *'the government should provide facilities of scholarship to the children of Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong tribals for higher education without maintaining the merit list'*.

Clause (d), stated *'the government should reserve special seats for Sikkimese students of Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong origin for study outside the state in the institutions of higher and technical learning'*.

Clause (e), demanded *'the government should provide Tribal Hostel to the Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong tribals in all the places of Sikkim having secondary schools'*.

Clause (f) mentioned *'the government should provide the reservation of 50% of vacancies in all the Central Government offices and undertakings situated in the state for the members of the Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong tribals'*.

Clause (g), demanded *'the government should provide the reservation of 50% of vacancies in all the offices and undertaking of state government for the members of the Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong tribals'*.

Clause (h), demanded *'the government should provide vacant lands to rehabilitate the landless Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong tribals'*.

Clause (i), organisation appealed *'the government should extend the distribution of food grains at subsidised rates throughout the state from all the Bhutia, Lepcha, Tsong and OBCs'* and the last demand which DTYC declared under

Clause (k) was *'the government sponsored Sahitya Academy should promote languages and literature of the Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong'* (Denjong Tribal Yargay Chogpa, 4th November, 1988). Thus the Denjong Tribal Yargay Chogpa since its inception took up and gave full support to the Limboos' cause and demands as genuine issue.

The Fourth General Election to the Sikkim Legislative Assembly and the Ninth Lok Sabha Election were to be held together in November 1989. On the eve of the election, Bhandari once wrote to the Prime Minister of India recommending the Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe and restoration of 02 seats for the Limboos in the State Assembly (Memorandum submitted to the President of India by the delegates of Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung, dated: 9th August, 1990). The Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi had also assured that their demand of giving the Limboos the status of tribal and the reservation of 06 seats in the Assembly would be given proper consideration (Thapa, The North-East Sun,

10th October, 1989). However, the move of Bhandari was just to win the heart of the Limboo community of Sikkim on the eve of Assembly and Lok Sabha Election of 1989. If Bhandari had have taken the issue of Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe seriously then the Limboos could have been recognised in 1987. But he did not pay much attention to the issue. In the SSP election manifesto, 1989, also no issue relating to the Limboos was mentioned. This attitude of Bhandari shows his double standard politics towards Limboos of Sikkim.

In the election the SSP made a clean sweep of both the Assembly as well as Parliamentary Elections. It captured all the 32 Assembly seats and the lone Lok Sabha seat obliterating opposition parties from the state. With this unprecedented and memorable victory for two consecutive terms both in the Assembly and Parliamentary Elections once again, Bhandari proved that he was the undisputed leader of the people of Sikkim. With this victory SSP once again came to power for the second term with absolute majority under the Chief Ministership of Bhandari and ruled Sikkim till 1994.⁹⁴

After his victory in 1989 Bhandari became more powerful as he had 32 out of 32 seats in the Assembly. There was rampant corruption and victimisation of the opposition and above all politics of divide and rule characterized Bhandari's government in the post 1989 era (Gurung, 2011, pp. 219-302). Bhandari became more authoritarian as compared to his earlier term. He did not tolerate any criticism from both within and outside the party. The press-medias were asked to behave properly or face consequences (Kazi, 1993, pp.154-172). The right of the press was curtailed. There were assaults, threats, intimidations and constant pressure over the press-media and use of force and commandos over the opposition parties. This is to say that there was an absence of democratic

⁹⁴ While forming the ministry after 1989 Assembly election, out of 13 ministers of Cabinet ranked, 6 (44.4%) was provided to Bhutia-Lepcha and only 1 (7%) to the Limboos. This distribution of portfolios for the Cabinet minister shows that Bhandari was more in favour of Bhutia-Lepchas than Limboos after 1989 Assembly election. Heavy weighted and veteran Limboo representative and community vocal, Sanchaman Limboo was dropped from Cabinet rank post and remained as MLA.

atmosphere in Sikkim. It was alleged that the administration, bureaucracy and police force were used to torture public to no end. Bhandari wanted to control all the people by coercion and physical torture. He tried to establish hegemony of one reign, one leader, one party and one language in Sikkim (Bhutia, 1999). This is how one-party-system, one-man-rule and reign of terror began in Sikkim under Bhandari regime.

