

CHAPTER III

ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN SIKKIM:

THEIR HISTORY AND IDENTITY

Humans as social animals achieve both real and ideal concepts of self partially out of a sense belonging to a group.¹ In an occupationally undifferentiated society a sense of social identity vis-à-vis political community rarely result in an antagonistic environs because it provides little basis for divergent concepts of belongingness. On the contrary, a more complex social formation, i.e. pluri-cultural societies, with their occupational divisions and amalgamation of groups maintaining a sense of diverse origin generally exhibit signs of tension, real or perceived, emanating from an overall sense of belongingness. This happens irrespective of having either an open (Democratic) or closed (Totalitarian/Monarchical) system of political organizations or constitutional system.

The process of identity is not static, but at the same time community's self-definition is to be found. Group identity develops through self-definition and definition by others. The two may be same but at the same time contradictory too. Through the exchanges between self-definition and definition by others community identity emerges. Further, as a dynamic process community identity includes and excludes people as members of the group and non-members/others. Interestingly a particular section may be sometimes included and excluded another time. A section may demand inclusion and may be denied and, in another occasion, a section may emphasize exclusiveness/ separateness and yet may be included. Hence, understanding of community self-definition and self-perception is important. For this, a brief analysis of different ethnic groups and their identity is demanded.

Sikkim, a tiny Himalayan state of the Indian Union, is a multi-cultural society cohabited by a multiple cultural-linguistic groups of which the Lepchas (also called Rongs/Monpas), the Bhutias (also called Denzongpas /Lhopas) and the Nepalis (also called Gorkhas/Paharias) constitute major/prominent communities in Sikkim. Lamaist Buddhism and Hinduism are the two major religions with 27.15 percent and 68.37 per cent followers respectively as per the 1991 census. Besides, a small fraction of the population is still continuing with animism, found particularly among the Lepchas and mongoloid stocks of the Nepalis. In recent past the percentage among the followers of the Christianity is also on the rise with 3.30 per cent in 1991. Over the years social mobility among the three ethnic communities has increased along with the events of inter-community marriages and social interaction though maintenance of distinct ethnic identity is also emphasized. The government headed by Mr. Chamling has shown special concern over the importance of preserving ancient cultures and has been providing all types of support for the preservation, continuation and development of these cultural heritage.

As stated above the major ethnic groups of present day Sikkim are the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalis. According to the first ever official census taken in 1891, the Nepalis consisted of 56 per cent and constituted a majority followed by the Lepchas (19 per cent) and Bhutias (16 per cent). More than hundred years after, the share of the Lepchas has declined to 14 per cent whereas the Bhutias have been able to maintain more or less the same proportion. The populations of the Nepalis, however, have increased significantly. A separate account of the Nepalis is not available but generally gives an impression that they consist of 70 per cent of the total population which, however, also includes the plainsmen population. Another point, which deserves mention, is that the decline in percentage of the Lepchas or that of stagnation of the Bhutias to total population does not mean decline or stagnation in their absolute number. Apart from the three, the communities like Sherpas, Yolmos (Kagatey), Limboos (Tsongs) etc. are important in any analysis of ethnicity and identity formation mainly in view of what the communities think and what others say about them.

Besides, certain other Nepali tribes/castes like Mangars, Tamangs (Murmi), Gurungs, Rais etc. deserve special mention in view of the present ethno-political scenario of Sikkim.

The history of Sikkim is smeared with personal preferences and rejections. This was possible because of the disappearance or absence of recorded documentary evidences. It is believed that the Tibetan lamas have burned the documents when they first came into contact with the Rongs or Lepchas considered possibly one of the earliest settlers of Sikkim. It is said that long before the rule of the Rong/Lepcha community in Sikkim this region was under the sway of Chandrapalla of Palla dynasty and was called Vijaypur Sikkim.² The local sources do not subscribe to this version. In other words, ethnic communities present in Sikkim today have migrated during different historical times under different endogenous and exogenous circumstances.

Paradoxically, some anthropologists believe that there were three different tribes inhabiting Sikkim before the advent of the Lepchas in Sikkim. H. Siiger writes, "... There are ancient traits of various kinds contributing to the suggestion that the Lepchas originally came from the east. On entering Sikkim the Lepchas found three tribes already in possession of the country, viz. the Na-ang or Na-ong, the Chang, and the Mon, of which the Na-ong were the earliest inhabitants."³ Risley too acknowledges the existence of the tribe called Na-ong, which means, "the blind fools", and associated the tribe with the popular feat of building a tower (Babel) at Daramdin in west Sikkim.⁴ He considers the tribe extinct.⁵ The New Encyclopedia Britannica also mentions "The Lepchas were early inhabitants of the region, apparently assimilating the **Naong, Chang, Mon,** and other tribes."⁶

The tribes in question may be the product of misrepresentation of the source⁷ but Mainwaring considers "Na-ong" as one of the foolish sections of the Lepchas.⁸ He further writes that other two tribes, i.e. Chang and Mon, as mentioned by Siiger, are most probably the "Tsong", by which name Limboos in Sikkim were/are known, and "Mon" should have meant the Lepchas.⁹ "Mon" is the term used by the Tibetans for the inhabitants of the lower Himalayas.¹⁰ The term, therefore, could be used to refer to all those lowland inhabitants, including

the tribes mentioned above, and the Lepchas. In fact the wandering nature of socio-economic lifestyle of ancient tribes of the eastern Himalayas and absence of clear evidence make it difficult to identify any group or community as autochthons of Sikkim. We only have some evidences of early settlement/ settlers and vague references to them in the oral traditions and folklores.

According to R.K. Sprigg, "The Limboos were living in Sikkim before there was a Sikkim for them to live in! By this paradoxical remark I mean that Limboos have inhabited the area in which they now predominate (or in which they predominated till very recently) from time immemorial; but Sikkim has been in existence only since 1642, a Water Horse Year, and in the year in which Phuntsog Namgyal ascended the throne as the first Chogyal at Yoksum Norbugang in what is now western Sikkim."¹¹ They (Limboos) seemed to have shared with the Lepchas the Western half of Sikkim, before the advent of the Tibetans and other Nepali tribes.¹² Risley too has mentioned about the Limboos as one of the early inhabitants of Sikkim and their coexistence with the Lepchas to the extent that they share common clan names like Sangmipo, Luksom etc.¹³ The name of the country 'Sikkim', which is derived from the two Limboo words "Su" (new) and "Khin" (a house or place), bears a conspicuous testimony about the Limboos being the ancient inhabitants of Sikkim. The Limboos are also called 'Yakthumba' – a term, which is in currency in Nepal more than either in Darjeeling or Sikkim. The Bhutias and Lepchas call them 'Tsongs' which etymologically means 'merchants'. They belong to the Kirata tribal family whose earliest reference can be found in the Puranas which also refers to a group of people called 'Yak-sa'.

Mangars, now a constituent of the Nepali community, are among the early inhabitants of Sikkim and are often referred to as contemporary of the Lepchas. According to J.D.Hooker, "Mangars are the aborigines of Sikkim, whence they were driven by the Lepchas westward into the country of the Limboos, and by this latter further west still."¹⁴ The ruins of forts built by the Mangars, called Zongs, are still found in many parts of Sikkim. The astounding similarity in the numerical system of the Lepcha and Mangar languages like Nat, Nees, Som, Buli etc.¹⁵

indicate not only the influence on each other but also lived together side by side in the ancient past. The Mangars share some religious, cultural and linguistic similarity with the Gurungs.¹⁶

The Tamangs (Murmis), Gurungs and Rais (Zimdars/Khambus) are also considered the early inhabitants of Sikkim. Hooker writes that the Murmis (Tamang) are the only other native tribe remaining in any numbers in Sikkim.¹⁷ They are the scattered people of Tibetan origin, and called 'Nishung' named after the two districts of Nimo and Shung, the places of their early inhabitation, situated on the way to Lhasa.¹⁸ They were originally called Bhote, meaning Tibetans, but later they assumed the title 'Tamang' indicating their traditional occupation as "horse riders". The word "Tamang", it is claimed, is derived from the Tibetan word 'Tamakh' meaning "mounted guard" of the king. In Tibetan language 'Ta' means 'horse' and 'Makh' means 'mounted guard'. In course of time the word 'Makh' is believed to have been corrupted as 'Mang'.¹⁹ The Gurungs of Chakung, called Taksari Gurung, were basically copper miners. According to Prof. Sinha Gurungs, like Tamangs, Mangars, Limboos, Rais, Lepchas, are the autochthonous inhabitants of Sikkim.²⁰ In 1891 the Gurung community constituted the fourth largest community of Sikkim after the Lepchas, Bhutias and Limboos. The Rai community, which is a constituent of the larger Kirata family, is also considered as the ancient inhabitants of Sikkim. Chaudhuri writes that the Rais have come to Sikkim along with the Lepchas from the Assam Hills.²¹ Reference of the Rai community in Sikkim is also found in Mackean's work.²² Risley, while reflecting on the population of Sikkim in 1891, had used different nomenclatures, such as Rai, Khambu and Jimdar, considering each one as separate community but, in reality, they belong to a single community, i.e. Khambu, the inhabitants of Khambuan. It is said that after the occupation of the Khambuan by Prithibi Narayan Shah in 1832, the Khambu tribal chief was given the honorific title 'Rai'.²³ 'Jimdar', on the other hand, is a corrupted form of the word 'Jimmadar' or 'Jimmidar' or 'Jamindar' (land lords) probably means the 'functionary with official responsibility' (Jimma = custody or hold + Dar = custodian or holder of land). Taken both the Khambus and Rai/Jimdar together, the community formed

the largest constituent among the Nepali community in 1891 and continues to be so even in present day Sikkim. Presently, only the Rai community uses the title Kirata though etymologically it means Limboo, Gurung, Mangar, Tamang, Sunuwar, Lepcha and the Rai itself.

Though different in many respects, these communities, over the years, have developed a sense of belongingness and togetherness among themselves. The intercommunity marriage, which was once considered a social taboo, is becoming common and a new Sikkimese culture, a sort of a fusion of all the cultures, is rising up. Having said that, they also exhibit tendency for the maintenance of their specific group identity and refuse to be treated as part of a broader or combined form of identity though, under certain circumstances, such broader identity is also emphasized. For instance the Bhutias and Lepchas have lived together for centuries as a combined community and under a common B-L identity but, off late, the Lepchas, through various activities and propaganda, emphasize on the maintenance of a separate Lepcha identity. Same is true with regards to the Limboos also. Limboos do not identify themselves with the larger Nepali identity. Similarly, the different sub-cultural groups within the larger Nepali community also speak in terms of respective group identity. There are associations/organizations of almost all these little communities through which they articulate respective group interest and group identity. Thus, it is necessary that these identities of different communities, including the little communities, should not only be studied but it is also important to find out where the identity of the Sikkimese lies amidst plethora of identities.

The Lepchas or Rongs:

The Lepchas call themselves “Rong” or “Rongkup” which means “the son of the snowy peak”.²⁴ The Tibetans, Bhutanese alike, call them “Rong-pa” which means the “the ravine folk” or “the dwellers in clefts or ravines” which metaphorically refers to a ‘monkey’ like inferior race.²⁵ According to Waddell the title “Lepcha” was an anglicized version of the contemptuous name ‘Lapchey’ (vile speaker) given by the Nepalis.²⁶ The word ‘Lapchey’ is not a Nepali word

and hence Waddell's contention seems to be a product of hearsay. Moreover, no one can say it for certain that the word is contemptuous in meaning. Rather there is a more convincing indication that the word 'Lepcha' or 'Lapchey' is originated from the Lepcha word "**Lapcho**" which means a rough stone altar laid for the purpose of offering to the "semi-divine" spirits, called 'Lungzee' by the Lepchas. Fanning also subscribes to this viewpoint. He writes, "We call these altars 'Lapcho', and hence, seeing the autochthones so much concerned about these Lapchos, they started calling us Lapcho people, and ultimately, our tribe became the "Lepcha" tribe for them. Then when the British and the plains folk met us, we were known as Lepcha, the name by which our tribe is known to the outside people now".²⁷ Some places initially populated / inhabited by the "Lepchas" are, as of now, bear the same tribal names, viz. Lapcho near Peshok in Darjeeling district, or Lepsep in west Sikkim etc.

