

## CHAPTER III

### A Short History of Sikkim and Status of Bhutias in Pre-merger Period

#### Section I

##### A Short History of Sikkim

Before the process of state formation, most parts of Sikkim were barren land. Politically speaking, Sikkim had no identification as a country or a state until 1642. Sikkim was more known as a hidden land where there was no settled government or political unit to rule the people. A number of petty kings and chiefs ruled over Sikkim, mainly belonging to the Lepchas and Tsongs (Limboos). The name Sikkim was given after the establishment of the Bhutia kingdom. Initially, the Lepchas called it *Mayel* and later called it as *Ronjong*, while the Limboos called it *Yoksom*, which means a fort or a fortified place and it was called *Denzong* by the Bhutias. *Suk khim* (now Sikkim) was the name given by the Limbooni queen Thunwamukma, wife of Chogyal Tensung Namgyal, the second Maharaja of Namgyal Dynasty. Sikkim means ‘a new home or place’ and later it was called Sikkim (Namgyal & Dolma, 1908, p. 27).

Historians like J.R Subba (2011), S. A Rahman (2006) stress that ethnic groups like Lepchas, Limboos and Mangars were present in Sikkim before the migrant Bhutias. The Lepchas are the earliest aboriginal inhabitants who called themselves *Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup* or *Rong* in short, which means the ‘Son of the Snowy’ peak or the son of the God (D.C Roy, 2012, p. 1). The name Lepcha is derived from the Nepali word *Lapche* which means ‘vile speaker’. They are called *Mon* by the Tibetans and *Meri* by the Bhutanese. The Limboos are called by various names like Limbus, *Yakthumbas* or *Tsongs*, who are also identified as the descendants of ancient Kiratas from Limbuwan, the land of the Limboos in Nepal (Subba, 2011, p. 297). Though the word ‘Limbu’ was used by the Gorkha rulers of Nepal only in 1774, Limbus were living in Sikkim even before Sikkim was created in 1642.

Along with the Lepchas and the Limboos, the Magars, were the earlier settlers of pre-established Sikkim. History says that the Magar Kiing Santanu Sen, also called Santu Pati Sen, resented the Bhutia establishment and supremacy in Sikkim (Subba, 2011, p.5).

From the historical perspective, the formation of Sikkim as a kingdom began with the consecration of Phuntsog Namgyal as the first king or Chogyal, meaning Dharma Raja and the establishment of the Bhutia rule in the name of Namgyal dynasty in 1642. Bhutia here means the migrated Tibetan people who settled in Sikkim. Once they started settling in Sikkim and established their rule, they considered themselves to be Bhutias and not Tibetans.

As the mythology goes, Sikkim is a hidden land as prophesied by Guru Padmasambhava,<sup>7</sup> the three lamas travelling from three different directions would meet at the place called Yoksum, which is situated in west Sikkim, for the purpose of consecrating the first Dharma Raja of Sikkim. Yoksum in Lepcha means “Three *Lamas*”, *Yok-* meaning *Lama* and *Sum* meaning three. With the coronation of Phuntsog Namgyal by the three *lamas*; *Gyalwa Lhatsun Namkha Namgyal Jigmed Chempo*,<sup>8</sup> *Kathog Kuntu Zangpo* and *Nga- Dag Sempa Phunsog Ringzing* in 1642 began the long established Bhutia rule in Sikkim, which lasted for 333 years.

According to historians, the Bhutias migrated from Tibet to Sikkim much before the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The study on the migration of Tibetans and their settlement reveals that Tibetans migrated to Sikkim and other parts of India, as a result of the defeat of the Red Hat Sect (followers of *Nyingma-pa*) at the hands of the Yellow Hat Sect (followers of *Geluk-pa*) in Tibet in a religious strife (Gurung, 2011, p. 32).<sup>9</sup> *Tsonkapa's Gelukpa* sect, founded in the fifteenth century, had become predominantly both religious and political spheres. The *Gelukpa* sect were the followers of the Grand Lama, the fifth Dalai Lama (Kotturan, 1983, p. 29). When the Dalai *Lama* became