On 14th June 1990, Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung once again submitted a Memorandum to the President and the Prime Minister of India, reiterating the same demand ie Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe. The two concerned MLAs belonging to the Limboo community, Sanchaman Limboo and Birbal Limboo were also signatories of the memorandum (Memorandum submitted to the President of India by Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung, dated: 14th June, 1990). Letter to the Sikkimese Limboos, on 18th August 1990, Denjong People's Chogpa, a registered political party also expressed its willingness to extend support for the recommendation of Limboos' inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribe and include the particular issue in its election manifesto. In the letter, the President of DPC, Lachen Gomchen Rimpoche stated; *'from the historical point of view, the phrase 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' stands oneness or solidarity among the Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsong. In view of the above fact, DPC strongly feels that the Tsongs (Limboo) of Sikkimese origin should be awarded with the Tribal Status'* further stated (Letter to the Limboos from the President of DPC, dated: 18th August, 1990).

As a reaction to the memorandum submitted to the President and Prime Minister of India, the Chief Minister of Sikkim, Bhandari, on 30th June, 1990, wrote an explanation letter to the two concerned MLAs belonging to the Limboo community regarding the said memorandum. The letter read; *'In your memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India you have said that 'Limboos are a mass of illiterate, poverty stricken and vulnerable group with no means to protest'*. How would you reconcile these two situations?

(i) How would you say that the Limboos are '*unequally yoked with the Nepali majority?*' The word 'Yoke' gives a very dangerous connotation and indicates master and servant relationship. Do you think that such relationship exists between the Limboos and the other castes in the Nepali community?

(ii) You have spoken about forgetting the history and culture of the Limboos. Who are responsible for this?

(iii) In the memorandum you have said, '*Inspite of jeopardy they continue to retain atleast two members in the Legislative Assembly in every Assembly Elections*'. This only means that the two members got elected only from Limboo votes. Do you agree on this?

(iv) In the memorandum you have also said '*we had the future of retaining one MP from the state in 1979 General Elections*'. This indicates that the MP was elected only from Limboo voted and the votes of the other communities had no relevance. Was he not a candidate of any political party and that he had no support from the people of Sikkim in general?

(v) Education in Sikkim is free right up to college level. This being so how would you explain that '*most of the Tsongs or Limboos are unable to send their wards to schools not to speak of higher studies*'. Do the Limboos still follow the primitive way of life as mentioned in the memorandum? Please explain '*the threat to the purity of Limboo language and culture as alleged in the memorandum*'.

(vi) Who has pushed the Limboos to '*utter their submission and dependence*' and that '*they are threatened of their very identity*'.

(vii) You have spoken of the '*utter degradation of their self respect*'. Please exemplify. Don't you think that these are serious allegations having wide ramifications?

(viii) What status and prestige the Limboos have lost that they are now asking for their restoration?

Both of you being the signatories to the memorandum don't you think you have violated the discipline of your party, Sikkim Sangram Parishad and its policies? Answers to these queries may please be sent to the party President

within two days of the receipt of this communication' (Letter to Sanchaman Limboo from Bhandari, Ref No 291/SSP/909-91).

