

CHAPTER I

SIKKIM : AN INTRODUCTION

Physical features

Sikkim is a small land locked state surrounded by the vast stretches of Tibetan plateau on the north, Nepal on the west, Bhutan and Chumbi valley of Tibet on the east, and Darjeeling District of West Bengal on the south. It lies between $27^{\circ}5'$ and $28^{\circ}10'$ North Latitude and $88^{\circ}4'$ and $88^{\circ}58'$ East Longitude. It is stretched about 70 miles from north to south and 40 miles east to west⁽¹⁾.

The state forms a part of the inner ranges of the Himalayas so that it has no open valleys and no plain flat areas, but has varied elevations ranging from 300 m to 5500 metres above mean sea-level. The Kanchanjunga range, a huge mountain mass, 12 miles south of the main chain of the Himalayas constitutes a distinctive physical feature of Sikkim. The other snow capped peaks of Sikkim are Kumbakarna 7711 metres, Nepal 7163 m, Tent Peak 7315 m., Pyramid 7132m., Fluted peak 6888m., Pendem 6706m., Narsing 5625m and the Sinolchu Peak 4859m. The trend of the mountain system in Sikkim, as a whole, is in general east-west direction. The chief ridges in Sikkim, however, run in a more or less north-east direction, e.g. the Singlila and Chola ridges. Another north-south ridge runs through the central portion of Sikkim separating the Rangeet valley from the Tista valley. The Rangeet and the Tista Rivers which form the main channel of drainage, run nearly north to south⁽²⁾.

Sikkim has a gradual rise from south to north. About one third of its total area of 7069 sq.kms. is covered by forests and half of the area is perpetually under snow. The snow bound areas are mostly in the north and in some parts in the West and East Districts. Human habitation in the North District is confined upto La-chen and La-chung valleys. In the state density of population varies according to its physical features. At present, the majority of the population are from the Nepalese origin. The Bhuteas and Lepchas constitute other important ethnic groups. However, the demographic map of Sikkim has been, at the present moment, criss-crossed by plains men from different parts of India. These plains men are the late comers and are found mainly in the urban areas⁽³⁾.

Political History

In the absence of any authentic records, the early history of Sikkim is not known to the people. Numerous folklores and tales of Lepchas when pieced together tell us that before the immigration of Tibetans into Sikkim, it was inhabited by the Lepchas. "Thi-Kungtek" according to them is their first "Panoo" or king⁽⁴⁾.

It was during the rule of Panoo Thi-Kungtek that the three Tibetan Lamas cleverly consecrated a Tibetan by the name of Phuntsog Namgyal as the king of Sikkim in 1642. They also spread Buddhism and converted Lepchas into their religion. These facts are found narrated in a travelogue, "Particulars of visit to the Sikkim hills" written by an East India Company's official J.D. Herbert in 1830.

This is the earliest written material available to us. After him, among the 19th century writers, the well known ones, writing on various aspects of Sikkim are Dr. Archibald Campbell, Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, Dr. Robert Gordon Lotham, George Byres Mainwaring, Lawrence Austine Waddell, Herbert Hope Risley etc. and among the 20th century authors, the names of John Claude White, Stocks Cde Beauvoir, L. Schermann and George A. Grierson are famous. What is noticeable is that there is only one book titled "History of Sikkim" written so far by the Tibetans themselves. In fact, the Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshey Dolma wrote this book in 1908 in Tibetan and later on was translated into English by Dawa Kazi Samdup. This book based on Tibetan chronicles, though partisan, upholding the views of the ruling Tibetan elite alone, is nonetheless important as it throws light on many aspects of Sikkim's history, e.g. Sikkim's relations with Bhutan, Nepal's bid to conquer Sikkim etc (5).

During the reign of Namgyal Dynasty Sikkim till 1815 was engulfed in a series of attacks and invasions from Bhutan and Nepal. On Sikkim's request the British Government helped Sikkim to overcome Nepal's subjugation and in Feb. 10, 1817 the Treaty of Titaliya was signed between Sikkim and the British Government of India. The signing of the Treaty brought the Tibetan influence in Sikkim to an end, whereas it paved the way for the British penetration there. Finally with the signing of the Treaty of Tumlong in 1861 Sikkim passed into the hands of the British Government of India as its protectorate.

After independence, India entered into a Standstill Agreement with Sikkim in 1948 maintaining status quo and retaining all earlier rights and obligations. During this period, Sikkim's political scenario changed fast with the birth of a number of political parties. Prominent among them were Sikkim State Congress and Sikkim National Party. The former championing the cause of democratisation of political process, abolition of land lordism and accession of Sikkim with India, while the latter opposed all that the former stood for. The National Party of Sikkim was backed by the Chhogyal. The demand for agrarian and political reforms by the Sikkim State Congress led to mass demonstrations as a result of which the government of India took over the administration of Sikkim. A referendum was held to decide the question of Sikkim's merger with India. Ultimately on May 16, 1975 Sikkim was merged with India becoming the 22nd state⁽⁶⁾.

Sikkim is divided into four districts — Mangan (North), Gangtok (East), Gyalshing (West) and Namchi (South). The division of the districts is based on the dividing lines of the two river system - Tista and Rangeet. There are variations among the districts in respect to size, density of population and economic characteristics. The Mangan District is the largest (1736 sq. miles), followed by Western District of Gyalshing (445 sq. miles), thereafter Gangtok in the East District (367 sq. miles) and Namchi in the South District (270 sq. miles). The North District occupies more than 60% of land area of Sikkim, but the population density is very low,

i.e. only 6% of population of Sikkim live in the district. In Gangtok or East District 40.9%, Gyalshing or West District 20.0% and Namchi or South District 25.1% of population live. As a result, the density of population is different in different parts of Sikkim. One of the causes of the variation of density can be said to be due to distribution of forests. The forest area covers about 40% of the South District, 64% of the West and 54% in the East. The North or Mangan District is situated mainly under forests and glaciers. The density of population is the lowest in North⁽⁷⁾.