Amidst obscurity and plethora of contradictory views on the origin, tradition and history of Lepcha community, one school of thought believes that the Lepchas have migrated from Assam and Upper Burma, and belong to Tibeto-Burman tribal family.²⁸ George Kutturan too has subscribed to this view.²⁹ Mrs. Beauvir Stocks, a veteran anthropologist, has traced their home in Southern Tibet³⁰ There have been references to connect the origin of the Lepchas with those three warriors of Alexander who remained in India, or with the missing tribes of Israel on the basis of their physical features, their artifacts and events, and linguistic similarity. Haffden Siiger writes, "if a straight line is drawn from the north to the south through Sikkim and Darjeeling and compare the Lepchas with other people of the west and the east, the Lepchas are much similar with the eastern people as such, the Lepchas may have migrated from the east to Sikkim and Darjeeling in the dim past".³¹ Mackean also writes that the Lepchas came from the east with the Jimdars (Rai /Khambu) who went on to Nepal and settled there. The Meches who also came along with the Lepchas settled in the foothills.³² Risley writes, "though the Lepchas claim to be the autochthones of Sikkim their physical characteristics stamp them as members of the Mongolian race, and certain peculiarities of language and religion render it probable that the tribe is a

very ancient colony from southern Tibet".³³ While exploring further on the origin and identity of the Lepchas, Thakur and Lepcha (1981) conclude, "We have here attempted to offer four-fold explanations to the origin of the Lepchas based on (i) habitational, (ii) linguistic, (iii) divinical and (iv) historical-anthropological evidences. Yet it seems difficult to give a conclusive answer to the problem of the origin of this tribe".³⁴

The Lepchas, on the other, consider themselves as autochthones of Sikkim, called "Mayel Lyang", which means "the land of the hidden paradise", or "the delightful region" and then later migrated to other places.³⁵ Such an explanation may be viewed as an indication of psychological attachment of the Lepchas with Sikkim and is rarely found in other interpretations.

Thus, it is very difficult to come to a definite conclusion on the origin of the Lepchas. On the basis of available Lepcha manuscripts, traditions, folklores and life experiences of old individuals, both the Lepchas and other, the following legend seems important. The present Lepcha families are the direct descendents of the ten sons of Fodongthing (Father) and Nazaongnyo (Mother), the first primogenitors of the Lepchas to whom God created from the snows of mount Kungtsuomzaongboo Choo (Kangchanjunga). Their descendants are called 'Rong – Kup – Kati' or 'Rongkati' which means 'Ten Rongs' (Lepchas). Their customary rules are called 'Rong – Kati – Tyum' which means 'the laws of the Ten Rongs'. The different Lepcha clans claim their association with the 108 Lepcha ancestors responsible for killing of Laso Mong, an Tibetan aggressor, at the foothills of mount Pandim. In course of time the title which these warriors earned got transformed into number of clans such as Tamsangmoo, Soongootmoo, Sangdyangmoo, Samickmoo, Munlomoo, Lutsommoo, Brimoo, Fyungtalimoo, Sampumoo, Numchyomoo, Sadamoo, Adenmoo etc.³⁶ Further divisions, i.e., Rongboo (Patrician) and Mongboo (Plebeians) took place as social divisions between the nobility or aristocratic and the commoners began primarily on the basis of functional pursuit. Though, there exists cultural and linguistic homogeneity among the Lepchas, geographically they are divided into four sects namely Renjyongmoo, Illammoo, Damsangmoo and Promoo. The Lepchas of

Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kurseong and Siliguri are called Renjyongmoo whereas their brethrens of Illam, Kalimpong and Bhutan (Bhutan in Lepcha is called Pro) are respectively called Illammoo, Damsangmoo and Promoo.³⁷

In Lepcha society the king is called "Panu" and Pohartak Panu is considered the first Lepcha ruler of Sikkim.³⁸ Mentions about Turvey Panu, another Lepcha ruler in succession, may be found in the writings of Mainwaring (1876), Sinha (1975), and Chaube (1987) also. According to Sinha, Turvey Panu ruled Sikkim sometime around 1425 A.D. He was succeeded by Tuv Athak.³⁹ He further writes that last Lepcha Panu was born in 1686 and ruled for a period of 25 years⁴⁰ A.R. Fonning, however, does not subscribe to the theory of Lepcha Panu.⁴¹

Lepchas have their own language and possibly, it is the oldest language of all the hill dialects. However, its origin is obscured and nobody can say for certain from where it originated and how it became the mother tongue of the Lepchas. According to philologists the language belongs to the Tibeto – Burman group of languages to which the other languages of other tribes of the sub-Himalayan region also belonged. According to the Lepcha mythology, the Lepcha language is the language of God, i.e., the language of Fodong Thing and Nazaong Nyo, to whom the Lepchas owe their origin.⁴² Others have claimed that the language was invented by Thekong Mensalong, a legendary seventeenth century Lepcha leader⁴³ but, Fonning considers such a claim as a product of glorification of the legendary hero.⁴⁴ Gorer, however, contends that the Lepcha alphabet was invented by the Chogyal Chador Namgyal of Sikkim at the end of the seventeenth century or the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁴⁵ Once again, Fonning does not agree with the contention of Gorer on the ground that Chador Namgyal had the most hectic time, both mentally and physically, during his short span of nine years rule (1707-1716), i.e., after he returned from exile. Such a highly intellectual peacetime work such as invention of a script of a foreign language could have been possible only when Chador Namgyal was a superhuman being'.⁴⁶ The Tibetan sources revealed that Lhatsun Chhempo, one of the three Lamas who anointed and consecrated the first Bhutia king (Chogyal) of Sikkim in 1642, gave

the language to the Lepchas. This source is believed to have been mentioned in a book written by Lama Khajon Ngawa. Last but not the least is a Gorkha theory, which relates its origin to the Kirata king Maw-rong or Mohorong of the seventh century. The Lepchas who formed a section of the Kirata tribes, was known as Imay then. Whatever may be the contentions on the origin of the Lepcha language, it certainly has undergone lot of changes/modifications under the influence of various other languages of the sub-Himalayan tribes. Among them the Tibetan influence on the Lepcha language seems to be most profound. This is because that most of the Tibetan religious books, including the Tashay Namthar, also called Tashay Sung, the oldest among the Lepcha Namthar, were said to have been translated in the Lepcha language by the Tibetan lamas. This is suggestive of the fact that the Bhutia Lamas knew the Lepcha language very well. It is believed that the despotic Bhutia king and dogmatic lamas burned down the Lepcha manuscripts saying that writings and records contained nothing but superstition, lies and evil.⁴⁷

According to an unconfirmed record Lepchas were approximately 3010 persons out of a total of 7000 populations in 1840. In 1873, Edgar in his travelogue recorded the Lepcha population as 2,500 persons out of a total of 5000 population. In 1891, the figures increased to 5,762 of which 2,362 were males, 2399 females and 1,001 were children. Below, an attempt is made to provide an overall figure of the Lepcha population in Sikkim since 1840.

Table 2.1: Number of Lepcha Population During 1840 – 1991

Census year	Numerical figure	Percentage to total population
1840	3010 (Approx.)	43
1891	5762	19.1
1909	6000	9.7
1931	13,060	11.89 (12 %)
1951	13,625	9.89
1961	14,847	9.8 (10 %)
1971	22,306	12.4
1981	22,147	8.3
1991*	56,904	14.0

*Source: From various books and census reports. * Source: Sikkim Human Development Report, Govt. of Sikkim, 2001.*

The figures given in the above table indicate a steady increase in the numerical strength of the Lepcha population in absolute term except in 1981, though percentage-wise the population shows a downward trend. Today, the Lepchas are in the minority among the three ethnic communities of Sikkim.

On the basis of the investigative works carried out by various authors on the occupational habit of the Lepchas, we know that initially the Lepchas led a semi – nomadic economic lifestyle depending mainly on forest products –fruits, roots and tubers- and hunting and fishing. Besides, they used to grow two varieties of dry-land paddy (Dunbra and Ongroyzo), millet (Mongbru) for preparation of Chee (a Lepcha beverage) and Maize (Kunchung) through the practice called shifting cultivation. Abundant forestlands provided ample scope for such a simple economic formation to sustain.

The contacts with the Tibetans during the fifteenth and sixteenth century had a great influence on the economic lifestyle of the Lepchas along with exposure to political domination, subjugation and cultural transformation with which the Lepchas were possibly unfamiliar. They were confined in the Dzongu protected area and lost contact with the outside world. This basically proved detrimental for community's political and economic advancement. Gorer, who worked with the Lepchas of the Dzongu reserved area, writes that orphans and children of poor Lepcha parents used to be kept as slaves.⁴⁸

Another important phase is characterized by political unrest with conflicts and tension. The contacts with the Nepalis, other than Limboos, Mangars, Tamangs, Gurungs and Zimdars (Rais/Khambus) who were living in Sikkim from earlier days, introduced a new variety of crops, viz. cardamom and wet-paddy, along with the system of terrace farming. The Lepchas being poor farmer, the system availed scope for a new method of occupational habit.

The British got involved in Sikkim's affairs due to the latter's involvement in wars with Nepal and Bhutan. Along with the British there came people of Aryan stock from Nepal and trading family from Indian mainland. Gorer writes about the extortionist and dishonest aptitude of the Kanyas (Indian traders) settled in Mangan. He writes, "an application was made to the court in the spring of 1937

to have the Kanyas (Indian traders) removed because their proximity (with the Lepchas) was the chief reason for the indebtedness and distress. Some years ago the court sent out an order that people were not to borrow so much and the Kanyas were not to cheat so much; but with the shops on the spot and with cunning and insinuating salesman, the Lepchas are unable to resist.”⁴⁹

After the occupation of Darjeeling and later Sikkim by the British, many Christian missionaries came into contact with the Lepchas. The Lepchas who were poor and ignorant became a convenient proposition for the missionaries to propagate Christianity among them. But Sikkim being a theocratic State the expansion of Christianity and subsequent conversion of the Lepchas into Christianity were not so easy. As such Christianity became more predominant in Darjeeling than in Sikkim. As a result the Lepchas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong had excelled far beyond than their Sikkimese brethren in terms of conversion to Christianity, access to modern and secular education, economic well-being, political consciousness and perhaps in the field of hygiene and sanitation too. In this context Fonning writes, “Among our people, those who have received modern education, and those holding important positions in the government and other services, the vast majority are invariably found from within this Christian group.”⁵⁰ Dr. Yen Tshing Sitling was politically active during the agitation of the Hillmen’s Association of the thirties in Darjeeling. Some educated Christian Lepchas, like Rev. Gyen Tshering Sitling, Anyu Azen Rebecca etc. were active in the field of social activities and had been the founder member of an organization, called Mutanchi Rong Shezum (The General Lepcha Association) in Kalimpong during 1940s. The objective of this voluntary organization was to educate, protect and ameliorate the poor Lepchas from the condition of abject poverty and mental darkness.

While the Lepchas in Darjeeling and Kalimpong were working for the overall development of the Lepcha community, the socio-political condition in Sikkim was not conducive for such an endeavour as yet. The indifferent attitude of the Lepcha landlords and Kazis towards their own Rongfolk further impaired their socio-economic progress. Besides, any attempt on the part of the Lepcha

leadership or elites to raise voices for the emancipation of the Lepchas was promptly suppressed by the Sikkim government dominated by the Bhutias with a king of Bhutia descent. For instance, Ruth Karthak, a socially and political conscious lady and the founder of Sikkim Independent Front party in Sikkim in 1966, was removed from Sikkim allegedly for hatching a conspiracy against the Chogyal.⁵¹ Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa, despite the allegation for money laundering, survived repression due mainly for being an incarnate Lama and the overwhelming support which he enjoyed from the majority Nepalis.

A common notion found in books and anthropological reports about the Lepcha is Lepchas are considered as the dying race. Fonning too used the notion as the title of his book 'Lepcha My Vanishing Tribe'. According to Fonning, the 'vanishing' condition of the Lepchas was created, firstly, due to the forceful conversion of the Lepchas into the Lamaist Buddhism during the Bhutia rule in Sikkim and, later, due to propagation of Christianity during the British. Thus, by vanishing tribe Fonning actually means the depleting socio-cultural, linguistic and religious condition of the Lepchas rather than the absolute figure of the Lepchas, which is increasing. Gorer also shares Fonning's apprehension for he writes, "As a society with its unique conglomeration of attitudes the Lepchas are certainly disappearing for their culture presupposes a homogeneous interlocking community and this as well as their complete suppression of competition and aggression, cause an inevitable break down of culture in any mixed community."⁵² While, Morris considered it psychological to a great extent associated with the habit of too much of drinking.⁵³ Besides, the depleting condition of the Lepcha population could be linked with malnutrition.