On 9th July, 1990, once again Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung submitted a memorandum to the President of India, R Venkataraman countersigned by the General Secretary of DPC, Major Tashi Wangdi Fungpo and General Secretary of DTYC, Uttam Lepcha regarding the earlier inclusion of Limboos in the list of ST. This time the demand and interest became much forceful and stronger than earlier as Chumlung had the support of most of the Limboo leaders belonging to different political parties including the ruling SSP. The two Limboo MLAs belonging to the ruling government were also the signatories of the memorandum. The tribal-dominated political party, Denjong People's Chogpa and another vocal social organisation of Tribals, Denjong Tribal Yargay Chogpa, had lent tacit support to the Limboos' cause and demand. The Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepchas⁹⁵ also strongly supported the 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' movement for unity among the Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboos⁹⁶ and demanded the earlier inclusion of Limboos in the list of Schedule Tribe and restoration of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. In the memorandum it was stated; *'In keeping with the tribal traditions, the Limboo community up-held and honour the 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' agreement fully and stayed with amity with Bhutias and Lepchas of Sikkim. It was the forces of those three communities which fought valiantly in 1788 war against the Gorkha invasion of Sikkim'*. However, the reaction of the Chief Minister of Sikkim, Bhandari who championed the interests of the larger Nepali was very dramatic. He threatened to quit his post as the party chief, if his two MLAs belonging to Limboo community, Sanchaman Limboo and Birbal Limboo fail to apologise for becoming a party to the Chumlung in submitting memorandum. *'Either I will resign from the post of the President or the two signatories will have to resign for violating*

⁹⁵ Who were declared as Scheduled Tribes in 1978, three years after the merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union.

⁹⁶ Whom the historians regard as the three main communities inhabiting the state prior to the large scale Nepalese immigration into Sikkim in the latter part of the 19th century.

party conduct' Bhandari warned at the public gathering (Sunday, 7-13th October, 1990).

The threat of Bhandari, however, did not have much effect on the Limboos. This was evident from a subsequent memorandum submitted to him by the 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' further demanding for the constitutional recognition of the Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo languages along with the Nepali language. When Bhandari was campaigning for the inclusion of Nepali language in the 8th Scheduled of the Indian Constitution, requesting to all the section of the society, 51 persons representing Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboos also urged the Chief Minister to raise the demand for the inclusion of their languages in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This linguistic issue created ideological difference and antagonism between Bhandari and a section of Bhutia-Lepchas and Limboos of Sikkim (Limboo, 2003, pp. 60-99).

Another issue on which the Limboos have become vocal was regarding the Mandal Commission recommendation. In 1990, the Limboos were included in the list of Other Backward Classes (OBC) of Sikkim by the Central Government but State Government headed by the Chief Minister of Sikkim, Bhandari refused to implement the Mandal Commission recommendation in Sikkim. The act of Bhandari's refusal to implement the recommendation of the Commission in the state has made the matter worse. In the autumn session of the Assembly, Bhandari moved a resolution against the implementation of the Mandal Commission report in Sikkim which was unanimously passed by the Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

Bhandari felt that the report which includes sections of the Sikkimese people in the list while excluding some others is 'discriminatory'. Implementation of such recommendation among the ethnic communities in Sikkim according to him was to divide them. Here it is also worth mentioning that in 1980 Bhandari himself had prepared the list of Other Backward Classes which included Limboo,

Rai, Manger, Tamang, Gurung and Bhujel. However, the Bahun, Chettri and Newars were excluded from the fold of OBCs. Racially, the communities included in the list of OBC belonged to the Mongoloid racial stock while Non-Backward Communities belonged to the Aryan racial stock. This was the reason why Bhandari did rejected the recommendation of Mandal Commission in Sikkim (Sikkim Observer, 8th September, 1990).

