

Summary and Conclusion

Sikkim, a Himalayan kingdom became part of India in 1975 ending long 333 years of Bhutia rule. Till the advent of the British, the Bhutias were free from outside interference. The entry of the British which led to the rise in the increase of Nepalese migration in Sikkim brought changes in political and socio-economic status and position of the Bhutias. The post-merger period is also marked by development of ethnic identity discourse. The Bhutias strived to maintain their identity in the state. The thesis intended to make a comparative study on the 'change' in the status and position of Bhutias in the pre-merger and post-merger periods.

Keeping in mind the study on the socio-economic and political status of Bhutias and its continuity, the entire thesis is summarized into seven chapters.

Chapter I incorporates the theoretical aspect of the research covering brief background of the Bhutias of India and profile of Sikkim like physical features, administrative setup, socio-economic background and ethnic composition. The Bhutias form the Tibeto-Burman group are mostly found in the Himalayan Region, stretching from Ladakh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling and Arunachal Pradesh. They are called by different names like Ladaki Bhutias, Arunachali Bhutias, Bhutanese Bhutias (*Dukpa* or *Drukpas*), the Sikkimese Bhutias (*Denzongpa* or *Lho-po*) and the Tibetan refugees who have migrated after 1959.

The second chapter covers the demographic profile of Sikkim and Bhutias in particular. Section I studies the demographic status of Sikkim and section II discusses the distribution of Bhutia people in Sikkim.

It is found that Sikkim officially consists of twenty different communities (Census 2011). The first population census of Sikkim conducted in 1891 recorded total population of 30,455 of which Nepalese constituted half of the total population but it is not a homogenous community. It consists of several ethnic groups and all of them are called Nepalese. They are followed by Lepchas, Bhutias and Limboos. The initial demographic profile of Sikkim shows the Bhutias as a single community having absolute majority in Sikkim. Each population census since 1901 records increase in the Bhutia population in Sikkim. However, a decline in the Bhutia population has been recorded in the census of 2011. East district has been identified with highest Bhutia

population in the state, followed by South, West and North districts. At present, the Bhutias constitute 11.38%, whereas 7.78% are Lepchas and 69.9% are Nepalese. Rai from the Nepali community records the highest population with 13.52%. The Bhutias share 63.1% of the total ST population in the state. The Lepchas mostly confined to North district represent 33.4% of total ST population. It is found that 10.9% of Bhutias and 4.5% of Lepchas are recorded in urban areas. With the change in the demography, change in socio-economic and political setup has been noticed in Sikkim. Nepalese, consisting of many caste groups have outnumbered all other communities in the state.

Chapter III is on 'Short history of Sikkim and status of Bhutias in pre-merger period'. It has two sections, section I deals with short history of Sikkim and section II deals with the study on the Bhutias of Sikkim and their role in pre-merger period. The Bhutias were the ruling community in Sikkim for 333 long years. The Bhutias occupied a high status in the society and were regarded as elites. The Landlords or *Kazis*, who are Bhutias, controlled the land holdings after the Chogyal. They also possessed magisterial powers in both civil and criminal matters.

In the post-merger period, the Bhutias inspite of their smaller number enjoyed certain privileges. One of those is with regard to the number of seats in the Assembly. They were allotted 12 seats and one *Sangha* seat (monks representing monasteries) in the State Assembly. Out of the total 32 seats, the Bhutias and the Lepchas have share of 37.5 % of seats. The study reflects that though the Bhutias are numerically less, they still continue to be the most dominant group in Sikkim.

Chapter IV gives an account on Sikkim's journey towards democracy and gradual marginalisation of the Bhutias in politics. The discussion is distributed into four sections. Section I, covers Sikkim's journey towards democracy, the second section looks into the role of the Bhutias in politics in the pre-merger period, while section III discusses the role of Bhutias in politics in the post-merger period and section IV sheds light on the marginalisation of Bhutias in politics.

The Bhutias have played an important role in politics in Sikkim since the foundation of the Namgyal dynasty. The introduction of parity system in 1953 paved way for the entry of other communities into politics. It was found that still the Bhutias were represented well in politics through representation in the State Council till the first election under uniform electoral system in 1974. The introduction of *Sangha* seat in

1958 further allowed the Bhutias to extend their influence in politics. In post-merger period, the Bhutias as a single community had a larger share with total of 67 Bhutias in the assembly elections from 1974-2019. They have the highest number contesting the election in the state. Bhutias have majority share among the 12 B-L seats in the state. Most of the reserved B-L seats are contested by the Bhutias.