In 1977 the Lepcha language has been recognized as one of the State languages of Sikkim. Renjyong Mutanchi Ringmom Kurmom (Sikkim Lepcha Literary Organization), was formed in 1978 with a primary objective to develop and promote the Lepcha language and literature in Sikkim. At present the language is taught up to the Under-Graduate level in North Bengal University. This was accomplished in 2000. The contributions of the Chamling government along with the Lepcha literary personalities, including some foreign writers, have

been immense in the publication of extensive literary materials. Notable among the Lepcha writers in Sikkim are D.K.Luksom, Sonam Tshering Lepcha, D.C.Luksom, Lha Tshering Lepcha, Norgain Tshering Sangdyang, Nima Lhamu Lepcha, Dhendup Lepcha, Ongdi Tshering Lepcha.

Table 2.2: Community-wise share in various services ,August- 2005

SERVICE S	ETHNIC COMMUNITIES / AFFILIATION						Total
	Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha	Sherpa	Other*	Un-Identified	
I.A.S	9	13	1	1	22	-	46
I.P.S.	4	3	-	-	18	-	25
I.F.S.	6	5	-	-	17	-	28
S.S.A.S.	83	39	7	-	12	-	141
S.S.S.	21	8	1	1	2	-	33
M.G.S.	7	4	2	1	-	-	14
S.S.N.S.	18	7	8	-	-	-	33
M.D.	133	70	11	5	4	-	223
S.F.A.S.	105	27	7	2	4	2	147
A.H.&V.S.	40	21	3	-	6	-	70
S.C.E.S.	107	26	5	1	17	-	156
S.C.S.	29	22	1	-	-	-	52
S.M.E.S.	31	10	1	2	3	-	47
S.E.E.S.	72	25	6	1	4	1	109
S.S.E.S.	34	13	4	1	6	-	58
S.D.M.S.	44	32	6	2	6	1	91
TOTAL	743	326	63	17	121	4	1273

*Source: Website of Sikkim Government, 2005. Note: * Indians from the plains.*

(**Abbreviation:** Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service, Indian Forest Service, Sikkim State Agri. Service, Sikkim Statistical Service, Mines and Geological Service, Sikkim State Nursing Service, Medical Service, Sikkim Finance and Acct. Service, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Service, State Civil Engineering Service, State Mechanical Engineering Service, State Electrical Engineering Service, Sikkim State Educational Service, Sikkim Directorate & Miscellaneous Service respectively).

In 1978, the community has been recognized as one of the tribes of India. The State Government of Sikkim has reserved about 33 per cent seats for the

Tribals, including the Lepchas, both in services in the State Government and the Public Sector undertakings, and in allotment of quota in educational institutions for professional courses.⁵⁴ Despite reservation, their participation, however, is very much dismal in service sector. In 16 different services, both All India Services and State, the participation of the Lepchas is meager 4.87 per cent out of the total of 1273 posts. The domination of the Bhutias over the Lepchas in terms of their share in the coveted administrative services viz. IAS, IPS and IFS (Forest), is continuing with the ratio of 22:1 out of a total of 99 officers.⁵⁵ It is to be noted that there was not a single IAS, IPS and IFS officers among the Lepchas until very recently. It is important that the State Government should carry out a thorough study of the situation in order to ascertain factors responsible behind such negative trend.

The younger generation educated Lepchas are politically conscious and articulate demands through various means. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 1980 has reserved 12 seats for both the Lepchas and the Bhutias of Sikkimese origin in the State Assembly. However, the absence of governing formula regarding seat sharing between the Lepchas and the Bhutias has mostly favoured the Bhutias in having larger number of representation in the Assembly. Various Lepcha socio-cultural organizations namely Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum (Sikkim Lepcha Progressive Association), Renjyong Mutanchi Rong-Ong Shezum (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Organization) have been demanding fifty per cent reservation out of the 12 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha communities in the Assembly and fifty percent in quota allocated for the tribals in employment and educational institutions for professional courses outside Sikkim. Further, the Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association has also demanded for legal protection banning the sale or purchase of their land by others, including the Bhutias, and compulsory use of 'Lepcha' title by the members of the community, particularly reflect the level of ethnic consciousness and identity among the younger generation of the community. It must be noted here that according to the provision of the Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917 the purchase of Bhutia-Lepcha land by others is forbidden but Bhutias can purchase the land of a Lepcha owner and

vice-versa. Hence, by raising such demand the Lepcha Association wants legal protection of their land from the Bhutias also. Apart from this, change of title due to inter-community marriage and increasing practice of adopting Bhutia names without surname has affected the enumeration process and very often the cause of misrepresentation or under representation of the Lepchas.

Considering the spirit of blood brotherhood pact signed between the Lepchas and Bhutias at Kabi Lungtsok and by virtue of living side by side for years, one could presume that there should have been no social alienation between the two. The communities, however, have some delicate problems. From the findings of Chie Nakane it can be said that the Bhutias consider themselves socially and culturally superior race than the Lepchas.⁵⁶ The statement is corroborated by Gorer and Das also. Perhaps it was due to this social prejudice that 'when a Lepcha achieved a higher status and became Kazi, he used to identify himself as a Bhutia'.⁵⁷

The Bhutia community attaches overwhelming importance to the so-called blood- brotherhood pact occurred between Lepchas and Bhutias; the Lepchas, however, now perceive such a pact as a new leash for Bhutia domination and assert their separate existence independently of the Bhutias. For example, the Lepcha Youth Association has categorically asked the convener of the Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC) to drop 'L' (symbolizing Lepcha) from the name of the organization.

The Bhutias:

The word Bhutia is derived from the name of the place "Bhot", i.e. Tibet, to which the Bhutias of Sikkim originally belonged. The migration of the Bhutias into Sikkim probably have begun during the fifteenth and sixteenth century.⁵⁸ Maharaja Thutop Namgyal and Maharani Yeshey Dolma Namgyal have also subscribed to this viewpoint and added further that the migration took place continuously in many ways and through different routes, from the northern and western passes of Sikkim.⁵⁹ According to a popular version the religious strife between the Yellow-Hat-Sect (Gelukpas) and the Red-Hat-Sect (Nyingmapas) in Tibet forced many followers of Red-Hat-Sect to flee Tibet along with their leader Khye Bhumsa after their defeat. They

settled in the Chumbi Valley, an inalienable part of Sikkim then. Initially the nature loving and friendly Lepchas did not object but as the migration continued the Lepcha Athing, Thekong Tek, advised the Panu Hyum to take stock of the situation. It is said that the Lepcha Panu was treacherously murdered.⁶⁰ According to the folklore/legend Khye Bhumsa later sought hospitable relationship with the Lepcha spiritual leader (Athing) Thekong Tek which was then solemnized by a 'blood-brotherhood' pact at Kabi and solicited blessing for son. Having realized their bleak future in Tibet, they made Chumbi Valley their permanent settlement and gradually spread to other parts of Sikkim. These early settlers from Tibet presently are known as Dezhongpa or Lhori while those who have migrated to Sikkim the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were called Khampa or Pu-pa and considered different from the Dezhongpa or Lhori. Those who migrated in the twentieth century, especially after Chinese occupation of Tibet, are referred to as Tibetans. The distinction, however, has been narrowed down due to the use of all embracing generic term "Bhutia" in the Scheduled Tribes Order of 1978.

Following the classification given by Risley, the Bhutias of Sikkim may be grouped under three categories. Firstly, the six families descended directly from Khye Bhumsa. They are Yul-Thenpa, Lingzerpa, Zhantarpa or Sangdarpa, Tshegyu Tarpa, Nyungyepa and Tshepa. The last four families (clans) are also called Tungdu-Rusi or 'the four families of a 1,000 collections'. The second category includes those who migrated after the exodus of Khye Bhumsa. They are called Khampas or Bebtsen Gye by virtue of having founded eight families (Clans) namely Gansapa, Namchangopa, Chungiopa, Ethenpa, Phenchungpa, Phempunadik, Namnakpa and Nachingpa. The third category is comprised of those who migrated at various times since the establishment of the Bhutia rule in Sikkim. They are called Rui-Chhung or the little families with eight important branches, the Chumbipa (immigrants from Kham in Tibet and Ha in Bhutan and settled near Chumbi Valley), and Lopen Lhundub (migrated from Ha and Paro in Bhutan and settled in Lachen and Lachung valleys). Each of these families or clans is further subdivided into several sub-families.

The Sikkimese Bhutia language was a spoken dialect and for all literary, cultural and educational pursuits, Tibetan was used in the past. It was also the official language of Sikkim before the merger. All government gazette

notifications were brought out in Tibetan language, including the official newsletter 'Sikkim Herald'. After 1975 efforts have been made to develop Sikkimese Bhutia as a distinct language in Sikkim, and in 1977 the status of Official language has been accorded to it. The social-cultural organization of the Bhutias like Bhutia Kay-Rab-Yargay Tsogpo, is dedicated in conserving and developing the culture, tradition, religion, language and literature of Bhutias of Sikkim. It was established in 1983. It has conducted many seminars, workshops and meetings with the objective of contributing towards the promotion of the Bhutia language and their rich culture. The organization also helps publication of books and dictionaries besides encouraging people who are engaged in the promotion of the Bhutia culture, art, literature and language by felicitating them. Almost all the Bhutias of Sikkim are bilingual/trilingual and speak Bhutia language as well as Nepali and Lepcha languages fluently. The language is taught upto the under-graduate level. The University of North Bengal introduced the Bhutia language as one of the elective subjects in 2001. Some of the prominent writers of the Bhutia language are Pema Rinzing Bhutia, Palden Tshering Gymtso, Norden Tshering, Dorji Rinchen Lama & others. The first Bhutia-English dictionary, co-authored by Norden Tshering and Pema Rinzing Lama, was published in 2001.

The majority of the Sikkimese Bhutias are the followers of Lamaist Buddhism but sympathizer of Christianity is also rising in recent past. Bodhisattva is their chief deity followed by guardian deities, including local deities, family deities, village deities and also mount Kanchenjonga. Monastery or Gumpa is their place of worship and the Bhutia lama (spiritual leader) performs all customary rituals. Their main concentration is in the North district, especially in Lachen and Lachung villages but, of late, they are numerically the largest among the tribes of Sikkim in the East district, especially in Gangtok.

In 1840 the Bhutias were approximately 1995 out of a total of 7000 populations. In 1873 they were 1500 persons out of a total of 5000 population. In 1891 the figure shot up to 4,894 persons among whom 1,966 were males, 1,960 females and 968 were children. The following table will provide an overall view

on the growth of the Bhutias in Sikkim. Table 2.5 indicates a steady growth in the Bhutia population of Sikkim. During 1901- 1911, there has been a substantial growth, while a decline is recorded in the year 1911-21. The fall has been partly attributed to deaths resulting from the great influenza epidemic of 1917. Since then the increase is maintained steadily except in 1981.

Table 2.3: Number of Bhutia Population in Sikkim from 1840-1991

YEAR	C O M M U N I T I E S		
	Sikkimese Bhutia	Bhutia unspecified	Tibetan Bhutias
1840	1995	N.A.	N.A.
1891	4894	N.A.	N.A.
1909	6000	N.A.	N.A.
1911	10411	12433	N.A.
1921	9639	9639	N.A.
1931	11070	15130	560
1951	15626	15626	N.A.
1961	36577	10762	6690
1971	36760	29875	33931
1981	21548	N.A.	4149
1991*	65033	N.A.	N.A.

*Source: various books and census reports. * Sikkim Human Development Report, Govt. of Sikkim, 2001.*

The Bhutias were mostly the traders and herdsman earlier but a sizable number were also engaged in cultivation. They generally preferred hilly terrain, high altitude and cold climate for habitation. With the consolidation of political power and establishment of religious hegemony after 1642/1646 not only the settlement pattern was changed but the social stratification too began to take shape in the form of Royal family, Lamas, Kazis and the commoners. The Lamas (spiritual leaders), who often belonged to the noble families of Tibet⁶¹ were the custodian of the important monasteries of Sikkim like Dubdi, Pemiongchi, Tashiding etc., besides exercising significant influence, as advisers to the Chogyal, in the political-administrative affairs of the State. The monasteries were in possession of huge landed property over which the Lamas enjoyed both revenue and administrative control. The Kazis, on the other, were landlords /

zamindars, mostly belonging to the Bhutia-Lepcha groups, who enjoyed immense economic and political power in a feudal bureaucratic and economic set up under the Chogyal. Within their territorial jurisdiction they also exercised power of adjudication.