Meanwhile, the press statement issued by the General Secretary of ASKLC, K B Limboo, of Martam-Bermoik, west Sikkim accused the stand of Bhandari led government on the Mandal Commission recommendation as '*an act of highhandedness*' aimed at appeasing '*a very small*' section of the Sikkimese people in the state. Representing the Limboos of Sikkim, Chumlung demanded for a '*review*' of the state government's decision on the Mandal Commission issue. On the other, reflecting the sentiments of the Sikkimese Limboos, Prithviraj Limboo, founder President of the Chumlung and Vice-President of Denjong People's Chogpa claimed that the inclusion of Limboos in the list of OBCs was an act of '*injustice*' as because, the Limboos deserved the status of Schedule Tribe like the Bhutias and Lepchas of Sikkim (Sunday, 7-13th October 1990). After Bhandari failed to implement Mandal Commission in Sikkim, bitterness between the leaders of OBCs specially belonging to Limboo, Rai, Gurung, Tamang, Manger and Bhujel and Bhandari started growing.⁹⁷

With regard to the Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe's, in 1990s, the Chief Minister, Bhandari once again had shown his unwillingness and antagonistic view. This was clearly reflected in the letter written by Mata Prasad, Additional Secretary, Govt. of India to P K Pradhan, Chief Secretary, Govt. of Sikkim. In the letter, it was stated;

⁹⁷ The Mandal Co-ordination Committee was also constituted under the leadership of Chandra Das Rai. It became broad-based forum of OBCs of Sikkim and had the support of most of the OBC political leaders.

'the Chief Minister of Sikkim vide his letter dated 14th November, 1981 addressed to the Prime Minister recommended the inclusion of Limboo community in the list of Schedule Tribes. The State Government again in the letter No 155/SCSTWD, dated: 2nd June, 1987 recommended the inclusion of Limboo as well as Tamang communities in the list of Scheduled Tribes'. It was further stated that 'in his (Bhandari) letter addressed to the Defence Minister had suggested that Limboo and Tamang should not be included in the list of Schedule Tribes as this would divide the Nepali community'. 'Since the earlier view of the Chief Minister and present one are contradictory, may I request you to obtain the specific recommendation of the State Government in this matter so that a decision could be taken' letter further read (D.O. No. 12016/17/810S CD [R.CELL], dated: 18th December 1991).

In September 25th 1992, ASKLC submitted a representation to the Prime Minister of India requesting to consider the case of Limboos' recognition as Schedule Tribe. It was accompanied with the remarks of the Chief Minister of Sikkim, SC/ST Department and former Governor of Sikkim along with the historical testimonies like copy of 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' treaty and various decrees issued by the successive Chogyals of Sikkim to the Limboos (Ref. No. ASKLC/ 100/92, dated: 25th September, 1992). In 1993, on 13th and 14th September, Resolution for the recognition of Lepcha, Bhutia and Limboo languages upto degree and post degree level and Resolution for re-scheduling of Scheduled Tribe of Limboos and Tamangs in Sikkim was placed in the August House (Sikkim Legislative Assembly) by the former Chief Minister of Sikkim, Sanchaman Limboo respectively on the subsequent days for the recommendation to the Government of India for rescheduling the Schedule Tribe list as well as the reservation of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly as per the Constitution of India under Article 342 and Schedule Tribe Order 1978 (Resolution of 13th and 14th September 1993, Sikkim Legislative Assembly). But the proposed resolutions could not receive response from Bhandari.

On 20th August 1992, Nepali Language was included in the Eight Scheduled of the Indian Constitution. But this achievement of Bhandari further displeased some section of Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo communities who wanted the Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo languages of Sikkim to be included in the 8th

Scheduled of the Indian Constitution along with the Nepali language. In March 1994, when there was such political and leadership crisis in the state politics of Sikkim and complete lost of trust upon Bhandari, due to his taxation policy and divided Sikkimese people into Tribal and Non-tribal in terms of Central Tax payment, Bhandari, visited Delhi and met Union Home Minister for State Internal Security, Rajesh Pilot and urged him to take up the issue of including Limboo and Tamang in the list of Schedule Tribe, Delimitation of Assembly Constituencies and restoration of reserved seats of ethnic Nepali communities in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly at an early date (Sikkim Herald, Thursday 31st March, 1994). Here, it is apparently noted that when Bhandari was in power, he never took up those aforesaid issues seriously and intentionally kept unheard for more than one and half decade. But when anti-Bhandari movement took its deep root in Sikkim, he reiterated the age-old issues to normalise the situation. This is how Bhandari in the state political affairs of Sikkim acted and fooled the Limboos of Sikkim during his undisputed regime. Neither the aspirations and demands of Limboos were fulfilled nor were their rights and interests protected. Those issues relating to the Limboos were only begging bowl of votes for Bhandari. He was a leader of double standard that Sikkim had ever produced. He promised one thing and did other thing in his own way.