A review of the history of Sikkim shows that marginalisation of Bhutia-Lepcha communities had started during the pre-merger period. This process began when the British through the Political Officer took over the administration of Sikkim. Since then the political and economic powers of *Kazis* and *Lamas* was reduced. The Nepalese immigrants posed a great threat to the powers and positions of the Bhutias. New power equation rose when Nepalese were also made the landlords gaining equal economic power with the Lepcha-Bhutia *Kazis* and landlords. The political uprising in 1940's against the Bhutia rule and feudalism and the inclusion of Nepalese in the politics through representation in the State Council gradually accentuated the process of marginalisation of Bhutias in politics.

The trend continued after transfer of administrative powers to Dewan (Indian) and it was almost total after the formation of new democratic state in Sikkim. The study reveals that the expansion of Scheduled Tribe list with the inclusion of other tribes of Bhutia origin in 1978 and inclusion of Limboos and Tamangs in 2002 made the position of Bhutias more insecure. The Bhutias have been representing themselves through various political and social organisations in the state as they have been relegated to as minority and Nepalese the majority community.

Chapter V is the study on the occupational pattern and economic positions of the Bhutias in the pre and post-merger Sikkim. It is divided into three sections; section I deals with the historical background of Sikkim's economy, section II deals with the occupational pattern and economic status of Bhutias in the pre- merger period and section III deals with the occupational pattern and economic status of Bhutias in the post-merger period.

The findings show that Sikkim is intimately connected with the agrarian sector of economy and the Bhutias have played great role in the evolution of the Sikkimese economy. Sikkim society being feudal, the Chogyal was the sole proprietor of land in the country with feudal lords assisting him. The monasteries also possessed huge

landed property over which the *Lamas* enjoyed both revenue and administrative control. Agriculture and pasturage was the main occupation in the country. Handicraft was also one occupation among the Bhutias.

The occupational pattern underwent major changes during the British presence where many developmental works were initiated. In 1970 about 27.54 percent of the Bhutia elites were the owners of estates, while 23.44 percent engaged in agriculture, 20.31 percent gave their service to the nobility and the aristocracy, 15.12 percent were into trade and business while only 2.54 percent of elite Bhutia families were lamas. The study conducted in 1970 on Bhutia elites by A.C Sinha showed that 25% of respondent's fathers were agriculturists, 19.25% were the owners of estates, 17.16% were traders and businessmen, 3.12% were monks and 25% took up different professions in government and private sectors. The study by A.C Sinha further shows that Bhutias engagement in agriculture decreased from 25% (father's engagement) to 2.34% of their children. Secondly, the Bhutia ownership of estates was reduced from 19.52% to 6.24%. Engagement in Business and Trade was reduced to 11.72 percent from 17.16 percent.

As for the post-merger era, socio-economic census, 2006, records the Nepalese as the leading group in terms of employment, which is followed by Bhutias and Lepchas. It is also found that the Rai community accounts for 13.8% of total households which is the highest income bearer. Bhutias with the share of 13.2% of households are the second highest income bearer in the next income category. Bhutia households are the highest income bearer in all four districts.

Among the various social groups in Sikkim, the Bhutias hold the highest possession of lands in the state. The paddy fields and land under cardamom cultivations are mostly owned by the Bhutias.

The study also reflects that agriculture has become the secondary source of income for the current generation of Bhutia people. As they have shifted over to business and trade, tourism, and salaried jobs. Even though the Bhutia share as agriculturists and as agricultural labour has declined, they still own large landed properties in Sikkim and income from land, coupled with income from other sources help them to survive a very high income group in society. It is evident from the study that the Bhutias, the dominant community in the pre-merger period still maintains their position in the new socio-economic structure of Sikkim.

Chapter VI is about Bhutias in Bureaucracy. There are two sections; section I deals with representation of the Bhutias in bureaucracy in the pre-merger period and section II talks about representation of the Bhutias in bureaucracy in the post-merger period in Sikkim.