The involvement of the British in Sikkim's affair (more explicitly after 1861) saw a reduction in the political and economic powers of the Kazis and Lamas, on the one hand, and settlement of certain Nepali businessmen and peasants and economic prosperity of the protected State of Sikkim on the other. The economic prosperity led to competition over resources and growth of resentment against the policies of the British Political Officer in general and Nepalis in particular. The resentment, however, led to introduction of certain legislative measures in favour of the Bhutias and Lepchas in the form of prohibition of transaction of the Bhutia-Lepcha land to the Nepalis and other communities (Revenue Order No. 1, 1897/1917), differential rate of revenue between the Bhutia-Lepcha and the Nepali peasants (1915) and settlement laws.

In the wake of demands for abolition of Zaminadari system followed by peasants' movement of 1949-50, certain economic changes were introduced such as abolition of the Zamindari system (excluding 15 private estates of the Chogyal and 5 monastery estates) and payment of revenue directly to the State. Though the affect of the economic reform on the land share pattern was marginal (due to continuation of the Revenue Order No. 1 and absence of ceiling and tenancy reforms), but their source of income had been drastically reduced. They, however, became apprehensive with the government notification no. 3082/L.R., 1954 which intended to detect the excess land over the upper ceiling of 20 acres and distribution of the same among the landless masses. They intended to protect their hereditary right over land and since they exercised influence at the decision-making level, the successive land reform measures to a large extent have remained ineffective.

In 1978 Bhutia community has been recognized as one of the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim. The 1978 Order included eight other Bhutias namely Tromopa,

Dopthapa, Sherpa, Yolmo, Kagatey, Drukpa, Tibetans and Chumbipa within the definition of the term Bhutia. Though these groups have been recognized as Bhutias they are not benefited by the Revenue Order No. 1 which prohibits sale or purchase of Bhutia-Lepcha land by other communities, including the Nepalis. However, they can contest elections from the 12 Bhutia-Lepcha seats reserved in the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim.

Traditionally, Bhutias are assertive and industrious people. The young generation Bhutias are well educated, well informed and are conscious of their rights and privileges both as a Sikkimese and as a citizen of a democratic country. Their access to best available educational institutions in the country and abroad together with the facilities extended to the Scheduled Tribes community, the Bhutias are overwhelmingly represented in the top level bureaucratic posts and in other decision making institutions. Their representation in such institutions often benefited the community immensely in terms of employment and other economic opportunities as compared to other communities of Sikkim. According to the statistical data provided by the department of Personnel and Administrative Reform & Training, Gangtok, there were as many as 28.76 per cent Bhutias in the highest administrative jobs in 1999, i.e. 44.5 per cent in IAS, 17.4 per cent in IPS and 21.7 per cent in IFS (Forest) in Sikkim. The percentage is slightly reduced in 2005 mainly due to increasing number of bureaucratic personnel from the plains. Similarly, according to an unpublished report of the Economic Census conducted in 2005-06 by the State government, Bhutias have been ranked as richest among the three communities of the State. Table 2.6 gives us a glimpse on ethnic backgrounds of the bureaucrats in 1999 and 2005 in Sikkim.

Table 2.4: Ethnic Background of the Bureaucrats in Sikkim -1999 & 2005

Ethnic Communities	Number of Cadres and Percentage							
	1 9 9 9				2 0 0 5			
	IAS	IPS	IFS	Total	IAS	IPS	IFS	Total
Lepchas	-	-	-	-	01 (2.1)	-	-	01
Bhutias	12 (44.5)	04 (17.4)	05 (21.7)	21	13 (28.3)	03 (12.0)	05 (17.8)	21
Nepalis	06 (22.2)	05 (21.7)	06 (26.1)	17	9 (19.6)	4 (16.0)	6 (21.4)	19
Sherpas	-	-	-	-	01 (2.1)	-	-	01
Others	09 (33.3)	14 (60.9)	12 (52.2)	35	22 (47.8)	18 (72.0)	17 (60.7)	57
Total	27	23	23	73	46	25	28	99

Source: Department of Personnel & Administrative Reform & Training, Government of Sikkim, December 1999 & August 2005.

Being the ruling community, the Bhutias did not have a political organization of their own before 1947 as their interest were adequately protected by various proclamations issued by the Chogyal from time to time. However, some pressure groups of the traditional landlords (Kazis) and Lamas of monasteries were present from the very early days in Sikkim. Being parties to the ruling clique these groups played important roles both in creating channels for articulation of their demands and influencing political decision in favour of the group. The non-associational group of the Kazis (landlords) was very powerful and enjoyed both administrative and judicial authorities within their territorial jurisdiction. The officials of the Darbar were mostly chosen from among the Kazis and by virtue of their proximity with the Chogyal, they used to influence decision in their favour. It is said that the Kazis were instrumental in denying the status of "hereditary subjects" of Sikkim to the Limboos even when one seat was reserved for them in 1967".⁶² In 1978, out of 13 Bhutia-Lepcha candidates who were taken in the IAS cadre selection 10 belonged to the Kazi group.⁶³

Similarly, the Bhutia spiritual leaders, called Lamas, also used to form a formidable pressure group in Sikkim. Their activities extended from advising the ruler in political affairs of the country to management of monasteries, including the monetary allocation for monasteries and selection of religious performances out of the State treasury. The custom was that the Chogyal could not avoid the advice tendered by the Lhade Mede, the Council of incarnate Lamas. Their influence in the political affairs of the State was such that in March 1958 one seat was reserved for the monasteries in the State Council as Sangha seat. It was politically very active during the 1970's as the members of the organization were apprehensive of the fate of the Chogyal and the status of Sikkim as a Buddhist State after its merger with a democratic secular India.⁶⁴ **(N.Sengupta: State Government and Politics in Sikkim, Sterling Publication, New Delhi, 1985, P. 128)**. They were instrumental in maintaining the socio-cultural and political identity of Sikkim even after the merger.

The first ever political organization of the Bhutias, called Sikkim National Party, was formed in 1948 with an objective to oppose the demands of the Sikkim State Congress for accession with India, establishment of responsible government and abolition of the Zamindari system. It was communal in its propaganda and feudal in its outlook, and, as such, failed to function as a political party. Sengupta writes, "The Sikkim National Party has sprung up with a curious programme which may be called the very anti-thesis of the policy of Sikkim State Congress".⁶⁵ For the Sikkim National Party, also called Chogyal's party, the Lepchas and Bhutias alone were indigenous Sikkimese whereas Nepalis were considered immigrants from Nepal.

The political and other social organizations that are formed after the merger in 1975 differ from their earlier counterparts in terms of composition and the group to which they appeal for support. Genuinely, they cannot be considered ethnic organizations of the Bhutias but are tribal organizations dominantly led by the Bhutias. The Denzong People's Chogpa (DPC), a registered political party, the Denzong Tribal Yargay Chogpa (DTYC), Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association (STWA), the Denzong Lhaday Yangki Chakchen (Association of Buddhist Monks

of Sikkim), the Bhutia Kay-Rab-Yargay Tsogpo (BKRYT) are such organizations to name a few. The Bhutia Kay-Rab-Yargay Tsogpo is a social organization dedicated in conserving and developing the culture, tradition, religion, language and literature of Bhutias of Sikkim. It was established in 1983. It conducts seminars, workshops and meetings with the objective of contributing towards the promotion of the Bhutia language and their rich culture. The organization also helps publication of books and dictionaries besides encouraging people engaged in the promotion of the Bhutia culture, art, literature and language by felicitating them. The Association of Buddhist Monks of Sikkim and 'Concerned Citizens of Sikkim' became popular during 1994 in respect to the protest movement unleashed against the construction of Rathang Chu Hydro Electric Project on religious – environmental grounds. The project was abandoned in 1997. Thus, religion has been an important factor and strength, which binds the tribals together but in spite of several endeavours, ethnic unification, is yet to be accomplished mainly due to existence of separate organizations of the tribal communities with distinct ideological belief and propaganda. The Bhutia way of life, which is generally highlighted as Sikkimese identity, is something that irks other tribal groups.

The Nepalis:

Nepalis constitute ethno-linguistically the majority group in Sikkim. But before going into the details of the subject there are certain ambiguities associated with the word 'Nepali' which required clarification in the first place. Firstly, who is a Nepali? Is he a citizen of Nepal or a member of an ethnic group or a caste or one who speaks Nepali language? To an average Sikkimese or for Indians as such, Nepali means those who have migrated from Nepal and speak the language which is identified as Nepali / Khaskura or Gorkha and belonging to Aryan languages group as distinct from Tibeto – Burman languages or dialects like Bhutia, Tibetan, Lepcha, Limboo etc. The Sikkimese Nepalis are born and brought up in Sikkim and, thus, are Sikkimese in the same way as the Bhutias and the Lepchas.

Secondly, Nepali is not a complete homogenous group like that of the Lepchas. It is a conglomeration of different and distinct tribes and communities which can be broadly classified under two basic groups: Mongoloids and Aryans.

Thirdly, there is a lack of cohesion between “those who are considered as Nepalis” and “those who consider themselves as Nepalis”.⁶⁶ For example, the Limboos in Sikkim are called Nepalis but they themselves do not consider so. Similarly, Sherpas or Yolmos are subsumed constitutionally as a Bhutia group but they acknowledge themselves as Nepalis.

Fourthly, an identity of a Nepali cannot be established only because he speaks Nepali language. A Bhutia or Lepcha or Marwari may not know any language other than Nepali yet he is never considered as Nepali but a Limboo or Rai or Gurung may speak no Nepali but his own language or dialect, yet he is a Nepali to the outside world.⁶⁷ So, Nepali identity is not just linguistic, but also racial and above all historical.

Nepali is just an umbrella term under which various tribes and communities find a homogeneous representation. The following groups are generally included as Nepali such as Bahun (Brahmin), Thakuri, Chhetri, Newar, Rai, Gurung, Tamang, Limboo, Mangar, Jogi, Bhujel, Thami, Yolmo, Sherpa, Dewan, Mukhia, Sunar, Sarki, Kami and Damai. Except those who belonged to Aryan stock and basically Hindus by religion like Bahun, Chhetri, Thakuri, Kami, Sarki and Damai who represent north Indian physical features, rest of the Nepali sub-cultural groups have their own languages or dialects, traditions, cultures, heroes and habits, religion and belong to Mongoloid racial stock. If taken together, they consist of roughly about 50 percent of Sikkim’s total population. The Bahun, Chhetri etc. speak Nepali language which belongs to Indo-Aryan group of languages with Nagri script like Hindi while the Mongoloid stocks are mostly bi-lingual, i.e. speak their own language/dialect other than Nepali language. Nepalis, therefore, is a mixture of Aryan and Mongoloid racial groups.