III

THE SSP GOVERNMENT AND BHUTIA-LEPCHAS OF SIKKIM

Sikkim became a part of India in 1975 during the tenure of Kazi led government. Some section of Bhutia-Lepchas including the monks and royal families (Bhattacharya, nd, p. 155) who wanted to maintain *status quo ante*, were displeased with the act of Sikkim's merger to the Indian Union. Moreover, in 1978, under Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe (Sikkim) Order, 1978, eight other communities such as Sherpa, Drukpa, Chumbipa, Yalmo, Tibetan, Kagatay, Tromopa and Dophthapa were included and brought within the fold and term of Bhutias. Following this, in 1979, Presidential Ordinance seeking to amend the People's Representation Act 1950 and 1951 was issued. This Presidential Ordinance

of 1979 reduced 16 seats reserved for Bhutia-Lepcha to 13 seats envisaged by the Tripartite Agreement of 8th May 1973. The reduction of the Bhutia-Lepcha seats in Sikkim Legislative Assembly from 16 to 13 and inclusion of the eight other communities with the Bhutia became the matter of apprehension and dissatisfaction among the Bhutia-Lepcha community of Sikkim. The Bhutia-Lepcha contended that since eight other sub-groups⁹⁸ were clubbed within the definition of 'Bhutias' thus the Bhutia-Lepcha seats in the Assembly actually should have been increased. They feared the dilution of their original Sikkimese identity and further reduction of seats in case if these sub-groups of Bhutias' become politically pro-active and demand for more seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly.

When there was such a political crisis at the backdrop of Kazi led government, Bhandari exploited the situation and championed to raise the burning issues such as anti-merger and restoration of Bhutia-Lepcha seats abolished in 1979 and went to the Assembly election of 1979 under the banner of Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP).⁹⁹ When Bhandari sensitised such local issues, he gained sympathy and support from all sections of the people including the monks and royal families and came to power after 1979 Assembly election winning 17 of 32 Assembly seats.

During his five years (1979-1984) rule in Sikkim under SJP, Bhandari dealt only with the language policy of Bhutia-Lepchas of Sikkim. In 1981, Bhutia and Lepcha languages were introduced upto class X as one of the optional subjects in the government schools of Sikkim. By 1983, both the languages were accepted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and were introduced upto Class

⁹⁸ Eight sub-groups of Bhutia were the Chumbipa, Tromopa, Dophapa, Yalmo, Kagatay, Sherpa, Drukpa and Tibetan

⁹⁹ He also took up other local issues like citizenship for stateless, protection of identity of Sikkim and the rights and interests of the Sikkimese and son of the soil policy. He assured for self-respect, self-dignity to the Sikkimese and usher for the democracy, socialism, secularism and scrub corruption and also blended the issue of Sikkim for the Sikkimese (Himalayan Observer, 1979, Sept, 22, Vol-14, No-5).

XI in 1984 and XII in 1985 respectively. However, issues of 'de-merger of Sikkim' about which some section of Bhutia-Lepchas and royal families were much concerned and restoration of 16 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas in the Sikkim Assembly could not be fulfilled.