Population in Sikkim according to 1981 census is 3,14,999 out of which 84% live in the rural areas and 16% in the urban areas. It should be mentioned that Sikkim had only a few urban areas before 1951. After 1951 certain centres merged as towns; the towns are Mangan, Gangtok, Singtam, Namchi, Jorethang, Gyalshing and Nayabazar. Gangtok town, the capital of Sikkim is classified as class III town in the population size of 20,000-49,999. Gangtok's population was 13,308 in 1971 and in 1981 it was about 36,768. All other towns are under lowest category of class VI i.e. population size of less than 5000. It seems that according to census of 1981, 72% of the urban people live in Gangtok town alone. Predominantly, Sikkim is rural and about 84% of people live in rural areas⁽⁸⁾.

There has been a continuous growth of population of Sikkim, particularly a substantial increase in 1971-81 decade. Decadal increase of rural population jumped from 224 in 1961-71 to 388 in 1971-81 and urban population from 1872 to 1,500 per 1000 persons.

However, it should be stated that in urban areas growth has remained continuously high since 1951.

Rural-urban decennial increase for every 1000 persons is shown in Table 1.1. It is seen that North District is the only district with very high population increase of 1028 persons per 1000 persons during the decade of 1971-81. In other words 1000 population of 1971 in North District has reached 2028 in 1981. Similarly, its rural population increased at a high rate in the decade 1971-81 as compared to the earlier decade of 1961-71. East and South Districts also have comparatively higher growth rate for rural population than the West District. Urban growth rates in West District also registered comparatively low growth rate during the decade of 1971-81, whereas South District recorded the highest growth rate during 1971-81⁽⁹⁾.

Table 1.1

Rural Urban decennial population increase for every 1000 persons in the Districts of Sikkim 1961-81

	<u>1961-71</u>	<u>1971-81</u>
Total	+334	+1028
North District Rural	+300	+1019
Urban	...	+1357
Total	+510	+ 613
East District Rural	+376	+ 383
Urban	+1485	+1542
Total	+162	+ 423
South District Rural	+136	+ 353
Urban	...	+3391
Total	...	+ 289
West District Rural	...	+ 284
Urban	...	+ 553

Further, it can be seen from the Census Report that East District is having the highest population with 1,38,762 persons in 128 Revenue Blocks (one uninhabited) and 2 towns and West District which has recorded a population of 75197 persons residing in 120 Revenue Blocks (one uninhabited) and 2 towns, North District is the least populated which accounts for 26455 persons residing in 54 Revenue Blocks (3 uninhabited) and 1 town.

A close examination of census figures reveal significant rural-urban difference in literacy rates in all the four districts of the state ranging from 20.56% in the East District to 25% - 63% in the West District. Difference in male-female literacy rates though gone down significantly as compared to 1971 census, is still quite high in rural areas. It is observed that difference in male-female literacy rates in rural areas of all districts of the state is approximately of the order of 21 percentage point, whereas this difference in urban areas is highest in West District. The East District is distinctly ahead in literacy followed by South and North Districts and West District. In fact, the regional variation of literacy rate is quite high in Sikkim.

Even in terms of percentage of participation in the work force there are considerable variations. The percentage of main workers to the total population is 46.6 in Sikkim. For males the percentage of main workers to total population is 56.5% whereas for females it is only 34.7%. The percentage of marginal workers in the state is 1-7%. There are only 0-7% marginal workers among the males

and 2.4% among the females. The remaining 57.7% of the total population in the state have been treated as non-workers in accordance with the concept of workers and non-workers adopted in 1981 census. Highest participation rate 51.41% is observed in West District followed by South District 47.79% and North District 46.34% lowest participation rate of 43.39 percentage is recorded in East District. Rural-urban difference in participation rate is highest in West District where main workers in rural areas are 51.77% and in urban areas 35.83% showing a gap of 15.94% Rural-urban difference in participation rate is lowest in North District where percentage of main workers is higher by 0.73 percent points in urban areas than in rural areas. The difference in male and female workers' participation rate is quite high in the state, but as compared to other states of the country this difference is very low. Male-female difference participation rates vary from 8.56 percent point in West District and 29.51 percent points in North District. Male-female difference participation rate is higher in urban areas as compared to rural areas of all the districts of the state. Role of marginal workers in the economy of the state is insignificant. Highest proportion of marginal workers (6.91%) is recorded in North District and lowest (0.48%) in West District. Proportion of non-workers is highest in East District (55.70%) followed by South District (49.67%) and the lowest proportion (46.75%) is recorded in North District.

It is well known that without education no nation can progress. The progress of education in Sikkim has been extremely

slow. In order to have effective educational facilities primary education facilities should be specially available to children right in their areas of residence, as small children cannot be expected to walk long distance to avail of these facilities, more so in the hilly terrain of the state. The table below indicates the primary education facilities in the state⁽¹⁰⁾.

Table 1.2

Primary education in Sikkim : Location of schools

District	No. of Panchayat within 1 Km.	Units having primary schools within 2 Km.	Units having primary school beyond 2 km.
1. East	55	5	8
2. West	47	4	9
3. North	21	0	0
4. South	60	2	4
Total	183	11	21

The above Table shows that out of total of 215 Panchayat units as many as 183 or 85% have primary schools within 1 Km, another 11 Panchayat units have schools within 2 Km, but still there are 21 Panchayat units where the children would be required to walk more than 2 kms if they want to attend the school. North District is better placed with all its Panchayat units having a school within 1 km.

As far as middle level education is concerned the position does not appear to be satisfactory, because only 50 Panchayat Units have a middle school within a distance of 1 Km., another 57 Panchayat Units have these facilities available within 5 km. There are 107 Panchayat Units where children will have to walk a distance of more than 5 kms. to avail of these facilities. Among the districts, South District appears to be the worst sufferer on this account.

In respect to secondary schools the situation is still worse. Only 17 Panchayat units have a high/higher secondary school within 1 Km, other 7 Panchayat units have such a school within 2 kms., 21 Panchayat units have this facility within 3.5 kms., and other 40 Panchayats within 6-10 Kms. As many as 120 Panchayat can avail of this facility only at a distance of more than 10 Kms.