The study shows that the foundation of bureaucracy in Sikkim had a feudal base, rule bound, exploitative, elitist, and repressive in service of the absolutist monarchy. Landlords (*Kazis*) and monks (high *Lamas*) occupied high posts. Overall, the Bhutias controlled all the bureaucratic posts under Chogyal. They played a vital role as advisers to the Chogyal, as administrator, as judiciary as well as financial administrators.

In 1970-72, 36.30% of Bhutias comprised as bureaucrats; 34.68% belonged to aristocrat family representing Bhutia families, 27.42% were kazis and 7.26% was represented by Newars. The high officials appointed in the administration were appointed from high class educated Bhutias.

In the post-merger period, the Nepalese replaced the Bhutias as the group holding highest number of bureaucratic posts in 2018. The Nepalese accounted for 50% of the total bureaucrats, while the Bhutias accounted for 30%, and other STs (Limboo, Tamang and Sherpa) for 10.6% and the Lepchas 6%. But given their number of population, the share of the Bhutias in bureaucratic posts is proportionately very high.

Thus, even after the shift of political power, the Bhutias continue as the top administrators in the state. Despite simultaneous coexistence of different ethnic communities and the prevalence of state civil service examinations and recruitment process, the Bhutias have always been able to build bureaucratic capacity in the state.

Chapter VII studies the representation of the Bhutias in Education. The chapter is divided into three sections. Section I discusses the development of education in pre-merger Sikkim, section II focuses on the post-merger educational development in Sikkim and section III tries to study the participation of Bhutias in the education sector.

Education was imparted through religious teachings in the form of Monastic education influenced by Tibetan system during the monarchy period. Monastic education was

accessible to the Bhutia *Lamas* only. The commoners did not get access to the Buddhist system of Education. Later, development of formal education in Sikkim began with the advent of the Christian missionaries in 1880's. Schools established were mostly primary schools. The first government school was Bhutia Boarding School, opened in 1906. Nepali Boarding School was the second government school established in 1907 and Enchey School was established in the Enchey monastery in 1909. More schools were established in 1913-14.

The study reflects that Education Department under the "Director of Education, Sikkim State" assisted by the "Board of Education, Sikkim State" was established in 1920 which accelerated the development of education in the state. The appointment of Education Inspector of Schools in 1945 and the appointment of first Executive Councillor of Education department in 1953 made education system more systematic and structured. In 1960, number of schools increased to 110 with 567 teachers and 12521 students. In 1970, total number of schools were increased to 263. Around 300 schools were established in Sikkim by 1976.

Post-merger period saw an increase in schools in 2019. East district has the largest number of schools and teachers, while, the North district has the least number of schools and teachers. The study reflects that the percentage of female teachers is higher than males in almost all the four districts. The literacy rate in 1971 was 7.74% and at present Sikkim is represented as the third highest in literacy rate with 82.2% in the country. The development of higher education in Sikkim laid its foundation quite late as compared to other Indian States. It saw a remarkable increase in number of Colleges and universities since 2000.

In the pre-merger period the Bhutias got the best opportunity in education through monastic education. The trend continues as Bhutia representation in education sector in the state is quite impressive. As per Census 2006, the literacy rate of Bhutias is at 81.09%. Male literacy rate is higher with 86.88% than female literacy rate, which is 75.03%. It is found that Bhutias have outnumbered the other two communities Lepcha and Limboo as language teachers in government schools. In 2017, Bhutias accounted for 38.7%, Lepchas were 30% and Limboos were 25.6 % as language teacher.

In higher education sector, the study reflects that in 2018, 55% of teachers teaching in colleges in Sikkim belonged to Nepali community (taking all the Nepalese communities together) as a whole, while, 23.3% represented the Bhutia group, 10.6% are from ST category, 6% are Lepchas and 3.4% belonged to 'Others' category. The enrolment of students in last three years in Bachelor Degree Courses (2016-18) shows the enrolment of Nepali students as the highest, followed by Lepchas and Bhutias. Similar pattern is followed in case of enrolment in the post graduate courses under Directorate of Higher Education, HRDD, Govt. of Sikkim. The enrolment of the Bhutias are shown less as most of the Bhutia families send their children outside the state for higher education.

The last chapter consists of Case Studies conducted in the three districts, North, East and West districts of Sikkim. The objective was to substantiate the study on socio-economic and political status of Bhutias in Sikkim. Three Bhutia dominant villages; Tashiding in West Sikkim, Lachung in North Sikkim and Tathangchen in East Sikkim were selected for the purpose.