The third Sikkim Assembly election was to be held in March 1985. During this Bhandari had fought an Assembly election under the banner of newly formed regional political party, SSP. In the election manifesto, SSP had raised regional issues such as restoration of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, grant of citizenship for the people rendered stateless in Sikkim, preservation of local identity and implementation of 'Son of the Soil' policy, constitutional recognition of Nepali language and maintenance of cordial Centre-State relations (SSP, Election Manifesto, 1984, pp. 1-10). On the other, the election manifesto of SSP did not include any issue relating to Bhutia-Lepcha community. It only promised to launch various schemes and programmes for the welfare of the Tribal communities (SSP, Election Manifesto, 1984, p. 7). When Bhandari contested under SJP, de-merger of Sikkim, restoration of seats Bhutia-Lepchas and Nepalis including the Tsongs in the Sikkim Assembly were the most important issues. But in 1985 Assembly election, Bhandari was much concerned with the idea of 'Son of the Soil' policy and 'Sikkim for Sikkimese' and issues like restoration of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, grant of citizenship to the stateless person, maintenance of cordial Centre-State relations and Constitutional recognition of the Nepali language. The issue of de-merger of Sikkim was dropped. This indicates difference between SJP and SSP in their stands and Bhandari's more inclination towards Nepalis rather than Bhutia-Lepchas. In this context, Kazi (2009, pp. 94-95) opines, SSP being more rooted in favour of the Sikkimese Nepalis rather than the Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboos of Sikkim. In the view of Gurung (2011, p. 238) this shift might have occurred due to the political development of May 1984 in which Sanchaman Limboo belonging to the Limboo community and the tribal leaders belonging to Bhutia-Lepcha community Sherab Palden, Loden Tshering, Sonam

Tshering, Lachen Gomchen Rimpoche and Athup Lepcha were involved in the collapse of Bhandari's ministry.

In the Sikkim Assembly election of March 1985, the SSP won 30 of 32 Assembly seats. Thereafter, Bhandari emerged as a powerful politician in the state politics of Sikkim. It was alleged that the rule of Bhandari in Sikkim after 1985 was of worst type. He was accused of being more dictatorial, arrogant and corrupt. The democratic values and spirit were claimed to be lost during this time. The oppositions were victimised. Bhandari claimed himself to be the sole responsible and spokesperson of the people of Sikkim representing the hopes and aspirations of all the section of the people. Bhandari neither favour any social organisation functioning independently nor actively involved in the state affairs. He dubbed the social organisations actively functioning and involved in the state affairs as anti-government organisations.

In 1985, four social organisations Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association (STWA), Sikkim Lho-men Youth Council (SLYC), Rangjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarzum (RMRT) and Moyal Pronzom (MP) of Bhutia-Lepcha decided to form 'Joint Front' to work towards the formation of a strong and united tribal body to press for the genuine demands of the tribals. A Joint Action Committee headed by Passang Obed Pazo was formed to pursue the goal. The JAC under the banner of Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association (STWA) on the 9th October 1985 submitted a 6 Point memorandum to the Governor of Sikkim, B N Singh (Memorandum of JAC submitted to the HE Governor of Sikkim: dated; 9th October 1985). The Committee raised the demand for the restoration of 16 seats in the Assembly for the Bhutia-Lepchas, delimitation of Assembly constituencies for the genuine tribal representation in the House, grant of citizenship to the 'stateless persons' based on the Sikkim Subjects Recognition and extension of inner-line-permit system to check influx of outsiders.¹⁰⁰ The memorandum explicitly emphasised the need to

¹⁰⁰ Those issues were not new but as old as STWA itself which had been reiterating from time to time ever since its inception in 1978.

safeguard the rights and interests of the tribals as enshrined in Article 371F of the Constitution of India.¹⁰¹ But Bhandari did not respond to the issues raised by STWA. Bhandari disliked STWA being independently functioned or actively involved in the state affairs. Sometimes, he dubbed STWA as anti-government organisation when it became more influential among the Bhutia-Lepcha community of Sikkim.