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<sup>7</sup> Guru Padmasambhava, popularly known as Guru Rinpoche is considered as the founder of Lamaism. Prior to the advent of Buddhism in Tibet in 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D, the religion that Tibet followed was Bon religion, a kind of shamanism. The dawn of Buddhism began during the reign of king Srong-tsan-gampo who ruled Tibet in and around 7<sup>th</sup> century. However, Buddhism could not flourish much after the death of Sron-tsang-gampo and when Buddhism was soon wiped-out by local Bonpa priests. Again Buddhism got revived during the reign of king Thi-sron-detsan who reigned from 740-786 A.D could firmly establish its foothold in Tibet. He built the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet namely Samye monastery and also many Sanskrit scriptures were translated into Tibetan. It was in the connection to the building of the Samye monastery that Guru Rinpoche or Guru Padmasambhava, a great wizard priest visited Tibet. The king Thi-Sron-Detsan invited Guru Padmasambhava to control the distractions put by the demons in building of the Samye monastery in 747 A.D (Waddell, 2004). A reputed sorcerer, Guru Padmasambhava, with his Vajra or thunderbolt subdued the demons and the construction of Samye monastery was completed in 749 A.D. Thereafter Lamaism became firmly rooted in Tibet under the patronage of king Thi-Sron-Detsan and his successors. It is believed that after establishing the first order of monk in Tibet Guru Rinpoche travelled to different parts of Eastern Himalayas like Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh for the purpose of spreading Lamaism.

<sup>8</sup> Gyalwa Lhatsun Namkha Namgyal JigmedChempo (1595-1650) was the founder of the Zog-chen sect of Mahayan Buddhism in Sikkim. He is credited with the formation of Sikkimese State in traditional histories. Kathog Kuntu Zangpo was the second pioneer lama and the high priest of the Nyingma Monastery of Kathog Dorjenden. Nga- Dag Sempa Phunsog Ringzing (1592-1656) was the third lama who consecrated the first Chogyal of Sikkim.

<sup>9</sup> It was reformed into various sects like Nyingmapa (older or unreformed sect), Kadampa (reformed sect) ‘Kargyudpa (semi-reformed sect), Sakyapa (semi-reformed sect) and the Gelukpa (reformed sect).

both spiritual and temporal head of Tibet, great discontent arose among the older Red Hat sect, which was inclined towards a simpler way of life. Persecution of the *lamas* of the Red Hat Sect came under the newer sects. At this point of religious rebellion, the *lamas* belonging to the Red Hat Sect fled from Tibet towards the southern direction. Most of them fled towards Sikkim and Bhutan and sought refuge. This is how the actual migration of Bhutias started in Sikkim and the subsequent era of Bhutias in Sikkim.

The history of Sikkim spells out that since its very inception, the social structure of Sikkim was invariably based on the Buddhist structure of Tibetan society. The Bhutias being originally Tibetans and inclined towards Tibetan culture and traditions, the political and administration set up in Sikkim under the Namgyal dynasty was based on the system of *Lugs gnyis* of Tibet. This state theory of *Lugs gnyis* explains the religion-political theory of state and society, in which both religion and politics are complementary to each other and dependent on state policies (Subba, 2011, p. 59). Basing on this structure, Chogyal Phunsog Namgyal selected twenty-four heads: twelve heads representing Bhutias as *Kahlons* (ministers) and twelve heads representing Lepchas as *Jongs* or castles.

Many factors stand responsible for the adaptation of the Tibetan structure in the formation of Sikkim's state structure. First, the founder of Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim has his originality in Tibet as one who was also consecrated by the Tibetan monks prophesied by Guru Padma Sambhava. Second, the geographical location of Sikkim also put it under the influence of its immediate neighbouring countries. Nestling between Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal, Sikkim was influenced by these nations. During the course of its historical and political development, the closest relation that Sikkim had was with Tibet. Almost all the legacies that the Bhutias carried were those of Tibet. Tibetan culture, tradition, societal setup, religion, politics and language were brought to Sikkim by them. However, these underwent some changes with time and one finds some difference in the aspects of culture, tradition, religion and language of the Tibetans and the Sikkimese Bhutias as these stand today. Third, the Chogyals of Sikkim always sought help and shelter from Tibet during times of external threats. Time and again Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal, (1708) fled and took refuge in Tibet. In 1788-89, Chogyal Tenzing Namgyal also fled to Lhasa with his queen when Gorkha attacked Sikkim at Rabdentse palace. Whenever the kingdom was endangered by military threats, Sikkim was supported by Tibet by providing shelter to the Chogyal and assisting with military support. Sikkim has always pledged to look upon Tibet for

its immediate support and help.