It is clear that there are considerable variations in respect to educational facilities in different districts of Sikkim. This is partly due to terrain and partly due to lack of finance. But it has to be noted that there has been some developments and improvements in respect to educational facilities in Sikkim after merger.

Medical Infrastructure

With greater emphasis being assigned on the provision of basic medical facilities for safeguarding population from disease there has been an increase in the availability of these facilities in the rural areas. The following Table shows the position in this context.

Table 1.3

No. of Panchayat Units having a hospital

District	Within 1 Km.	Within 1-2 Km.	Within 3-5 Km.	Within 6-10 Km.	Beyond 10 Km
1. East	4	5	6	7	47
2. West	2	2	5	10	40
3. North	1	2	2	1	15
4. South	0	2	7	9	48
Total	7	11	20	27	150

From the above Table, it is clear that 7 Panchayat Units have a primary health centre within 1 km. and another 27 Panchayat units have a primary health centre only at a distance of 6-10 kms, and 150 Panchayat units are, however, not well placed as the nearest health centre is found to be only more than 10 Kms. away. It may, however, be added that even though the national norm of having primary health centres for a population of 20,000 has been achieved, yet because of their distribution of population and hilly terrain, distances from the health centres are formidable.

The problem of provision of safe drinking water in the rural areas has been receiving attention of the government lately. This item has also been included in the Minimum Needs Programme by the

Planning Commission on national basis. The Tables 1.4 and 1.5 indicate the availability of this amenity both in summer and other seasons in various Panchayat units.

It can be seen from the Table 1.4 and 1.5 that for many Panchayats spring is the main source of supply of water. In the summer season as many as 163 Panchayats have drinking facilities within one km. of the Panchayat against 137 in other seasons. Availability of water is still a problem for many Panchayats during all seasons. The first place among the main source of drinking water is taken by spring which is perhaps natural-Sikkim being a hilly state, the second place is being occupied by some kind of piped water. There are, however, quite a good number of Panchayat units, 52 in summer and 76 in other seasons whose residents have to go out of their Panchayats for water.

In respect of electrification, Sikkim has made a remarkable progress during the Seventh Five Year Plan. Sikkim has also been successful in its rural electrification programme.

The most important facility that the rural population needs is a place to sell their surplus produces and buy by normal markets periodic "hats" and fair price shops for groceries. It is pertinent to point out that regulated markets as they have been set up in other parts of the country for the procurement of surplus produce of the farmers, do not exist in Sikkim at all. Only 27 Panchayat Units have some sort of market within 1 Km. and between 2 Km. to 10 Km. More than 90 Panchayat units have markets more than 10 Km. distance. Again

Table 1.4

No. of Panchayat units having water facility main source in Summer season

	Within 1 Km.			Within 1-2 Km.			Beyond 2 Km.				
	Tap	Pond	Stream	Spring	Others	Tap	Stream	Spring	Tap	Stream	Spring
1. East	9	6	1	42	2	2	0	6	0	0	0
2. West	13	7	0	20	1	3	0	15	0	0	0
3. North	13	0	0	2	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
4. South	28	6	1	12	0	3	1	3	4	2	6
Total	63	19	2	76	3	14	1	24	4	2	6

Table 1.5

No. of Panchayat units having main source of water in other seasons

	Within 1 Km.					Within 2 Km.		
	Tap	Pond	Stream	Spring	Others	Tap	Stream	Spring
1. East	6	3	2	28	2	2	2	19
2. West	0	6	0	23	0	1	3	14
3. North	12	1	0	2	0	5	0	0
4. South	23	4	2	12	2	0	1	6
Total	41	14	4	65	4	8	6	39

only 17 Panchayats have "hats" within 1 Km. and 114 Panchayats have "hats" from 2 to 10 Km. distance. 84 Panchayats have periodic "hats" at more than 10 Km. distance. The facility of fair price shops is available only in 30 Panchayats within 1 Km. and majority of Panchayats have this facility at a distance of more than 10 kms. It may be noted that the above facilities are not mutually exclusive and thus the actual number where one of the other facility may be available may be less than what appears from the government data. In fact marketing system is heavily concentrated in a few localities and therefore, the farmers have to face difficulties in selling their products⁽¹⁴⁾.

Banking facilities in Sikkim are mostly confined to urban and semi-urban areas. The only four banks operating in Sikkim are State Bank of India, State Bank of Sikkim, United Commercial Bank and Central Bank of India. The State Bank of India has only three branches in East District (Gangtok). Again in the same district there are three branches of Bank of Sikkim and one is the South and one in the North District. It means that in West District there is virtually no bank. In fact, the banking system has not properly developed in Sikkim.

Again Co-operative movement has not advanced far in Sikkim. Only 62 Panchayat units have a co-operative society within 5 Km. But 158 Panchayat units have no Co-operative at all, or located beyond 10 Km. distance. These Co-operatives are not very often useful because of distance involved⁽¹⁵⁾.

Out of 215 Panchayat units only 71 units have a fertiliser depot or seed-store within one km. Another 60 are within 5 Km. of this facility. The residents of 57 Panchayat units can avail of this amenity only if they are prepared to walk between 6-10 kms. Another 27 Panchayat units are so placed that they are at least 10 Km. away from any fertiliser depot or seed store⁽¹⁶⁾.

The provision of veterinary services still does not appear to be satisfactory. Only 19 Panchayat units out of 215 have this facility within 1 Km. 43 Panchayat units can avail of this opportunity within a distance of 1-5 kms. Nearly half of the Panchayat units can reach veterinary hospital or dispensary only after waling more than 10 kms⁽¹⁷⁾.

Quality of People in Sikkim

Development of any country depends upon its quality of people. Sikkim is relatively a backward state and rate of literacy has not progressed to the extent considered to be desirable.

The educational status of householos in the rural areas is shown in the following Table.