In the history of settlement of different ethnic groups in Sikkim the Nepalis seemed to have followed a natural process due to the prevalence of free intercourse between the people of Nepal and Sikkim, the territorial contiguity

existing between the two neighbours, porous and flexible borders and exigencies of time. From the writings of many eminent investigators and anthropologists like Subba, Mackaen, Risley, Hooker, Sinha etc. it can be safely stated that some of the Nepali tribes or communities belonging to Mongoloid (Matwali) groups like the Limboos (Tsongs), the Mangars, the Gurungs, the Tamangs, the Rais etc. either lived in Sikkim and adjoining places even before the arrival of the Lepchas or were contemporaries of the latter. R.K.Sprigg writes, "the Limboos were living in Sikkim before there was Sikkim for them to live in".⁶⁸ According to J.D.Hooker, Mangars were the aborigines of Sikkim, but were driven by the Lepchas to further westwards into the country of the Limboos, and this latter further to the west.⁶⁹ In Hooker's writing the mention about the Murmis (Tamang) finds a special place as one of the native tribes of Sikkim.⁷⁰ A special reference to the Rai tribal community as contemporary of the Lepchas is found in the writings of W.G.Mackaen.⁷¹ Chaudhuri also writes that the Rais have come to Sikkim along with the Lepchas from the Assam hills⁷² A.C.Sinha also writes, "In Sikkim there are three main sub-cultural stocks" of the Nepalis community namely "the Kiratis, the Newaris and the Gorkhas. Among the Kiratis, the Limboos, the Rais, the Lepchas, the Gurungs, the Tamangs and the Mangars constitute the autochthonous inhabitants of Sikkim."⁷³ He further adds that with the growing assertion of the Bhotia rulers, the Limboos, the Mangars, the Lepchas and other Kirati tribes were pushed westwards to Nepal and southwards to India.⁷⁴ Risley also writes "the Limboos, Gurungs, Murmis (Tamangs), Khambus (Rais) and Mangars are more or less allied, while the others, excepting the Lepcha and Bhutia, are later immigrants from beyond the Arun in Nepal."⁷⁵ The bulk of the Nepali migration, particularly those belonging to the Aryan stock, took place in the middle of the 19th century and plethora of explanations detailing the nature and circumstances of migration are available. Scholars like T.B.Subba relate the migration with the territorial conquests. He explains that a large chunk of territory of Sikkim, i.e. eastward of Mechi River to the westward of Teesta River, was under Nepal for about thirty-seven years since 1780. Many Nepalis living in that territory are known to have come and settle in Sikkim since then.⁷⁶ Secondly, the

scholars like P.K.Rao and B.S.K. Grover consider that Nepalis were particularly encouraged to settle in Sikkim by the British for two important reasons: (a) to accelerate the economic growth, and (b) to counteract the supremacy of the Sikkimese royal family and the Bhutia councilors.⁷⁷ Yet other scholars like Karan and Jenkins, Lall and, later on, Datta-Ray consider J.Claude White, the first British political officer of Sikkim, predominantly responsible for the large-scale migration of the Nepalis.⁷⁸ Before assuming his new administrative responsibility in Sikkim as the Political Officer, J.C. White had spent a year or so in Nepal and thus had the experience of working and understanding the Nepali way of life. He justified the Nepali migration on the economic ground saying that “the unenterprising, lazy and unthrifty aborigines would not respond to the strong inducements held out to them to open up this new land.”⁷⁹ In the Administrative Report of 1905-06 he writes, “Immigration from Nepal is steadily increasing and is encouraged by all classes as the Nepali ryot is hardworking and thrifty as a rule, pays his taxes regularly and at the same time is a law-abiding and intelligent settlers.”⁸⁰ In 1906 he expressed his willingness to open up hitherto forbidden North district for the Nepalis in the interest of Sikkim. During 1910-11 he regretted that “immigration from Nepal continues but not on as large a scale as formerly.”⁸¹

Apart from the economic health of Sikkim, it is indeed worthwhile to understand the political dimension associated with the process of immigration. In the context of Sikkim the British interest had always met a fitting challenge from the pro-Tibetan forces within Sikkim and Tibet as a whole. Sikkim, in fact, proved to be a common bone of contention between the British and the Tibetan rulers. The Tibetans had always considered Sikkim as an extension of Tibet, and the successive Chogyals, except for Sir Tashi Namgyal, looked towards Tibet as an ultimate source of guidance in all respects, including control over monasteries and religious matters. Thus, in order to combat against such a strong contender and challenger it was obvious for J.C.White to turn towards the Nepalis who had already proved their being *sui generis* both in times of war and peace. In this connection Basnet writes, “The Gorkhas (Nepalis) made as good a peasant in

peace-time as he made a soldier in war. The Bhutias and Lepchas made poor farmers partly because of their ignorance of the methods of cultivation and partly because of a natural indolence. The Lepchas had always been used to easy-going ways and was averse to hard labour or, for that matter, any other form of strife and struggle. The Bhutias, while having natural aptitude for trade, was loath to physical labour.”⁸² Thirdly, there were many Lepcha councilors and landlords who were equally interested in having the Nepalis settled in Sikkim for enhancement of revenue. The prominent among them were Tsepa Lama, Khangsa Dewan, Phodong Lama and Lasso Athing.⁸³

Another factor that encouraged migration was changing socio-political scenario in Nepal. The military expeditions intending to consolidate Nepal politically under Prithivi Narayan Saha and his successors, the population explosion and its effect on land holdings, declining economic conditions and food deficiency in Nepal are specially highlighted by scholars as indigenous factors, also called push factors, responsible for Nepali migration. Whereas, various treaty agreements such as Anglo-Nepalese Friendship Treaty of 1850, the Indio-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 etc. served as legal political framework in the process of migration and are considered external factors or pull factors. For instance article 7 of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 states; “The Government of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.”⁸⁴

Another element, which should be taken into cognizance, is that all Nepalis who have settled in Sikkim might not be migrants from places of Nepal. As mentioned earlier many tribal communities, who are presently included into the Nepali fold, inhabited the western and southern parts of Sikkim long before the country got its present name. It must also be noted that when wars broke out generally the rich and affluent would be the first to leave the country than the poor or helpless.

According to the unconfirmed report the Nepalis were perhaps 1995 persons in 1840 out of a total population of 7000 persons. According to Edgar the total population of Sikkim in 1873 was 5000 persons out of which Nepalis, including the Limboos, were 1000. The populations gradually increased with the passage of time and under various historical / political circumstances. Table 2.7 provides detail of the Nepali population in Sikkim since 1840.

Table 2.5: Nepali Population in Sikkim during 1840-1991

YEAR	TOTAL POPULATION
1840	1995
1891	18,981
1909	50,00
1931	36,105*
1951	97,863**
1961	88,916***
1971	1,34,236
1981	1,92,295
1991	2,84,520****

*Source: Various books and census records. Note: *Separate enumeration of groups*

like Gurung, Rai, Mangar, Chhetri, Kami are not available for this period.

** Taken on the basis of religion (Hindus) inclusive of Indian plainsmen.

*** On the basis of language spoken. ****Inclusive of "others".

The above table is indicative of the fact that the population of Nepali community increased gradually over the decades. In 1931 the population has been shown only 36,105 persons due to the unavailability of the data regarding the Gurungs, Rais/Jimdars/Khambus, Mangar, Chhetri and Kami sub-cultural groups of the larger Nepali community. Due to some enumeration difficulties these communities perhaps have been included in 'others' which is shown over 49,043 persons in 1931 census.

Nepalis are predominantly Hindus by religion and linguistically different from that of the Bhutias or Lepchas. For being one of the premier communities of Sikkim, they assert their own separate identity and resent any propaganda

undermining their interest and existence/identity. The Bhutias, on the other, are apprehensive about the Nepalis because of their numbers, economic well-being and assertive nature. In her article, Chie Nakane attempts to highlight areas of disagreement by saying that “the ruling class (Bhutias) of Sikkim is much concerned, not only about the Nepali economic exploitation of the Lepcha and Bhotia community, but also about the increase of the Nepali population as opposed to the decrease of the Lepcha-Bhotia population.”⁸⁵ Despite adverse conditions meted out to the Nepalis, e.g. laying down a territorial limitation for the Nepali settlers, rules prohibiting Nepalis from becoming the village headman, prohibition of land alienation to Nepalis, differential revenue system etc. they worked hard and strived to uplift their condition and advance to the dislike of the Bhutias. An appointment of Nepalis in government offices was also disliked by certain segments of Bhutia people who viewed this as an infringement upon their natural preserves. Introduction of Nepali language as a medium of communication in government offices also arouse the suspicion of the Bhutias. This was perceived as domination or influence of the non-hereditary subjects over the traditional values (Tibetan culture) of hereditary subjects of Sikkim.

OTHER COMMUNITIES/ GROUPS:

In this section, discussions about certain racial groups of the Nepalis have been presented in view of the ambiguities currently surrounding the groups and their ethnic identities. The ambiguities basically revolve around what do the groups in question think, or others think about their ethnic affiliation. For instance, the Limboos in Sikkim are called Nepalis but they themselves (at least organizationally) do not consider themselves as Nepalis. Similarly, Sherpas or Yolmos are subsumed constitutionally as the Bhutia group but they acknowledge themselves as Nepali. Such developments in recent years indicate the presence of a dichotomy between self-definition of the group and generally perceived notions about the group; and also indicate the evolving nature of cultural and ethnic identities. A group or a sub-group under certain historical circumstances may try to redefine their self-identity and claim distinctiveness. For this reason, it is felt

that the groups which in recent years have attempted to assert their separate identity, contrary to prevailing perception about their identity, deserve separate treatment.

The Limboos (Tsongs):

The community is known as Tsongs or Chongs in Sikkim, and 'Yakthumba' – a term which is popular in Nepal is an endogamous term generally used by the Limboos themselves. The honorific term 'Subba', which means Chief, is also often in use which perhaps was given by the Gorkha rulers after the conquest of the Limbuan, presently eastern Nepal, the principal settlement area of the Limboos.

Etymologically, the term "Limboo" means "archer" or "bow shooter" and the community is carrying this name since the split of Limbuan into ten districts / thums.⁸⁶ Yakthumba, on the other, most likely means inhabitants of hill or hill men (Yak=Hill, Thum=Place/District and Ba or Pa = people / inhabitants.)⁸⁷ According to another version, Yakthumba means Yak herders⁸⁸ which seems relevant in case of the Lhasa Gotra Limboos who, as some writes have put it, have migrated from the Tibetan region of Tsang where Yak is found in abundance. The Limboos, however, do not subscribe to the idea of Gotra classification which is predominantly a Hindu practice. They consider it as an attempt to identify the Limboos within the Hindu fold. According to J.R.Subba "Yakthungba" got currency only after the division of Limbuan into ten provinces or Thums. To him the word "Yakthumba" is composed of three Limboo words namely "Yiok, Thum and Ba" which means "fort, Province and from" respectively and taken together it becomes "from the fort of the province". It is quite a common practice among the Limboos to ask to which province a Limboo man or woman belongs to. The common question is "Adangba (si) Atti Thum Keyungba (si) Be?" The answer to this query can be "Tambar Yiok Keyungba Ro" or we are from Tambar fort of Tambar Khola. 'Yiokthumba' in course of time corrupted to 'Yakthungba'.⁸⁹ Since Limboos are predominantly found in and around Yaksum, there is a strong possibility of having the word "Yaksumpa" corrupted into "Yak-thum-ba/pa" in

the distant past. The Purana also gives reference to a group of people called 'Yak-sa' whose kingdom was in the Himalayas.

The Limboos belong to the Kirata tribal family whose earliest reference is found in the Puranas.⁹⁰ Their original homeland was supposed to be in the Tsang province of Tibet from where they migrated to a place lying on the eastern or the left bank of the Arun and extending from it to Sikkim (i.e. Sikkim of 1858), was referred to as Limbuan or the country of the Limboos. It formerly belonged to Sikkim, but was conquered and permanently annexed to Nepal by the descendants of Prithivi Narayan Shah of Nepal.⁹¹ Their migration from Tsang province is believed to have been due to the increasing influence of the Lamaism over their religious way of life.⁹² The title "Tsong", as the Bhutias of Sikkim preferred to use, linked them with the province of Tsang in Tibet.⁹³ The lexicon meaning of the term "Tsong" in Bhutia language is "to sell"⁹⁴ which associates the Tsong (Limboo) people with their occupational trait as "merchants".