As for the historical background of state formation of Sikkim, history says that Tibetan Prince, *Guru Tashe*, was foretold to proceed to *Denzong*, meaning Sikkim, which means “Valley of rice” in Bhutia and *Demozong* in Bhutnese. *Guru Tashe* had three sons: the eldest son *Jo-Khye-Bumsa*, was known as superior, with the power of ten thousand horses. He was married to *Gurumo*, the daughter of Sakya ruler and settled in Chumbi Valley, then a part of Sikkim. *Khye-Bumsa* is recognised as an important figure in the history of Bhutia kingdom in Sikkim. The rulers of Namgyal dynasty are the lineage of *Khye-Bumsa*. The majority of historical discussion on *Khe-Bumsa* assumes that they were childless. They were advised to visit the Lepcha spiritual head, *Thekong Tek* and his wife, *Neylong Nyel*, in Sikkim to seek their blessings. Coming to Sikkim and meeting the Lepcha spiritual head, he got solicited with the blessing for sons and returned back to Chumbi valley. There in Chumbi, three sons were born to *Khe-Bumsa* and his wife; *Kay-boRab*, *Mi-tponRab* and *Lhag-moRab* (Namgyal and Doma, 1908, p. 14-16).

*Khey Bumsa* paid a second visit to Sikkim to express his gratitude for being blessed with three sons. He met *Thekong Tek*, with whom he concluded the blood- brotherhood treaty with the Lepchas at *Kabi*.<sup>10</sup> The blood-brotherhood treaty was concluded with a ceremony where several animals were sacrificed to the local deities as a witness of the Lepcha-Bhutia bond of friendship (Subba, 2011, p.12-13). However, Saul Mullard (2005, p.72) states that coming of *Khey Bumsa* to Sikkim and the story of the existence of *Thekong Tek* is a folk history and there is uncertainty in the story which requires more clarification.

Of the four sons born from the second son of *Khye Bumsa*, *Mi-tponRab*'s youngest son *Guru Tashe* became more influential among the four brothers who received the dignity that of a ruler. *Zhal-nga A-Phag* was the son of *Guru Tashe*. From *Zhal-nga A-Phag*, *Guru Tenzing* was born. Phuntsog Namgyal, the first Chogyal of Sikkim was the son of *Guru Tenzing*. Phuntsog Namgyal was born in Gangtok in 1604. *Guru Tashe*'s family became more dominant and flourishing among their people. This is why the *Rongs* or Lepchas came under their supremacy (Namgyal and Doma, 1908, p.22-23). As a result, referring to the source, we can conclude that

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<sup>10</sup> The Blood Brotherhood treaty was signed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and the place has been identified and protected as the sacred place at *Kabi Lungchok*, North Sikkim.

the Lepchas were appointed in the services of the Bhutias<sup>11</sup> since then.

As per the prophesy of Guru Rimpoche, the three Tibetan lamas of the Red Hat Sect, namely *Lha-tsum Nam-kha Jig-med*, *Nga-dag Sempa Phunsog Ringzing* and *Kathog Rigdzin Kuntu Zangpo*<sup>12</sup>, consecrated Phuntsog Namgyal as the king of Sikkim in 1642 at Yoksum. Many historians see that the consecration of Phuntsog Namgyal's consecration as the extension of the Tibetan dominance in Sikkim.

Though the coming of *Khye Bumsa* to Sikkim to pay a visit to *Thekong Tek*, the Lepcha head is believed to be folk history, the detailed account of the visit spells out that the Lepchas were the existing group in Sikkim prior to the arrival of Bhutias and their settlement. The works of Dharnidhar Dahal (1984, p .24) and Subba, (2011, p 11) clearly stated that the Lepchas, Limboos and Magars living in Sikkim opposed the establishment of Namgyal (Bhutia) dynasty in Sikkim. The ethnic groups resented against the Bhutia supremacy but were defeated and ultimately came under their influence. The mention and reference of treaty of brotherhood '*Lho- Men- Tsong*', between the three ethnic groups; Lepcha, Bhutia and Limboo by the historians is also an evidence to the existence of other groups in Sikkim prior to Bhutia rule. The mention of the first Chogyal's encounters with the Lepcha Chieftans, Magar kings and Limboo kings by historians like Jas Raj Subba in his studies, provides information on the prevalence of other tribes before the migrant Bhutias. Subba states that Limboos confronted acceptance of Namgyal dynasty as the rulers of Sikkim. They fought against the Bhutias, who were well equipped with swords and guns, but lost the war. Similarly, the Magar king, Santusati Sen of Mangarjong of Mangsari, West Sikkim fought against the establishment of the Bhutia rule. The Magar king, not being able to defeat the Bhutias, sought help from the Limboo king of Lunchok in West Sikkim. Eventually, the Bhutias were successful in establishing their hold and influence (Namgyal and Doma, 1908,

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<sup>11</sup> The Lepchas who proved to be trustworthy were appointed in the household establishments and in other responsible works in the state. Those Lepchas who served the Bhutia Chief were called the ministerial Lepchas or 'Monpos'. The Lepchas who could not win the trust of the Bhutia chief were employed as traders (to carry goods and grains to any market for trade and barter). These lot of Lepchas were called Tsong-sKyelMonpas.