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Table 1.6

The percentage of literate and illiterate persons in various age-groups

Age group	Literate %	Illiterate %	Total %
0 - 5	6.16	21.41	15.58
5 - 14	39.81	15.94	25.06
14 - 25	26.42	18.80	21.71
25 - 40	17.66	22.52	20.67
40 - 60	8.29	16.72	13.50
60 - 100	1.66	4.61	3.48
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

The Table shows that the percentage of literacy was the highest (39.81) in 5-14 age group, lowest (1.66) in 60-100. A consistently declining tendency has been noticed in the rate of literacy. The illiteracy rate, on the other hand, was the highest (22.52%) in the 25-40 age group and lowest (4.61) in 60-100 age group. As for total, it will be noticed it was the highest (25.06%) in the age group (5-14), while lowest (3.48) in age group 60-100.

The above Table can further be broken up for details and the detailed picture is shown in the following Table.

Table 1.7
Level of Education

	Age groups					
	0-5	5-14	14-25	25-40	40-60	60-100
1. Illiterate	84.89	39.30	53.49	67.34	75.54	81.82
2. Can write	15.11	53.58	40.15	28.78	22.24	17.23
3. Class VIII Passed	-	0.73	4.21	1.77	0.34	0.38
4. Higher Secondary	-	0.39	1.91	1.89	0.73	0.38
5. Graduates	-	-	0.24	0.22	0.15	0.19
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

It appears that the rate of illiteracy is the highest (84.89) in 0.5 age-group and lowest (39.30) in 5-14 age-group. The percentage of those who can write worked out to be highest (53.50%) for 5-14 age group. The percentage of population passed the VIII standard recorded the highest (4.21%) in 14-25 age group, while lowest (0.34%) in 40-60 age group. Those passed higher secondary hardly worked out to be 1.91% in 14-25 age group, while more or less the same, i.e. 0.38% was noted for 5-14 and 60-100 age groups. Those who attained graduation level form 0.24% in the age group of 14-25, while 0.15% was observed for the age group 40-60. The total impression one gets is that in education Sikkim is still backward.

In respect of education there is also considerable amount of regional variation. Illiteracy of all groups is highest in West District (69.06), followed by North (64.74%), South (61.40) and

East (57.73%). More or less similar pattern follows in respect of enrolment in schools. The West District may be considered as the most educationally backward.

An attempt has been made in the agricultural census to study the health status of the farmers according to age-groups. The data have been presented in the Table 1.8.

Table 1.8

Health details of the members of operating households (By percentage)

Age-Group	Healthy	Weak	Sick	Total
0-5	92.65	6.65	1.70	100.00
5-14	95.31	2.95	1.74	100.00
14-25	95.61	3.11	1.28	100.00
25-40	95.02	3.16	1.82	100.00
40-60	85.93	8.30	5.77	100.00
60-100	60.65	20.70	18.65	100.00
	92.29	4.86	2.85	100.00

It will be seen from the above Table that the percentage of healthy population recorded the highest in the age-group 14-25 (95.61) which indicates the degree of health status noticed at the stage of adolescence. The percentage of healthy even in the age-group 0-5 and 5-14 displayed somewhat encouraging state of affairs. The percentage of healthy population, however, displayed a downward

trend in the subsequent age-group, viz. 40-60 and 60-100, a phenomenon found almost in all rural areas.

As for weak population, the state percentage more or less exhibited a rising trend from one age group 14-25 onwards and touched the highest (20.70) in the 60-100 age-group. This Table further reveals that the percentage of sick population displayed a rising tendency with the increase in the ages of rural population. The percentage except in the age-group of 14-25 fluctuate between 1.70 and 18.65, the highest percentage being noticed in the age-group of 60-100⁽²¹⁾.

Regarding the position in the districts it is observed that the percentage of healthy population has consistently been maintained at higher trends in the age-groups 0-5, 5-14, 14-25 and 25-40 in all the districts which indicates the general health condition of the rural population. The percentage has been maintained at the lowest particularly in the age-group of 60-100. The percentage for East, West, North and South Districts respectively worked out as 62.42, 62.22 and 75.55 as against the state average of 60.65. It will be seen that the North District has the lowest percentage of healthy population in the age-group of 60-100.

Percentage figures for weak population in the districts exhibited a mixed tendency as the percentage maintained a downward trend in the age-group 0-5, 5-14, 14-25. Thereafter, a rising trend was noticed. With the percentage touching 36.84 in the North District in the age-group of 60-100, the same was lower at 20.81

East, 13.35% for West and 25.66 for South Districts. The state average for this group has been worked out as 20.70%⁽²²⁾.

As for sick population, the percentage has been maintained at the lowest (0.25-1.43) in the age-group of 14-25 in all the districts, the lowest being recorded in North and the highest being recorded in East District. Therefore, the percentage, after recording marginal fluctuations displayed a rising trend in all the four districts. The percentage of sick population for 60-100 age group recorded respectively 16.77 for East, 24.43 for West, 16.84 for North and 25.57 for South Districts, the state average being 18.65% for this age-group⁽²³⁾.

Quality of population and urbanisation

Quality of population to a large extent depends on the pace of urbanisation. According to Debi Prasad Bhowmik⁽²⁴⁾ urbanisation is a very recent phenomenon in Sikkim. Gangtok was the only urban centre according to the census of 1951. Other urban centres were only visible from 1971 census. At present only 16% of the population live in eight urban centres, but in Gangtok alone 72% of the total urban population live. In Gangtok 36,747 people live according to 1981 census. Gangtok is only class III town. The other towns are Gyalshing (population 745), Jorethang (population 3921), Mangan (population 780), Namchi (population 1444), Nayabazar (population 932), Rangpoo (population 2452) and Singtam (population 4043). Other than Gangtok, all other towns are classified as class VI towns.

The process of urban development in Sikkim has two main forces in operation — administrative and commercial. The result of administrative forces is witnessed in case of Gangtok and Namchi. Namchi emerged as a nodal centre because of its location at the junction of the major roads - Darjeeling-Gangtok and Gangtok-Namchi. The second important force for the emergence of urban centre is the commercial activity. The state saw the emergence of a number of bazars or market-centres along with major routes which ultimately developed into "nodal points" by virtue of their location. Among them Gyalshing bazar and Mangan were made district head quarters in 1963⁽²⁵⁾.