Thus, the present two districts namely Gyalsing (Geyzing) in the west and Namchi in the south and a part of the north district of Sikkim lying on the western bank of the Teesta river were originally peopled by the Limboos. The territorial area, called Limbuan, was divided into 10 districts or thums headed by their respective chiefs, called Subba. From this division into 'Ten' the Limboos were henceforth referred to as 'Das Limboos' (Ten Limboos) and derived clan names either from locality or from the 'thars' or septs or sub-divisions.⁹⁵

R.K.Sprigg comments that, "the Limboos were living in Sikkim before there was a Sikkim for them to live in! By this paradoxical remark I mean that Limboos have inhabited the area in which they now predominate (or in which they predominated till very recently) from time immemorial; but Sikkim has been in existence only since 1642, a Water Horse Year, and in the year in which Phuntsok Namgyal ascended the throne as First Chogyal at Yoksum Norbugang in what is now western Sikkim."⁹⁶ That the Limboos (Tsongs) were one of the early settlers of Sikkim is discernible from the treaty of "Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum", believed to have been signed in the middle of seventeenth century among the Bhutias (Lho), Lepchas (Mon) and Limboos (Tsong). The treaty signed in water

hare year is the historical testimony of a blood relationship among the three communities of Sikkim and a pledge to “abide by the commands of the king, his Guru and his sons and will never let arise a bad thought against Sikkim”.⁹⁷ The Treaty added further, “we the ministers and leaders of Sikkim including those of the eight communities of Lhopas (Bhutias) hereby pledge that Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum will have one destiny and one government. They will fight together with their foes and feast together with their friends..... If any among the Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum, would not abide by this pledge will be made to pay three ounces of gold as pledge breach fee and thereafter he will be punished according to the degree of crime he has committed from slight physical punishment to the extent of death penalty. No hesitation will be made in execution of this punishment so that all may keep this in their minds.”⁹⁸

Understandably, the Treaty was designed to ensure political stability to the Namgyal dynasty, established in 1642, from the potential threat from both the Lepchas and Limboos. If the translation is authentic, the apprehension of the Bhutias is noted as “during the last Mongpa (Lepcha) war some people’s action were noted and let them be beware of now from this year of water hare onwards we will abide by the King, his Guru and his sons and will never let arise a bad thought against Sikkim”⁹⁹ It also suggests that the treaty was accorded after the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty. The enactment of the treaty was followed by grant of autonomy to the Limboos by the king Phuntsog Namgyal as “The Tsong or Subba or Limboo Chiefs are hereby authorized to rule their districts under the title of ‘Subba’ with all the facilities of enjoying their tribal rites in social and religious functions by beating the royal band called Negara (Perlge) or cattle drum.”¹⁰⁰

In all its likelihood, the Treaty of Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum was never implemented in the sense there is no record suggesting that Limboos (Tsongs) were ever appointed as Dzongpens during the rule of Phuntsog Namgyal. Kutturan writes that there is no record to indicate that such a council had ever existed.¹⁰¹ However, the conclusion of the Treaty helped the Bhutias in winning the support of the Limboos in future military expeditions and consolidation of

Sikkim. Later Nepal succeeded in occupying the whole of Limbuwan area up to the Teesta River for thirty-seven years since 1780. As per the condition of the Treaty of Titaliya of 1817, the portion of the land occupied by the Gorkhas were restored by the British to Sikkim which now form the west district of Sikkim including the present district of Darjeeling in West Bengal. It is said that the Limboos were one of the ethnic groups who had witnessed the consecration ceremony of the first Chogyal of Sikkim in 1642 at Yaksum.

Similarly, the name of the country Sikkim itself is the conspicuous testimony of the Limboos (Tsong) as the ancient inhabitants of Sikkim. According to Riskey the word 'Sikkim' is derived from the two Limboo words "Su" (new) and "Khin" (a house or place) and is associated with a new palace built at Rabdentse by Phuntso Namgyal.¹⁰² L.B. Basnet also considers the word Sikkim originating from Limboo vocabulary "Su-Him" (new house) and the name was first got currency when a Lepcha Chief married a Limboo girl.¹⁰³ According to the Limboo legend when the bride entered her husband's house she exclaimed in her own tongue "Su-Him", and thus, in course of time, corrupted into Sukhim, Sikhim and then to Sikkim.¹⁰⁴ However, from the writings of Hamilton and Kirkpatrick, it is clear that the name was originally given to a place and not to a country.¹⁰⁵ This also suggests that the Limboos have the tradition of inter-marriage with other tribes particularly with the Lepchas and in many respects their habits are similar to those of the Lepchas.

Scholars differ in their viewpoints regarding the Limboo religion. Campbell admits that the Limboo religion is neither Hindu nor Buddhist but at the same time it is very difficult to "give a name to the one they practice".¹⁰⁶ Dalton too has similar difficulties and adds that they have "obstinately adhered to their primitive paganism."¹⁰⁷ Riskey calls the leading principle of the Limboo religion as animism.¹⁰⁸ Some other scholars like Swami Prapannacharya and Gambhir Rai Arya have linked Kirati tribes with the Aryans (not mongoloids) and their religion with the Vedic origin.¹⁰⁹ In this context, it is mention-worthy that the Limboos of Sikkim have been worshiping three important deities: Theba Samang (literally Grandfather God), Yuma Samang (Grandmother God), and Him Samang

(Household God),¹¹⁰ beside worshipping Tagera Nyingmaphuma, which is often personified as Lord Shiva. Hence any clear relationship with either Hinduism or Buddhism cannot be established. The manner of worship, however, differs depending upon the clan and locality but sacrifice of male animals and birds are common among them. Limboos have a tradition of “mundhums”, a sort of rituals chanted orally while performing various kinds of religious performances. The priests are variously called as Phedengma or Samba or Yebe-Yema and Yuma depending upon the kind of ritualistic functions they perform. Generally Phedengma is supposed to perform more sober and cleaner religious duties than the Yebas and the Yemas. The Sambas are believed to possess immense powers of controlling and driving off the evil spirits.

The Limboo language belongs to the Tibeto – Burman family like many other mongoloid languages. The script is called “Siri Jonga”, originally taken from Brahmi script prevalent in North India and evolved through the 6th century A.D.¹¹¹ The script is named after its creator Siri Jonga who was the Limboo king of Limbuwan. During the eighteenth century another Limboo linguist, Teyongsi Siri Jonga Sing Theba, spread the language among the Limboos of Limbuwan and Sikkim. His mission was considered dangerous by the Tibetan authority in Sikkim and was killed by the Lamas of Pemiongchi monastery in 1741 at Martam, West Sikkim. Teyongsi in Limboo language means re-incarnation and he is considered as the re-incarnation of Siri Jonga of Limbuwan. The third phase in the history of evolution of Limboo language began with Lasor Sendang (1840-1926) who was born at Atharai Thum of Limbuwan. He taught Limboo language to the villagers of Western Sikkim.¹¹² It was due to his relentless and inspirational effort that a Yakthung Hang Chumlung Sabha was held on the 26th July, 1925 at Kalimpong and later the Sabha was converted into Akhil Baratiya Kirant Chumlung Association to cover greater areas of Darjeeling and Sikkim. The social movement started by Mahaguru Phalgunanda Lingden during the middle of the 20th century contributed immensely towards the promotion of the Limboo language and script including social reforms and religious awakening among them.¹¹³ The movement was especially successful in bringing the Limbos of Limbuwan, Darjeeling,

Kalimpong and Sikkim (west, south & north Sikkim) under a single platform of “*Satya Dharmako Muchulka*” (Conscious Document of True Religion). Since Mahaguru Lingden was the follower of Josmani sect of Hinduism which believes in prohibition of animal sacrifice, non-vegetarian diet and taking drinks etc., it was considered antithetical to the Limboo way of life in general and hence his influence remained confined to a small section of the Limboo population.

In 1942 Iman Singh Chemzong arranged for teaching Limboo language in Geyzing (now Gyalsing). He wrote Limboo-English dictionary besides publishing many books on Limboo literature and culture. Harkadhoj Limboo also used his influence as the Councilor, to teach Limboo language as additional subjects upto class II and in 1979 it was taught upto class VIII. In 1981 the language was recognized as one of the State Languages of Sikkim and in 1982 Limboo programmes were broadcast through All India Radio, Gangtok. In 1985 it was introduced as main subject in the syllabus of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)¹¹⁴ and in 2000 the University of North Bengal gave permission to teach the language as main subjects at the under-graduate level.¹¹⁵

Though the Treaty of Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum mentioned Limboos as sons of Bhutias, the Limboos continue to receive unequal treatment from the successive Bhutia rulers. The Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917 did not include Limboos as one of the protected members of the Chogyal’s subjects. They were treated with at par with other Nepalis and paid higher revenues. In 1958 Shri Barnadhoj Limboo contested the Council election from the Pemayongtse constituency but owing to the complicated and communal system of voting introduced under 1958 proclamation, he was not elected despite securing 684 votes as against the third successful candidates, Shri Galden Tashi Bhutia, who secured 623 votes. In 1961 the Chogyal promulgated the Sikkim Subject Regulation identifying the Limboos as one of the indigenous subjects of Sikkim. The proclamation embroiled into controversy allegedly for creating a rift within the Nepali community. Though all references to communities were removed from the Subjects Regulations with effect from January 16, 1962,¹¹⁶ it was successful in raising doubts whether Limboos were Nepalis. In 1967 one seat was reserved for the Limboos in the

Sikkim Council and in 1968 royal permission was granted for teaching Limboo language in government schools.¹¹⁷ The Limboo seat in the Sikkim Council continued till 1973. The Representation of Sikkim Subjects of 1974, however, unceremoniously abolished the provision of separate seat and for all practical purposes the community was clubbed with the Nepali community.

In May 23, 1973 the Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limbu (Limboo) Chumlung was established at Tharpu in West Sikkim. The organization in its first meeting held on 19 July 1973 at Soreng bazaar in west Sikkim adopted resolutions declaring 'Chongs' (Tsongs/Limboos) as one of the indigenous tribes of Sikkim and were not Nepalis.¹¹⁸ In 1976 the Kazi government could not specify Limboos as the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim even though the Central Home Ministry had particularly asked for clarification from the State Government as to why Limboos (Tsongs) could not be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim.¹¹⁹ In November 1977 the then Governor of Sikkim, Shri B.B.Lal, wrote to the central counterpart demanding restoration of seats reserved earlier for the Limboos in Sikkim Legislative Assembly in concurrence to article 371F(f) of the constitution of India.¹²⁰ However, Limboos were neither recognized as tribes of Sikkim in 1978 nor seat was restored when the Presidential Ordinance seeking to amend the Representation of People Act 1950 and 1951 was issued in 1979. Since then the Limboos, through its various forums, have been highlighting the concept of Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum in support of the claim as aboriginal Sikkimese and their just demand for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes and restoration of seats in the Assembly. In August 1987 the State government submitted the following explanations in favour of the Limboo community in the conference of the Union Ministers held for comprehensive revision of the list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as "Limboos: They claim their existence right from the time of that of the existence of the Lepcha in Sikkim. They were one of the members of the Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum. They have their separate language complete with script, which the State Government has described as one of the State Languages and is being taught upto class XII in 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 Scheduled Tribes has already been recommended by the State Government of Sikkim".¹²¹ Though there were sufficient recommendations in favour of the Limboo community for Scheduled Tribes status the then Bhandari government reserved the special recommendation by stating "We cannot separate the demands. We do not want divide and rule policy. All Sikkimese are one".¹²²

According to the report of the Economic Survey carried out by the Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Sikkim, in 1994-95 the Limboos constituted about 10.71 per cent (6842 households) of the total households (63,878) of Sikkim. While classifying the Limboo households under seven economic categories, the Report concluded that the Limboos were economically poorer as compared to the general households of Sikkim. About 80.32 percent (5,496) of the Limboo households had less than Rs. 11,000/- while 91.94 percent (6,260) had less than Rs. 20,000/- annual income indicating that the majority of Limboo households were below the poverty line.

Table 2.6: Limboo Households by Economic Categories, 1994-95.

Households Income per annum	Limboo Households (Absolute)	Percentage of Limboo Households categories	Total Households (Absolute)	Percentage
Below Rs. 4,000/-	2592	37.80	18,655	29.20
Below Rs. 6,000/-	3662	53.52	28,933	45.20
Below Rs. 8,500/-	4775	69.79	38,869	60.84
Below Rs. 11,000/-	5496	80.32	46,581	72.92
Below Rs. 20,000/-	6260	91.94	55,258	86.51
Below Rs. 50,000/-	6801	99.40	62,747	98.22
Above Rs. 50,000/-	41	0.06	1,131	1.77
Total	6842	-	63,878	-

Source: Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Sikkim, 1994-95, Gangtok.

The Bureau highlighted the following factors responsible for such a dismal economic condition of the Limboos in Sikkim. They are:

- a) Political and administrative suppression by the ruling class for nearly 353 years. (1642-1995 A.D.);

- b) Social and economic exploitation by the ruling class for about 333 years (1642-1975);
- c) Faulty culture and traditions of Limboos themselves;
- d) Low level of literacy, awareness, simple mindedness and peace loving nature;
- e) Lack of political, economic and social awareness.¹²³

Table 2.7: Number of Limboos in Government services, 1994-95

Employment Class	Limboos	Others	Total	(%) of Limboos	(%) of Others
Class I	7	352	359	0.03	1.95
Class II	33	750	783	0.18	4.14
Class III	524	9,183	9,707	2.89	50.74
Class IV	450	6,797	7,247	2.48	37.56
Total	1014	17,082	18,096	5.60	94.40

Source: Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Sikkim, 1994-95, Gangtok.

According to the table 2.9 regarding employment scenario the Limboos occupy a small section of the total workforce in the State Government. Their percentage at the higher administrative and decision-making level is negligible while at the lower levels (class III and IV employees) the members of the community are employed in large numbers i.e. 2.89 and 2.48 percent respectively.