From May 1986, the STWA could not function independently. There was continuous interference from the ruling political party. On 16th May 1986, the executive body of the STWA headed by Passang Obed Pazo was dissolved in the meeting attended by the pro-SSP tribal Ministers, MLAs, senior officials and representatives who were much closed to the ruling party. On May 23rd 1986, the election for the formation of new executive body of STWA was held. The office-bearers of the newly formed executive members of STWA were all ruling party members and supporters. Ram Lepcha was elected as the new President of the organisation, Bhandari the chief Patron, Thukchuk Lachungpa, the General Secretary, Chamla Tshering, Treasurer and Sanchaman Limboo, Karma Topden (MP), Namkha Gyaltshen and several state secretaries who were close to the party were members of the organisation. Since then the STWA continued to be dominated by the ruling political party and for long experienced political victimisation under '*one-man-rule*', '*one-man-reign*' of Bhandari.

The fourth General election to the Sikkim Assembly was held in 1989. In this election once again, the SSP swept the poll securing all 32 Assembly seats of Sikkim. While forming the ministry, out of 13 Cabinet ministers, 6 (44.4%) was provided to Bhutia-Lepchas. The allocation of portfolios for the Bhutia-Lepchas in

¹⁰¹ In 1979, 16 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly were reduced to 13 including 1 Sangha seat. So in order to ensure full protection of Bhutia-Lepchas, the organisation demanded for restoration of those 16 seats that were reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas and were abolished in 1979. On the grant of the Indian citizenship to the '*stateless persons*' STWA proposed Sikkim Subject Regulation Act of 1961 as a base for the determining degree in granting citizenship in Sikkim (Memorandum submitted to the Governor of Sikkim by the STWA, dated: 9th October 1985).

the Bhandari's ministry shows his favour towards Bhutia-Lepchas. But from the way he dealt with the issues of Bhutia-Lepchas, it reveals Bhandari's reluctance in protecting their interest and rights. The concerned political issues and demands of the Bhutia-Lepchas were restoration of 16 seats in the Assembly, delimitation of Assembly constituencies for the genuine tribal representation in the House, grant of citizenship to the 'stateless persons' based on the Sikkim Subjects Regulation Act 1961 and extension of inner-line-permit system to check influx of outsiders. Those issues were not seriously felt and taken up by Bhandari. During the two consecutive SSP led government rule under Bhandari, neither the rights nor interests of Bhutia-Lepchas were protected nor was the lost dignity brought back. Bhandari's promise of returning back Sikkim to its sovereign status and restoration of 3 lost Bhutia-Lepcha seats in the Sikkim Assembly became a far reaching dream never turning into reality.

Conclusion

The 'Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum' are the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim having distinct language, culture and faith and belief systems. At one point of time these communities were the dominant ones in Sikkim. But in due course of time with the rapid growth of population in Sikkim, the demographic composition and pattern underwent a change. They became one of the linguistic and religious minorities of Sikkim. They started losing their distinct identity. Realising this they have started and had been demanding for the restoration of their political rights and protection of their interests even after the merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union.

During Bhandari led SSP rule, they demanded the protection of their rights and interests. Bhandari raised the issues of Limboo, Lepcha and Bhutia's during the Assembly elections but after the elections was over, Bhandari kept quite. The issue of Limboos' inclusion in the list of Schedule Tribe and restoration of 02 Tsongs in the Sikkim Assembly and restoration of 03 Bhutia-Lepcha reserved seats in the Assembly was ignored. When organisation of these groups raised

their issues, Bhandari attempted to suppress their democratic aspirations and voices. He claimed that he was the sole representative of the people of Sikkim to fulfil their inner hopes and aspirations.

During his two consecutive terms in Sikkim, Bhandari championed only the cause of the 80000 persons who were stateless and demanded the inclusion of Nepali language in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. He failed to fulfil the aspirations and demands, the issues raised by the linguistic and religious minorities of Sikkim. Restoration of 02 Tsong Seats for the Limboos and 03 Bhutia-Lepcha seats in the Assembly and inclusion of Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo languages along with the Nepali language in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution remained just promises which were made during the time of elections.