In the urban areas of Sikkim as a whole, there has been a net increase of 31,476 persons in the decade (1971-81) of which 20,247 or 64% persons are migrants from other parts of India⁽²⁶⁾.

Among the towns, Jorethang shows the highest rate of growth during the last decade (1971-81), namely 414.6%. The rate of growth is also high in the administrative headquarters like Namchi (213.9%), Gangtok (176%) and Mangan (135.7%). Gangtok, the capital has changed its status in each decade ascending from a class VI town in 1951 to a class III town in 1981. In contrast, the rate of growth is rather low in Gyalshing (67.4%), Nayabazar (46.2%), Rangpoo (37.4%) in which case the impact of post merger development is less significant. The present Jorethang is only an extension of Nayabazar across the river Rangeet. The nature of terrain (flat surface) facilitates expansion of the urban areas of Jorethang whereas the nature of terrain limits further extension of Nayabazar, Rangpoo

is located 12 Km. south of Singtam next to the border between Sikkim and West Bengal. The merger of the state and the closure of the Rangpoo road in 1968 flood have limited the trading activities of Rangpoo, whereas the alignment of the roads provides greater mobility of Singtam⁽²⁷⁾.

The nature of service given by these roads depends upon availability of transport. The strategic location of the state and north-south alignment of the main roads has given rise to unidirectional pattern of commodity flow. In such a spatial interaction system, any small town may not be dependent on any big town within the region, however big the town is. For example, Rangpoo is dependent on Siliguri (of West Bengal), though Singtam and Gangtok are the nearest big towns. Spatial location of the towns played a dominant role in determining the extent of their service areas in such a three dimensional surface. The service area of the towns located in the valley (Singtam, Rangpoo, Jorethang and Nayabazar) extends toward the higher slopes of the catchment boundary. In this way, these towns offer valley type service area which has a command over the area which starts from the centre of the basin and spreads upward. On the contrary, the service area of the towns located on the high land (Gyalshing, Mangan, Namchi and Gangtok) spreads over the slopes downward. In the case of ridge towns, the outer boundary of the service area merges with the rivers on the two sides of the ridges and command areas of them make a convex surface area. These towns form the ridge type service

area. This pattern, however, is distorted in the case of Gyalshing and Mangan due to their location on the upper slope where service area extends both along the upper and lower slopes of the ridges⁽²⁸⁾.

The urban population is mainly concentrated in Gangtok and other town centres are very small. Nevertheless, the small towns having a strategic location, play a dominating role in the spatial interaction pattern in this landlocked territory⁽²⁹⁾.

A glance at the ethnic groups of Sikkim

The present population of Sikkim is primarily composed of different races or ethnic groups. They are the Lepchas, the Bhutias, the Nepalese and the plainsmen. According to the census taken in 1991, the total population of Sikkim is 4,03,612. However when Sikkim was first placed under the rule of the British Political officer John Clagude White, it had only three ethnic groups implying thereby the absence of plainsmen. Sikkim had its first census taken in 1891 according to which the total population was 30,458. Out of this figure the Lepchas were 5,762, the Bhutias were 4894, the Limbus were 3356 and other Nepalese were 16000⁽³⁰⁾. Over centuries the narrow fertile valleys of the inner Himalayas and the rugged hill tracts of the greater Himalayas have been settled by the Tibeto Burmese, Tibeto Mongoloid and Indo Aryan races who have adjusted themselves to the rigorous climate of the state. Thus Sikkim has gradually become the state of multi racial inhabitants. Of these, the oldest inhabitants are the Rongs or Lepchas. Next came the Khampas from the Tibetan province of Kham; they are commonly known

as Bhoteas. The Limbus who are considered by some as belonging to the Lhasa gotra, are believed to have migrated into Sikkim from the Tsong province of Tibet. The Limbus, are, therefore, also called Tsongs. These Limbus and other Rais, Mangars, Gurungs, etc. of Sikkim are allied races and in fact, belong to the Kirati sub-cultural stock of the Nepali race. Among the three ethnic groups, the last comers into Sikkim were the Nepalese⁽³¹⁾.

Prior to any invasion, or infiltration into Sikkim from outside, the life style of the Lepchas was marked by a high degree of mobility subsisting on roots, tubers and fishing and hunting. One interesting point about the Lepcha community is the absence of the conception of noble or commoner classes among them. Other communities, therefore, regard the Lepchas as a casteless or classless society⁽³²⁾.

From the ethnographical studies of the Lepchas carried out by John Morris and Geoffrey Gorer in the Talung valley of the Dzongu reservation in North Sikkim, it has been found that in other parts of Sikkim the Lepchas had intermarried with Tibetans and Nepalese to such an extent that they had lost all traces of tribal consciousness, except in the Talung valley of Dzongu for this valley formed the part of the Maharaja's estate and none other than Lepchas are permitted to own land or to settle on it⁽³³⁾.

The Nepalese, at present, are the most dominant and numerous ethnic group in Sikkim. The census figures for different ethnic groups are available from 1891-1991. In 1891, out of total population of 30,458 the Lepchas were 5762, Bhuteas were 4894, Limbus 3356 and Nepalese were a little over 16,000. In 1931, out of total

population of 1,09,808 the Nepalese population had grown upto 84,693, whereas that of Bhuteas was 11955 and Lepchas 13060 only. That is to say, the Nepalese population that was 50.75% in 1891 increased to about 77.13% in 1931⁽³⁴⁾.

From 1931 onwards the census reports have not provided figures of different ethnic groups. But from religions tentative figures regarding this proportion between Nepalese and Bhutea-Lepcha population can be calculated because Bhuteas and Lepchas are mostly Budhists and Nepalese are Hindus.