In 1990 the community has been included in the list of Other Backward Classes (OBC) of Sikkim in the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, established by Government of India to investigate the condition of backward classes, but the State government headed by the Chief Minister Bhandari refused to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations.¹²⁴ The community has been also denied opportunity to be recognized as Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim in 1990 for ethnic and political reasons.¹²⁵ In 1994 the Chief Minister, P.K.Chamling, implemented the Mandal Commission recommendations and Limboos, besides other, were recognized as the Other Backward Classes of Sikkim. Chamling also wrote to the central government for the (a) recognition of the Limboo language in the Eighth Scheduled of the constitution of India; (b)

inclusion of the Limboo community in the Scheduled Tribes list of Sikkim; and (c) reservation of seats for the Limboos in the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim.¹²⁶

The Report of the Other Backward Classes Commission submitted to the State Government in 1998 provides following details on the economic position of the Limboos in respect of other communities. The data was compiled from 38 government departments.

In January 2003, the Limboos and Tamangs have been recognized as the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim without fixing the number of seats to be reserved for them in the State Assembly though notification to that extent is required under article 332 of the constitution of India. In the same year the Union Cabinet postponed all issues relating to delimitation of Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies to till 2026 and the present delimitation committee formed in 2002 could not carryout separate enumeration of the Limboos as they were not Scheduled Tribes in 2001. Since then the Sikkim Limboo Tamang Tribal Forum and the Sikkim Limboo Tamang Joint Action Committee have been demanding for reservation of seats within the special provision of article 371F of the constitution of India. It must be mentioned here that the said article is non-obstante in nature. The recognition of the Limboos and Tamangs as Scheduled Tribes, however, has created an anomalous situation. These communities are now recognized constitutionally as Scheduled Tribes, but cannot contest from reserved for Scheduled Tribes in the State Assembly of Sikkim because such seats are reserved only for two Scheduled Tribes group, i.e. Bhutias and Lepchas. In order to solve the problem the Delimitation Commission in its letter to the Government of India, vide letter no 282/DEL/2003, dated 11.06,2003, proposed for the need to amend Section 7 (1A) of the Representation of the People Act 1950.¹²⁷

Thus, Limboos are one of the primordial ethnic communities of Sikkim and are generally identified with the Nepalis. But, a substantial section of Limboo community resents to such identification. Almost all of them speak Limboo language. The community has been having, at least, one representation

**Table 2.8: Caste/Community-wise Employment Status in 38
Departments, 1998.**

Sl. No.	Communities	Selection IAS/IPS/IFS	Gazetted Grade I	Gazetted Grade II	Non-Gazetted	Class IV
1	Scheduled Tribe	23	95	120	888	1115
2	Scheduled Caste	2	7	15	143	450
3	Bahun/Sharma	2	25	42	372	739
4	Chhetri	6	11	35	318	752
5	Pradhan/Newar	7	17	44	245	301
6	Gurung	-	8	17	180	524
7	Mangar/Thapa	1	1	16	74	208
8	Tamang	1	5	12	158	555
9	Limboo	2	3	14	151	586
10	Rai	1	12	28	81	789
11	Sunuwar	-	2	9	50	23
12	Dewan	-	2	3	5	2
13	Giri/Sanyasi	-	1	1	16	44
14	Jogi	-	-	-	2	13
15	Thakuri	-	-	1	4	3
16	Bhujel	-	-	1	10	29
17	Bengali	-	1	4	16	1
18	Marwari	1	2	4	10	5
19	Bihari	3	3	6	20	15
21	Sweeper	-	-	-	-	5
22	Keralian	-	1	20	20	15
23	Rajasthani	-	1	-	2	-
24	Kashmiri	-	-	-	1	-
25	Mohamedan	-	-	-	2	-
26	Garali	-	-	-	1	-
27	AngloIndian	-	-	-	-	1
28	Thami	-	-	-	-	2
29	Karmakar	-	-	-	1	6
30	Oria	-	-	-	1	-

Source: Report of the OBC Commission, 1998.

in the Legislative Assembly since 1974 and the same is increased to four after 1999. They are one of the Scheduled tribes of Sikkim but seat in the Assembly is yet to be reserved.

The Sherpas:

The Sherpas are known all over the world for their virility as efficient mountaineers. The word “Sherpa” is a combination of two Bhutia words ‘Shayar’ (East) and ‘Pa’ (Residents or People). Thus, it is presumed that the name “Sherpa” was used by the Tibetans. According to Balchandra Sharma, a noted Nepali historian, the Sherpas have come down from Tibet and settled on the North Eastern part of Nepal especially in the region of Solo Khumbu.¹²⁸ The Sherpa legend, however, indicates their original place as Shera-Ta in the Kham province of Tibet. Following their tantric leader, named Shyr-Toong-Gyal, the Sherpas migrated to the regions of Solokhumbu in Nepal and some of them advanced further towards the hilly areas of Darjeeling, Bhutan and Sikkim.¹²⁹ In another version the Sherpas are considered to have originally lived “in the frontier of districts in the Tsing-Lai-Sechwan provinces of China.¹³⁰ and possibly migrated to Sikkim and other parts of the region after Tibet’s conversion to Buddhism in the middle of the 7th century.¹³¹ Since the Sherpas were, and still are, by and large Buddhist by religion, their occupational indulgence as porters and guides in mountain expeditions till date provides a valuable basis for migration into the hilly areas of Darjeeling and Sikkim. They are also seen having leadership and organizational qualities.

The Sherpas are divided into number of endogamous clans which can broadly be divided into two groups - Khadev and Khamedu - the former holding a higher status than the latter.¹³² Further, there are subdivisions or sub-clans or branches within these two bigger clans. A few of them are – Gajra, Goporma, Golay, Pang Karma, Pang Dorjay, Pal Dorjay, Pinasa, Nay Jungba, Rong Sherpa etc.

The early accounts of the Sherpa population in Sikkim are not available. The census taken in Sikkim in 1891 did not provide details about the Sherpa population but the passing remark made by Risley in the Gazetteer of Sikkim (1928/1993) suggests that most probably the Sherpa community was enumerated and shown as Bhutias.¹³³ At present the Sherpa population in Sikkim is around 20,000 to 25,000¹³⁴ with 3,340 households¹³⁵ spread in all the districts of Sikkim.

The areas inhabited mostly by the Sherpa population in Sikkim are Ribdi, Bareng, Sangkhu, Okhrey, Seprey Nagi (Sombarey), Bega and Bermoik in the West district, Bermoik Thangsing, Palk Naya Busty, Damthang, Jowbari, Perbing and Soreng in the South, Phademchen, Agamluk, Subaney Dara, Sumin, Dokchen, Thokchey and Yali in the East district and Kabi in the North district.

The Sherpas in general are the followers of Buddhism of Ningmapa sect; but spirit worshipping, called Bonpo, which too is influenced by the tenets of Buddhism, is also common among them. Like the Tibetan lamas the Buddhist Sherpa lama performs rituals based on the teachings of Padmasamvava (Guru Rimpochey) along with the main mantra as “Om-Mani-Padmay-Hum-Ray”. While the Bonpo Lama follow the teachings of Bonpa Serab and initiate puja ceremony with “Om-Manti-Muyey-Saydo” as key mantras.

The Sherpas observe various social and religious festivals and are mostly organized in Gumpas. Their festivals, culture, food habits and traditional attire, except for ‘Gametil’, a piece of striped cloth worn over the Bakhru, which the Sherpa married women wear at the back while the Bhutia women wear the same piece of cloth, called ‘Pangden’, on the front, bears much resemblance with Bhutias. Lochar (New Year) is their most important festival besides Manirindu, Dumji and Osho etc.

The Sherpas speak in Sherpa language among them and use Tibetan script. Sherpa language falls under the Tibeto-Burman group of languages but Dawa Gyatso Sherpa, the Sherpa translator in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, contends that “Sherpa language is based on Tibetan language but it differs from Tibetan in pronunciation. Only ten percent of Sherpa words resemble Tibetan words”.¹³⁶ The language is accorded recognition in Sikkim as a State language in 1995 and since 2000 it is being taught upto the senior secondary levels in government schools. Besides rendering Assembly proceedings in Sherpa language, the deliberations can also be made in the Sherpa language in the State Legislature as was done for the first time by Mingma Tshering Sherpa, legislator from the Rakdong-Tintek (BL) constituency, in 2002 Budget Session.

In Sikkim, the Sherpas are mostly engaged in agricultural activities. Land is their main source of income but since the Revenue Order No. 1 does not provide protection, the number of landless among them is on the rise. The subsidiary sources of income include labour, service and guides on mountain expeditions. In earlier days the Sherpas, for being natural climbers, were mostly employed as porters by the White Sahibs in their mountain expeditions. Over the years many of them have become heroes of the Himalayas and have engaged as guides and instructors in mountaineering institutions of India and abroad. However, their participation in the service sector is as low as 1.33 percent out of a total of 1273 posts in 16 different services of the State.

In Sikkim the Sherpas enjoy scheduled tribes status as one of the Bhutia sub-tribes since 1978.¹³⁷ However, since seats in the State Assembly are reserved as per the Representation of People Act 1950, i.e., when Sherpas were not recognized as Bhutia tribes, the Sherpas are denied with the privilege of seat reservation in the State Legislature. It must be mentioned here that the Representation of People Act, 1950, as amended in 1980, provides for a broader definition of the "Bhutias" including the Sherpas and other Bhutias.¹³⁸ Over the years it was given an impression that the 12 seats reserved for the Bhutias and the Lepchas were not meant for other tribals included within the corpus Bhutia in 1978. It must also be mentioned here that the Representation of People (Amendment) Act, 1980 (8 of 1980) has maintained that the seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha are also meant for those groups included within the larger Bhutia definition in 1978.¹³⁹ In other words Sherpas can have representation only as a Bhutia and not as a separate Sherpa community. And since Sherpas are recognized as Bhutias, it is contended that they do not need separate seat in the Assembly.

Table 2.9: Service-wise figure of Sherpa Community in Sikkim, August 2005.

Sl. No.	Services	Sherpa	Total Posts.
01	Indian Administrative Service	01	46
02	Indian Police Service	00	25
03	Indian Forest Service	00	28
04	Sikkim State Agriculture Service	00	141
05	Sikkim Statistical Service	01	33
06	Mines and Geology Service	01	14
07	Sikkim State Nursing Service	00	33
08	Medical Doctors	05	223
09	Sikkim Finance & Acct. Service	02	147
10	Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Service	00	70
11	State Civil Engineering Service	01	156
12	Sikkim Co-operative Service	00	52
13	State Mechanical Eng. Service	02	47
14	State Electrical Eng. Service	01	109
15	Sikkim State Educational Service	01	58
16	Sikkim Directorate and Misc. Services	02	91
17	Total	17	1273

Source: Department of Personnel & Administrative Reform & Training, Govt. of Sikkim, August 2005.

Since 1994 the community has been contesting election from reserved Bhutia-Lepcha constituencies. The community has their own socio-cultural organization, called Sikkim Sherpa Association, which has been working for the promotion of culture, language and over all development of the Sherpa community. Despite adversities, the Sherpas have maintained their own cultural identity. With the gradual advancement in the field of education the Sherpas have become economically better off and conscious of their interest and political rights, and assertive too, while maintaining a healthy understanding with other communities. Despite being Scheduled Tribes, the Sherpas, in general, have not been able to come up at par with other tribes of Sikkim and this is where both the concerned Association and government should give a serious thought.

Yolmos/Kagatey:

It is believed that they have migrated to Sikkim from eastern Nepal. The

name “Kagatey” is derived from a Nepali word “Kagaj” meaning paper and associated with their traditional occupation of paper-making. However, they preferred to call themselves ‘Yolmos’ though both nomenclatures are found in the list of Bhutia Scheduled Tribes included by the Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1978. Earlier they used to be treated as one of the Tamang groups.¹⁴⁰

They speak Kagatey language or dialect and use Tibetan script for writing purposes. They speak Nepali language quite comfortably and often hold having closer social and cultural ties with the Nepalis than the Bhutias. The Bhutia organizations like Survival Sikkimese and Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee consider them as one of the Nepali sub-cultural groups.

They are Buddhist by religion. Their chief deities include the Buddha and the Padmasamvava (Guru Rimpochey). They go to Gumpa (monastery) for worshipping but since there is no separate Gumpa of the community in Sikkim, they have been seen visiting Gumpas of other Bhutia communities of Sikkim. Earlier, they had a binding rule of having one of the sons trained in Lamaism to become a Lama afterwards, but such a custom is no longer adhered to. Their major festivals include birthday of Padmasamvava, Buddha Purnima, and Lochar (New Year) etc. They celebrate the Lochar festival separately with rituals of their own.