The findings substantiate the data provided by the government reports regarding the transformations and diversification in the occupational pattern among the Bhutia families in Sikkim. Agriculture as their traditional occupation has declined as they are pursuing other alternative occupations. The case study shows that the number of Bhutia agricultural households, both as agriculturist and agricultural labour has declined, but they continue as owners of large land plots. While members of Bhutia families have taken up new professions and switched over to different business enterprises, they continue to hold plots of lands and therefore have different sources of income. In the North district almost all of them have shifted to tourism business.

Among the surveyed Bhutia families, the family sizes have become smaller and are mostly nuclear type. The findings show that pursue of education and literacy has increased among the Bhutias and majority of them have received education up to graduation and most of them have received their higher education outside Sikkim.

The largest ruling tribe in Sikkim, at one time, the Bhutias, established their own kingdom, but in course of time they had to surrender their political power to the demand for constituting a democratic state. In spite of this 'change', the Bhutias, today continue to occupy high position in the society. They played a prominent role in the

pre-merger period, they also have maintained their influence and role in the post-merger period. Occupying most of the high posts in the state administration, the Bhutias still maintain their position as elite in post-merger Sikkim.

The economy and culture was shaped by the Tibetan Buddhist elements brought in by the Bhutias and implemented through the monarchy. The political status of Sikkim has changed over the years, politics has been more secularized, influence of *lamas* and monasteries in administration has ceased, but the influence of the Bhutias in the society continues, and so does the role of *lamas* in the society. Reservation of one *Sangha* seat in the Assembly election has also given a scope to the *lamas* to get directly involved in state politics.

The state government has expressed the importance of the community (Bhutia) by retaining few of their practices even today. Bhutia has been recognized as state languages in addition to Lepcha and Limboo. These three regional languages are now recognized at Master degree level in the state's only Central University. The influence of Bhutia culture and traditions on Sikkimese society is also evident. The state government's annual calendar is still based on the Tibetan Lunar calendar:- the calendar that Sikkimese Bhutias follow. All the Buddhist festivals and occasions are declared as state holidays in Sikkim. For example, Saga Dawa is a Buddhist religious festival that falls in the fourth month of the Tibetan lunar calendar. It is a state holiday. All educational institutes, banks, government offices are closed on this day. The day is marked by a religious procession every year, where all communities participate in the procession carrying the holy Buddhist texts, Kangyur. To observe this holy month, all butcher shops are closed for 15 days, killing of animals and selling of meat in the state are prohibited during the period. Similarly, the first month of the Tibetan lunar calendar is declared a holy month, where selling of meat is banned for seven days. Selling of meat during these holy month is a punishable offence in Sikkim. The Tibetan influenced Bhutia architecture with paintings of Buddhist motifs and ornamentations are evident in the structure of government buildings, including schools and colleges. These typical architecture, the monasteries, the institute of Tibetology in Gangtok, various monastic festivals, the *Sangha* seat in Assembly and the role of the monks in state politics, often remind one of its Buddhist heritage. The participation of all communities in the Bhutia customs, rites and rituals points to the 'Buddhist essence' in all aspects of social life.

Yet, at the same time, it is also a fact that despite their overall comfortable position in the state, the Bhutias (along with the Lepchas) do suffer from a feeling of loss and resent the gradual marginalisation in politics of the state. Their aspirations and demands have become an issue in the politics. One instance is the inclusion of Tamang and Limboo in the Scheduled Tribe list in 2002. The sharing of the 12 B-L seats in the state Legislative Assembly has also been a debated issue. But that is a different issue of the state politics. Fearing a gradual dilution of their identity and marginalisation they have formed various associations like *Denzongki Lho Khay*, *Bhutia Literary Development Association* with an objective of preserving their language and identity. *Bhutia Kayrab Yargay Tshopo Lhoriy Lushey Sangkyob* are such groups that supports the community by taking language classes for younger people to learn Bhutia language, culture, traditions and history.

On the whole, an analysis of the available data do point to the fact that despite their small number, their hold on state bureaucracy, government jobs and land holding is still proportionately very high. With sound socio-economic background particularly their hold on land have helped them to maintain their identity as an elite community in spite of the ‘change’ that had set in the polity and economy of the state. And the impact of Bhutia practices and rituals continue to be prominent in Sikkim.