Table 1.9

Ethnic composition of Sikkim from 1891-1981

Year	Total	Lepchas	Bhuteas	Nepalese	Nepalese as % of population
1891	30,458	5,762	4,894	15,458	50.75%
1911	80,000	30,000		50,000	62.50%
1931	1,09,808	13,060	11,955	84,693	77.13%

Religious groups of Sikkim from 1951 census

Year	Total	Budhists	Hindus	Hindus as % of total population
1951	1,37,725	39,395	97,863	71.05%
1961	1,62,189	49,894	1,08,165	69.24%

From the above Tables, it can be tentatively concluded that Nepali Hindus constitute about 70% of the total population of Sikkim which however, was much lower in the arly period.

The immigration and settlement of Nepalese in Sikkim started in the early part of the nineteenth century under the patronage of the British government of India much against the opposition and jealousy of the Bhutea people. On the one hand, the British Government were encouraging Nepalese immigration and their settlement in Sikkim, on the other hand, it opposed Tibetan influence over Sikkim so much so that anyone having pro-Tibetan leanings was not allowed to succeed to the throne of Sikkim. After the death of Sidkeong Namgyal, the king of Sikkim, setting aside the claim of Thinley Namgyal, the British government, therefore made Thutob Namgyal the king of Sikkim after which the British government became the undisputed king maker in Sikkim⁽³⁶⁾.

Nepalese are the people, either whose forefathers had come from Nepal, or those who had their origin in Nepal. The majority of the Nepalese are Hindus. They have their own language, dress and way of life. In fact, they have retained their religious and cultural identity distinct from Lepchas⁽³⁷⁾.

After their settlement in Sikkim, the Nepalese within no time, Prof. Nakane says, made much progress, their economic position being comparable to that of wealthy Bhuteas and Lepchas. The Nepalese prosperity, according to Prof. Nakane, is attributable to the Budhist-Hindu way of life with high productivity and low

consumption for the Nepalese Hindus and low productivity and high consumption for the Budhist Bhuteas and Lepchas (38).

Commenting on Nakane's conclusion, Prof. Trevor Ling remarks on Nakane ignoring the immediate historical background in her work. Prior to Nepalese penetration into Sikkim Prithvinarayan Shah's conquest of small political units of Nepal and finally the conquest of Kathmandu valley made his task of unification of Nepal complete bringing into existence a hierarchy of functionaries related to land allotments, revenue collection and administration of justice at the local level. In Nepal, land was generally allotted to Brahmins, members of the nobility, government officials, priests and others belonging to non-agricultural classes, who had neither time, nor the aptitude to cultivate their land themselves. For the Nepalese peasants who as tenants cultivated the land, it made no difference whether their landlord was an individual, or a religious institution, or even the state itself. In such a case, whatever was left after meeting the cost of cultivation and providing him with a minimum of subsistence, was taken away from him without any consideration, besides occasional gifts and presents and free labour service rendered by the agriculturist tenants to the village headman. According to Ling, poverty of the vast majority of Nepal's peasants is basically responsible for their immigration into Sikkim and their successful settlement there. Taking their dire poverty into consideration, Ling further says that it is not difficult to work intensively for even a reasonable reward and being accustomed in Nepal to the lowest possible standard, they were being satisfied with a somewhat restricted consumption than their Bhutea-Lepcha

neighbours during, or at least, in their early years in Sikkim. If the critical factor is to be identified, it is not the Hinduness of the Nepalese immigrants, but their poverty, low standard of living and their previous conditioning to work hard for little reward⁽³⁹⁾.

The success of Nepalese penetration in Sikkim and then in Sikkim's economy is remarkable in that they in the past, laboured all along in an environment full with the cross currents of strifes and jealousy and opposition from the rulers and other members of the nobility. Systems instituted by the Bhutea rulers for the Nepalese and Bhutea-Lepchas were discriminatory. For instance, the rate of land revenue levied upon the farmers of the three communities till 1956 was highly discriminatory. For the same areas and quality of land, the Nepalese had to pay higher rent than the Bhutea-Lepchas. The land revenue first introduced in 1915 was levied at the following rates for an area covered by a pathy (1 pathy = 11 seers approx.).

Table 1.10

Two sets of revenue for Nepalese and others

Type of land	Class	Nepali			Bhutia-Lepchas		
		Rs.	Annas	Paise	Rs.	Annas	Paise
1. Paddy	I	2	0	0	1	8	0
	II	1	8	0	1	2	0
	III	1	2	0	1	0	0
2. Dry Land	(No Class)	0	14	0	0	8	0

The above discriminatory revenue was in force till⁽⁴⁰⁾ August 1956 when the Maharaja issued a Proclamation by which it was declared that the rates of land revenue should be equalised among the three communities through periodical adjustments.

In the early part of the 19th century, opening of virgin land in Sikkim by Nepalese immigrants was encouraged. By paying a nominal sum of Rs. 1.4.0 called "chardam" they were allowed to settle by clearing the jungle. Later on when the Nepalese outnumbered the Bhutea-Lepcha population by a large number, Tashi Namgyal, the king of Sikkim by issuing a Notification No. 5093/F dated 13. 4. 1948 prohibited the opening of new land by Nepalese.

The land alienation policy in Sikkim was and is still highly favourable to Bhutea and Lepchas only, but not to Nepalese. The Revenue Order No. 1 of May 1917 which sought to protect the interests of the hereditary state subjects, i.e. Bhuteas and Lepchas of Sikkim by prohibiting alienation of their land in favour of non hereditary subjects, i.e. Nepalese, is still in operation. The point that could be raised here is that the Kirati sub-cultural stock of the Nepalese community, particularly the Limbus who migrated to Sikkim in the early days, their claim as hereditary state subjects was no less strong than that of the Bhuteas⁽⁴¹⁾. In fact, the very name of the state Sikkim, it is said, is derived from a Limbu word⁽⁴²⁾.

If before 1947, the attempt on the part of the Royal House was to establish the supremacy of Lepcha-Bhutea community over the Nepalese immigrants, after 1947 the attempt was to maintain the ethnic balance. The political changes that had been taking place

during that period were mainly responsible for such a change in the attitude of the ruler.