The socio-cultural organization of the Yolmos/Kagatey is not known in Sikkim. They have also never been seen or heard raising demands in public. It seems either they have been completely assimilated within the Bhutias or their numbers are too few to form organization. No ethnographic details of the community are available in Sikkim. Economically they are yet to make substantive progress, though after 1978 few of them have emerged in the field of hotel business, service sector, creative arts and politics at the village level.

THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY:

In a multi-cultural society ethnic conflict/tension generally occurs due to the feeling of marginalization or alienation, real or perceived, of cultural identity

of one group or groups by other or others. This feeling is very strong in a multi-ethnic society which is characterized by the presence of dominant and dependent cultures. For instance, during the Chogyal's rule the Tibetan way of life was emphasized to such an extent that it led to the feeling of marginalization among other ethno-cultural groups of Sikkim. And in the post-merger era the Bhutias feel in the same way in presence of the dominant Nepali culture. Such feelings, more often than not, lead to the emergence of groups and movements intending to resist the assimilation process and to assert distinct identity of their own. In a liberal democratic polity such actions of resistance often appeal with the ideas of freedom, equality and justice, and attract special attention regarding preservation or conservation of ethno-cultural symbols of the groups like dress, language, religions, customs, historical antecedents, legendary heroes, geographical sites and related beliefs etc. Thus, a multi-ethnic society presents a tendency of conflict between the forces intending to develop a common identity based on the cultural ethos of the dominant group while the smaller groups owe their allegiance or loyalty to their group identity. The phenomenon is well explained by Amalendu Guha as 'Little Nationalism'.¹⁴¹

The question of identity or feeling of loss of identity is not new in the political history of Sikkim. In fact it is as old as the state itself. But in the present perspective the identification process, however, is not as easy as it seems to be mainly due to the prevalence of various levels/layers of identities and their political uses. Different groups and individuals in Sikkim present the question of socio-cultural/community/political identity in diverse ways: sometimes the identity of Bhutia-Lepcha as opposed to Nepalese received importance; sometimes the issue of the Bhutia domination over the Lepchas is highlighted and sometimes even the issue of the interest of the "real" Bhutias vis-à-vis the Tibetan Bhutias or other Bhutias is raised. Hence, the attempt at creating a common or civil-political identity on the basis of ethno-cultural affiliation is not only contentious but also a major issue in Sikkimese politics, though the trend is universal in dimension.

During the Chogyal's rule conscious attempts were made to provide

Tibetan identity on the basis of ethnic affiliation of the ruling class. Tibetan language, religions and way of life was forcefully imposed on the people belonging to other ethno-cultural groups in order to achieve the objective. This also included the attempt to write their own history and legends while destroying the historical antecedents of the early inhabitants of Sikkim. The impact was colossal especially on the Lepchas and Limboos but it was not so profound on the Nepalis in general owing to their numerical strength and organized Hindu religion.

During the reform movement of the late 1940's the identity question vacillated between the two extremes – whether Sikkim should remain become a democratic State or to remain a monarchical and theocratic State. The Sikkim National Party defended Sikkim's independence in terms of history, society, culture, language, religion and ethnicity of the ruling community.¹⁴² The ruling Bhutia elites were apprehensive of being ousted from power in a democratic state of Sikkim while the majority Nepali saw in it the end of discrimination and hegemony of the minority over the majority.

The political transition in 1975 called for massive restructuring of the system affecting the erstwhile pattern of governance and resource distribution system. This had raised a certain level of anxiety more intensely among the Bhutias than the other two groups, and to combat with this new menace the priorities were accordingly reoriented / designed to suit the immediate purposes. Henceforth the question of identity revolved around the question of ethnic identity of particular group/groups, including the question of preservation/protection of the rights and privileges of that group or groups.

In a pluri-cultural society the political decision makers generally faced with an onerous responsibility of maintaining a balance while accommodating or representing, as far as possible, the interest and aspirations of all the sections of the people, whether majority or minority. In the context of post-merger Sikkim the fears and apprehensions of the minority have been perhaps lavishly exaggerated for no culture can become extinct or get submerged simply because of the fact that some other culture has overtaken it. In reality, the feeling of being overtaken or

subsumed under another groups or culture rather add more vigour for consolidation or preservation of cultural identity of the minority provided that it does not voluntarily give up and which is seldom desired. For instance take the case of the Lepchas or Limboos in the early period of Sikkim. Despite of the conscious effort to obliterate the Lepcha or Limboo language or religion, they survived the assimilation process under monarchical theocratic system and flourished further in presence of another dominant, i.e. Nepali culture. In fact, the political decision-making process should be effective and neutral in its dealing with promotional and delivery responsibilities.

The Bhutias, once belonging to the ruling elite, mainly feared or apprehend that they would be relegated to a subordinate position in the political hierarchy after the merger of Sikkim with India. The Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association (STWA), formed in 1978, was apprehensive that the unhindered influx of the Nepalis would pose a threat to their culture and existence and would fight against any economic or political policies of the government which the association thinks detrimental to the interest of its member. It suspected the policies of the government which is dominated, at least numerically, by another cultural group.

The real threat, however, on the identity of the Bhutias is however due to the Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1978. The Order declared Bhutias and Lepchas as Scheduled Tribes but many other tribes of Bhutia origin were also included in the definition of Bhutia, who, according to the Bhutia organizations, do not merit inclusion in the definition of the Sikkimese Bhutia – such as the Chumbipas, Dophopas, Kagatey, Sherpas, Yolmos, Drukpas, Tromopas and Tibetans. This has aggravated the sense of insecurity among the Bhutias. The insecurity is further heightened in view of the recognition of Limboos and Tamangs as the Scheduled Tribes of Sikkim in January 2002. Though the government is committed to preserve the seats in favour of the Bhutia and Lepcha, the newly entered tribal communities, by virtue of being greater in number and assertive nature, cannot be stopped from exploiting the economic and educational benefits which has so far remained dominated by the Bhutias. The 33 percent reservation in government departments and public sector undertakings,

and for allotment of seats in educational institutions for professional courses are meant for the Scheduled Tribes¹⁴³ which, until substituted, also include the share of the Limboos and Tamangs.

The Bhutia-Lepcha communities are more resentful of the present electoral system and delimitation of constituencies. Due to the demographic composition and settlement pattern, the Bhutia-Lepcha candidates have to depend on the Nepali voters for winning election. They want genuine representation of the candidates from the reserved Bhutia-Lepcha seats and hence they proposed for 1958 election pattern.

The Bhutia-Lepcha tribals are also apprehensive towards the issue of the land reform. Being the erstwhile ruling community, the Bhutia-Lepcha tribal community even today possesses extensive landholdings. According to the Agricultural Census, 1990-91 about less than 5 per cent (4.9 %) of the Scheduled Tribes possesses over 28 per cent (28.1 %) land area under their possession.¹⁴⁴ Besides, the monasteries, which are the symbols of their cultural identity, also possess huge estates received as rewards or donation either from the Chogyals or the Kazi landlords. Earlier, such estates enjoyed tax exemption and the income from them was to be utilized for the maintenance of the monasteries. However, in order to implement various welfare policies, various legislations were passed in the post-merger era by the State government namely Sikkim Agricultural Land Ceiling and Reform Rules, 1978 (amended in 1979 and 1985), Sikkim Cultivators Protection Act, 1985, Land Registration and Acquisition Rules, 1978, which were viewed as measures designed to alienate or dislodge them from their hereditary rights over the land. The Bhutia being the ruling community / elite earlier, the effect of the land reform measures would be obviously colossal on them than other communities. In fact Sikkim has the tradition of protecting the land of the Bhutias and Lepchas since 1897 when J.C. White was the political officer of Sikkim. The rule was further strengthened in 1917 as Revenue Order No. 1 and now enjoys constitutional sanction under article 371 F (k). But despite of existence of laws prohibiting alienation of Lepcha-Bhutia land to others, including other tribals, they feared that the amount of land confiscated by the government in

excess of upper ceiling would be distributed among the non-tribals. In fact, a resource scrapped and industrially unviable State like Sikkim has its own compulsions and challenges within which it has to implement various welfare policies, build infrastructure facilities and create scope for employment generation. This is where the onus of all tension lies – the interest of the State is viewed as the interest of the majority Nepalis and considered contradictory to the interest of the ethnic minority group/groups. When the government proposes, somebody somewhere will be dispossessed. It is to be noted that the issue is not that of cultural assimilation or domination, but it is most likely an issue of feeling different and such feeling is present not only between the majority and minority cultures but also found among minority ethnic groups i.e., Bhutia and Lepcha, and even within the Bhutias and majority Nepalis themselves.

Over the years it so happened that the Lepchas and Sherpas feel that they have been left far behind their Bhutia brethren in all respects. The 12 seats reserved for the Bhutia-Lepchas have been monopolized by the Bhutias. The Lepcha Youth Association wants parity to be maintained between the two communities and enactment of legal provision prohibiting transfer of land to others, including the Bhutias. On the other hand, the Sherpas too want separate seat to be reserved for the community in the Assembly and modification in the Revenue Order No. 1 so that they being the Bhutia, as per the constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1978, should be allowed to buy tribal (Bhutia-Lepcha) land.

Nepalis too are apprehensive of their identity in view of allegation made in different occasions challenging their identity as Sikkimese Nepali. At various point of time they have been referred in ignominious terms like ‘Coolies’ and ‘Immigrants’ despite of the fact that all Nepalis were neither ‘Immigrants’ nor were they coolies. They have been threatened eviction and metaphorically told “Nepali Chor, Sikkim Chod” (Nepali thieves leave Sikkim).

In 1975, many Nepalis of Sikkimese origin were denied Indian citizenship since the cut off year was based on the Sikkim Subjects Regulation of 1961. The Nepalis feared that they would be rendered stateless. Similarly, in 1979 the 16

seats reserved for the Sikkimese Nepalis, considered as their political identity, were abolished. The Nepalis feel very much disturbed in presence of the influx of more articulated and assertive outsiders. Their fear seemed to have been justified in view of 1985 Assembly election when one non-Nepali candidate was elected from the Gangtok General Constituency.

The Nepalis do not contemplate threat of assimilation or cultural domination but fear political and economic alienation and marginalization. They seemed to be perplexed to witness the economic and service sectors being dominated by the outsiders. The difference between the Nepali and plainsmen in services like IAS, IPS and IFS (Forest) is approximately 19 (19.19) percent to 58 (47.94) percent respectively in August 2005. In 1999 the difference was approximately 23 (23.28) percent and 48 (47.94) percent respectively. The percentage of the Nepalis in these elite services was even lower than that of the Bhutias both in 1999 and 2005.

Added to this is presence of traditional rules almost all of them discriminate against the Nepalis barring perhaps only three namely Income Tax Manual, Notification regarding land holding which is 20 acres for Bustiwalas, 30 acres for Mandals and 100 acres for Kazis, and Sikkim Subject Certificate.

Another noteworthy continuum in dominant-dependent scenario is found within the majority Nepalis of Sikkim that further creates confusion to the question of identity. It must be mentioned that the mongoloid Nepalis, which roughly formed about 50 per cent of the total Nepali population in Sikkim, are ethno – culturally different from the Aryan Nepalis and believed to have lost their distinct cultural identity during various historical-political circumstances in the distant past. Besides demanding for revival of cultural identity they also complain that the upper caste Nepalis (Aryan stock) have appropriated the major part of the privileges intended for the Nepalis as a whole. They alleged that the upper caste Nepalis have denied them the status of Other Backward Classes in 1990. Some mongoloid Nepalis like Tamang, Limboo, Gurung, Mangar, Rai, Sunuwar etc. hold the former Chief Minister, belonging to the upper caste, responsible for doing nothing to push forward their just claim for the tribal status. Though there is

no manifest tension between the two groups but the formation of separate organizations such as Sikkim Tamang Buddhist Association, All Sikkim Gurung (Tamu) Buddhist Association, Sikkim Sunuwar (Mukhia) Koinchbu, Akhil Sikkim Chhetri-Bahun Kalyan Sangh, Scheduled Caste Welfare Organization, Akhil Bhujel (Khawas) Sangh, Akhil Sikkim Mangar Association, Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh of Sikkim, Sikkim Newar Guthi, Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limboo Chumlung etc. with objectives to protect group interests and identity is indicative of the apparent division within the larger Nepali community.

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