<sup>12</sup> Lha-tsum Nam-kha Jig-med (1595-1650) was the founder of Zog-chen sect of Mahayana Buddhism in Sikkim. He was basically from sByaryul province of southern Tibet. On the request of one of his Principal teacher's, Jatshonsnying po came to Sikkim with fifteen of his followers. Nga-dag Sempa Phunsog Ringzing (1592-1656) belonged to a place called Sag Khrimkhar in western Tibet. As per the prophetic tradition of the Nyingmapa school, he came to Sikkim with his son. Both Lha-tsum Nam-kha Jig-med and Kathog Rigdzin Kuntu Zangpo belonged to a family of nobility in Tibet. Kathog Rigdzin Kuntu Zangpo was the high priest of Nyingma Monastery of Kathog Dorjeden belonging to a Vajrayana sect.

p.23 and Subba, 2011, p 17). The most interesting event that took place after the coronation of Phuntsok Namgyal was the recognition as the ruler of southern slopes through letter and silk scarf received as a token of felicitations from the His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet. The Bhutias originally belonged to Tibet and had a great bond towards Tibet. However, this occasion made the Bhutias more support-seeking from Tibet in times of trouble too (Namgyal and Dolma, 1908, p. 23). After the consecration as Chogyal (Dharma Raja) in 1642, Phuntsok Namgyal's first and foremost task was the consolidation of the land resources of all the communities of Sikkim into one and the making of 'Greater Sikkim'. Through the tripartite agreement mentioned above, the three communities agreed to integrate under one government and abide by one order. Thus, the agreement was signed by a total of 24 leaders belonging to three communities, where four were Lepchas, eight were Bhutias and the Limboos had the largest number, with 12 leaders signing the treaty in 1642.

Yuksom in West Sikkim, as the first capital created by the tripartite treaty, extended from the Bhutia dominated areas of Chumbi valley, the Lepcha dominated areas of most of the present Sikkim with the Hah Chu Valley and Amdo Valley, which are now part of Bhutan and also Ilam, now part of Nepal and the third area was the Limboo dominated areas of present West Sikkim and Limbuwan (Subba, 1999, p. 13-20, 126-128). The country ruled by the first Chogyal extended to Thang-la, beyond Phari (Tibet) in the north, Tagong-la, near Paro in Bhutan in the east, Titalia, in the south (near the borders of Bihar and Bengal in India) and towards Timar Chorten, on the banks of the River Timar in Nepal in the west.

The second foremost task undertaken by the Chogyal Phungsok Namgyal was the establishment of the administrative structure of the new kingdom. For the purpose of administration, the country was divided into 12 *dzongs* (districts) each being headed by a *Dzongpon* (governor). All *Dzongpon's* were Lepchas, belonging to high positioned Lepcha families. There existed a council of administration, comprising of 12 ministers altogether (Joshi, 2004, p. 79). From this it becomes clear that the Limboos did not occupy any administrative posts in the country, though they were the third group to sign and complete the tripartite agreement for formation of 'Greater Sikkim'. Apart from the formation of 'Greater Sikkim' and the establishment of an administrative system, a new palace for the Chogyal was built at *Tashi Temka* at Yuksom and *Nga-dag Sempa* built the *Lhahang* which is also called Red Temple and *Kathog* monastery by *Kathog Rigdzin Kuntu Zangpo* in 1643 ( Subba, 2011,p. 27).

The first Chogyal's reign ended in the year 1670. He was succeeded by his only son, Tensung Namgyal, as the second Chogyal of Sikkim. Born in the year 1644, Chogyal Tensung Namgyal began his rule from 1670. The first achievement of the Chogyal was the building of a new palace at Rabdentse in West Sikkim and shifting the capital from Yuksom to Rabdentse. He did this on the suggestion received from *Lha-tsum Chempo*, who was still living then. Tensung Namgyal was married to three wives. Numbe Ongmu, a Bhutanese woman, was his first wife who bore a daughter named Pende Ongmu, who later claimed to be heir to the throne. Debasam-serpa, a Tibetan was Tensung Namgyal's second wife who bore him a son named Chakdor and the third wife was a Limboo, the daughter of a Limbu Chief of Arun Valley in West Sikkim of Greater Sikkim (now Nepal). From her, Chogyal Tensung Namgyal had two children, a son named Shalngo-Guru and a daughter, Pende Tshering Gyemu. Nothing of much significance had happened during his reign (Namgyal & Dolma, 1908, p. 24).