Initially political parties in Sikkim were not developed on ethnic lines. Nor were they emerged as a "handwork of disgruntled Nepalese peasants". The first three political parties, viz. the Praja Sudharak Samaj was formed by Tashi Tshering, Sonam Tshering etc., the Praja Sammelon was founded by Gobardhan Pradhan and Dhan Bahadur Tiwari and Praja Mondal by Kazi Lhendup Dorjee. These three political parties had the avowed objectives of achieving socio-economic reforms jointly. At a meeting of Dec. 7, 1947 these three political parties generally merged to form the Sikkim State Congress. This party demanded (i) abolition of landlordism, (ii) formation of democratic and responsible government and (iii) accession of Sikkim to India⁽⁴³⁾.

In the meantime, a new political party, called the Sikkim National Party was formed. This party, was, in fact sponsored by the ruler to fight the democratic agitation and to emphasise the communal and social differences as backwaters to democratic development. The Nepalese, it was argued by the leaders of the National Party were "immigrants", while the Bhuteas and Lepchas were indigenous. Thus the National Party emerged as the proclaimed champion of Bhutea-Lepcha community⁽⁴⁴⁾.

The emergence of political parties and sporadic demonstrations staged by these parties made the ruler adopt a number of measures "to protect the interests of minority". Among them the

most important measure is called Parity formula which was favourable to Bhuteas and Lepchas only. The Parity formula bracketed Bhuteas-Lepchas in one group and the Nepalese in another group and allotted equal representation to these two groups. The first Sikkim State Council set up by the Proclamation of 1953 was to be composed of twelve elected members of which six would be Bhutea-Lepchas and six would be Nepalese. A section of the State Congress members was of the opinion that in the case of representation of members it should have to be seen that no discrimination was made so that no community could say that it had been represented by lesser number of members. Exactly the something happened in that the Nepalese community, although in the majority was allotted six seats only. This is but discriminatory. Parity formula, though decried by the Nepalese leaders in pre-merger period was conveniently followed even after the abolition of monarchy and Sikkim's merger with India. During 1973 agitation, one of the demands made by the Nepalese leaders was the scrapping of parity formula and introduction of one man one vote principle for the constitution of the State Assembly. Finally when the election was held in 1974, it was based on Parity formula — 16 members belonged to Bhutea-Lepchas and 16 members from the Nepalese community.

After Sikkim's merger with India, the question of reservation of seats for different communities came up and created tension in the political atmosphere of Sikkim. The Government of India by placing the Bill No. 79 in Parliament amended the representation of the People Act, 1951 and reservation of 12 seats to Bhutea-

Lepchas, one for Sangha, two for scheduled castes and seventeen seats were declared general. The Nepalese were not accorded any reservation, while the plains people were given the right to franchise. The Nepalese leaders became apprehensive. Almost all the political parties opposed it. In fact, the dissension among the members of the Sikkim Janata Party over the question of reservation of seats for the Bhutea-Lepchas and the deprivation of the Nepalese community from such reservation led to a split in the party and a new political party called the Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) was created in 1978 to champion the cause of the Nepalese. Their contention was that since long the Nepalese ethnic group had enjoyed reserved seats in the Sikkim State Council and in the absence of reservation, they turned apprehensive that they would soon be outnumbered by the influx of plainsmen and would fail to get proper reservation in the Assembly. The Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) made this ethnic issue its main plank in 1979 election and came to be recognised in the people's mind as a party representing the Nepalese.

Ethnicity came to play a major role in the 1986 as well as in 1990 elections in Sikkim. All major political parties like Sikkim Sangram Parishad, Indian National Congress (I) besides the Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary) voiced the (i) need for reservation of seats for the Nepalese, (ii) granting of citizenship to stateless population of the state and (iii) the recognition of the Nepali language in the eighth schedule of the Constitution. Despite the similar programme in their election manifesto, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad won both the elections by an overwhelming majority bagging

30 seats out of 32 and 32 seats out of 32 in the 1986 and 1990 elections respectively⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Ethnic issues have come up often in the recruitment of higher posts in the government departments. The general grievance of the Nepalese during the reign of Chhogyal was that the ruler was interested only in bolstering up the minorities' end, regarded the Nepalese as second class citizens. Unqualified Lepchas and Bhuteas were being appointed to posts to which a Nepalese had a stronger claim by virtue of their higher qualifications and the Nepalese language was also not accorded its due importance. A study conducted in 1970-72 which studied inter alia the background of 72 top Sikkimese bureaucrats suggested that recruitment to the higher civil service were made on personal consideration through certain net works of influence at the higher level. Regarding the ethnicity of these bureaucrats the study showed that 56.77% of them belonged to the Lepcha-Bhutea community and 31.34% were the Nepalese. But the situation changed drastically after the merger⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Besides such appointments, another problem confronted by the government after the merger was the official language. The government has recognised four languages as the official language of the state, namely Lepcha, Bhutea, Nepali and Limbu. In schools, these languages are taught as vernaculars whereas English is the medium of instruction.

The post 1975 developments evoked limited hope among the Bhuteas and Lepchas and made them nervous too. Democracy in Sikkim means concentration of political power in the hands of the Nepalese community. The land and the authority which Bhuteas and Lepchas knew belonged to them the other day, by a sheer play of fate turned to be otherwise now. In a state where the other day they had been the ruling community, now they became the Scheduled Tribes and they had to prefer that status because they felt that to be the only means of survival. It is in this background that the Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association has been formed in 1978 to promote the educational, cultural and economic advancement of Bhuteas, Lepchas and to protect their rights and privileges⁽⁴⁷⁾. Likewise the Limbus and Rais of Sikkim have also formed Kirati Association with the same objectives as that of the Tribal Association of Bhuteas and Lepchas. In fact the Tsongs of Sikkim have been raising their voice for their recognition as Scheduled Tribe.

The nature of ethnic groups in La-chen and La-chung

The entire inhabitants of La-chen and La-chung belong to two tribal communities whom J.S. Lall in his book, "The Himalayas : Aspects of Change" has called them as northern communities. Culturally and socially they are very akin to the Tibetans, but they do not call themselves as Sikkimese Bhotes as the descendants of Tibetans in Sikkim usually call themselves. Instead they call themselves La-chenpas and La-chungpas to distinguish themselves from Sikkimese Dhutias by claiming their descent from the immigrants of

a tract called "Ha" in the northern region of Bhutan. In ancient days, therefore, the tribals of La-chen and La-chung were not called as they are called today La-chenpas and La-chengpas. They were called Ha-Pa (North people) whereas the Bhutias of Sikkim were called Hlo-Pa (South People)⁽⁴⁸⁾.

People from other communities are neither allowed to possess land holdings, nor to settle in the two valleys. Even access to La-chen and La-chung is not free. Not to speak of foreigners, Indians even from states other than Sikkim are required to obtain "Entry Permit" and "Stay Permit" from the District Magistrate of Mangan before visiting the two valleys. At a time a 30-day "Stay Permit" would be issued. Quite recently, a few of the educated La-chenpas and La-chengpas have married Nepalese girls.

The community life of the tribals within the two valleys is so well knitted on democratic basis under their chieftain, called Schi-pdon that all activities are carried on very smoothly. Decisions on matters like sowing and harvesting seasonal migrations and donations for "gombas" once taken in their assembly hall "Dzumsha" by their Schi-pdon in consultation with the Dzumsha-members are strictly implemented. Not a single case of disobedience to Schi-pdon's order or disrespect to him has been recorded till today.

The four main ethnic groups of Nepalese, Bhutias, Lepchas and plainsmen as found in other parts of Sikkim are conspicuous by their absence. The valleys of La-chen and La-chung thus belong solely to La-chenpas and La-chungpas, except in recent past a few Tibetan refugees have been allowed to settle at Thanggu - an upland

valley of La-chen (49).

With the spread of modern education in Sikkim in the post merger period, the power and control of resources have shifted from the hands of the erstwhile feudal lords and aristocrats to the new middle class people who are educated, enlightened and holding top positions in bureaucracy. Sikkim is no more an inaccessible and isolated tiny Himalayan Kingdom. It has joined the national mainstream of the country and marching ahead on the path of modernisation. In the post merger period the most noteworthy event in Sikkim so far as the majority Nepalese community is concerned, is the recognition of Nepalese language in the eighth schedule of the constitution of the country on August 20, 1992.

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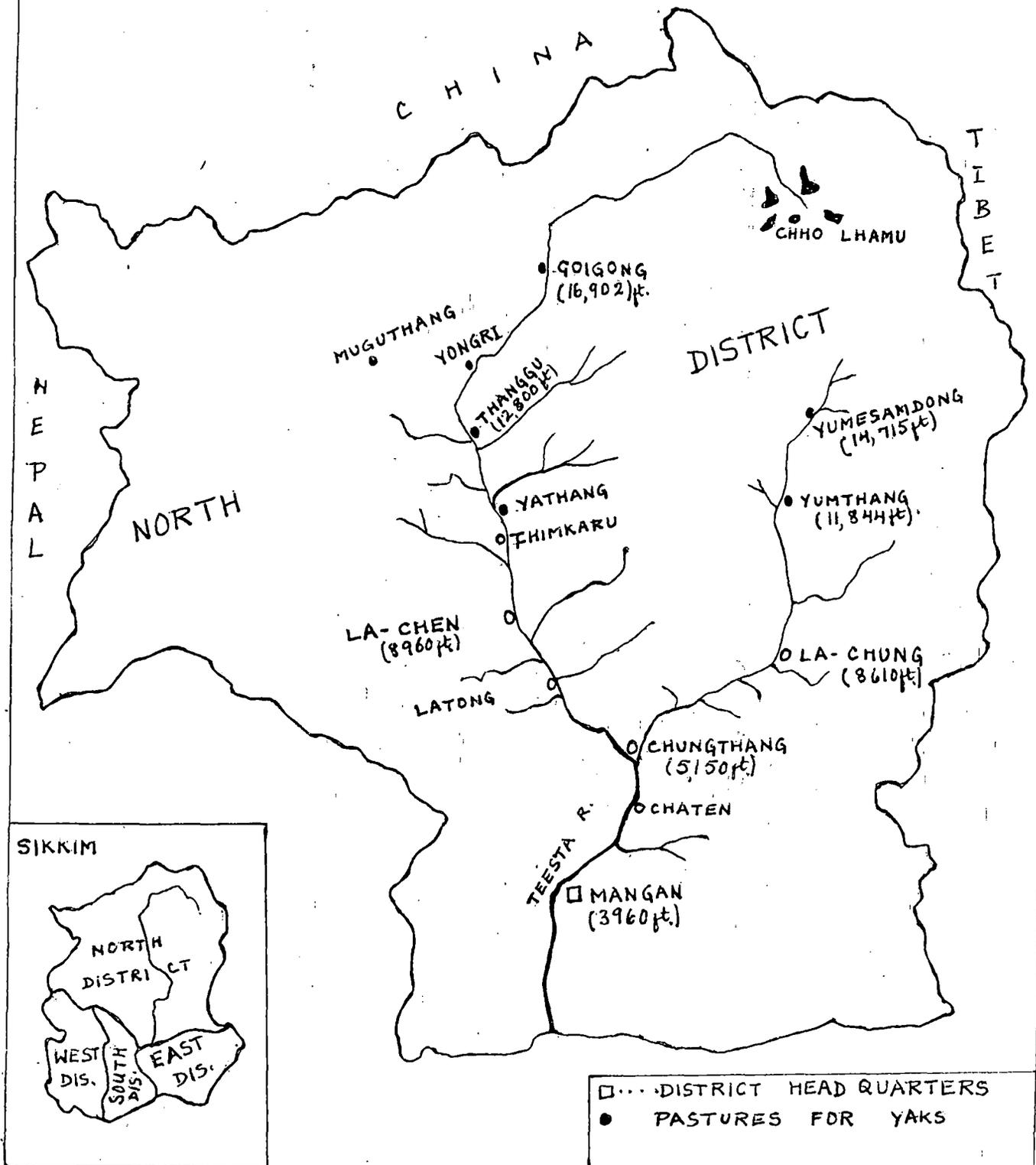


FIG. 21