He was succeeded by Chakdor Namgyal, who was born in 1686 and ascended the throne 1700 at the age of 14. Pende Ongmu, his eldest sister, challenged the accession claiming that being the first child of Tensung Namgyal she had the first right to the throne. Pende Ongmu having failed to take the throne, conspired against the Chogyal and concluded an alliance with the Bhutanese force to invade Sikkim and help her assassinate her brother. However, Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal was rescued and fled to Lhasa, Tibet by the way of Illam and Limboo Country Wallung with the help of his loyal councillor, Yugthing Teshe. After reaching Lhasa, he took refuge under the sixth Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Tsang-yang Gyamtso and the Regent, Gyalpo-Lha-bZang. He studied Buddhist texts and Tibetan writings in Lhasa. Eventually, he became the official astrologer for the sixth Dalai Lama in Tibet. He received many recognitions from both Tibetan and Chinese governments. He was accorded with dignity of the *Thajjee*<sup>13</sup> and rewards of landed estates (Padi-jong, Nagartsejong, Tinkejong and Gyalkharmangpa) in Central Tibet for his services to the Dalai Lama (Namgyal & Dolma, 1908, p. 24-25).

Back in Sikkim, the Bhutanese forces under Deb Raja entered Sikkim and captured the Rabdentse palace. Perhaps this was the first invasion Sikkim received after the creation of Greater Sikkim. After Chakdor Namgyal's flight, the palace was taken care of by Yugthing

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<sup>13</sup> Thajjee-His property was later inherited by his successors. The landed estate of Chakdor Namgyal in Tibet was reacquired by the Tibetans during the time of Tsugphud Namgyal, the seventh Chogyal of Sikkim.

Aroop, son of the counsilar, Yugthing Teshe, the Lepcha man who helped Chogyal in his escape to Tibet. He was arrested and sent to Bhutan to Deb Raja called Sayshing, for punishment. Rabdentse Palace came under the control of Tabar Nga-wang Thinley and Don Phenlay and was kept under their control for eight long years. When the sixth Dalai Lama died in 1707, Chakdor Namgyal made his way towards Sikkim after many long years. He returned with wife, from U, princess of the Lowo Raja. To make Chakdor Namgyal's return safe in Sikkim, the Tibetan government requested through a letter to the Bhutanese government to withdraw its forces and evacuate the Capital of Sikkim. The Bhutanese did as requested, but the forces that had camped at east Teesta maintained their position at Fort Dumsong (Sikkim Gazette, 1894, pp. 12-13 ). However, Chakdor Namgyal reoccupied the Rabdentse palace. During Chakdor Namgyal's reign Pemayangtse monastery was constructed, which is one of the premier monasteries in Sikkim. The reign of Chakdor Namgyal did not last long as he was murdered by his own *amji* (traditional Tibetan medicinal healer) at Ralong hot spring. It is said that Pende Ongmu had a hand in it to settle her old grievance but she also had to face the penalty of death for killing her brother, on the same day Chakdor Namgyal was killed.

Chakdor Namgyal was succeeded by his son Gyurmed Namgyal, as the fourth raja in 1717. His reign did not last long. In 1734, Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal became seriously ill. Since he did not have good relation with his wife from Tibet, he was left with no child to continue his lineage. On his death bed, he admitted that a nun of Sanga-Cholling, daughter of Nyer Gaden of Tagchung- Dar caste, was conceived with his child. The name of this son, the heir to the throne was Namgyal Phuntshog.

Born in 1733, Namgyal Phuntshog became the fifth Chogyal of Sikkim. There arose some discontent regarding the legitimacy of Namgyal Phuntsog as the real heir of the throne and *Dzongpons* (governors), particularly Chandzod Tamding refused to accept him as the Chogyal. Assuming all powers, he appointed himself as the *Gyalpo* and ruled Sikkim for three years, from 1738 to 1741. Another group led by Chandzod Karwang, the Lepchas, a loyal supporter of Gymurmed Namgyal, acknowledged Namgyal Phuntshog as the heir of Gymurmed Namgyal. Hence, the self-appointed *Gyalpo* Tamding was forced to leave the throne and Sikkim. He fled to Lhasa and sought help from the Tibetans to reinstate him as the ruler of Sikkim. The Tibetan government agreed to assist and deputed Rabden Sherpa Gyalpo as the Regent to Sikkim. Immediately, Rabden Sherpa Gyalpo restored security in Sikkim and made a few major changes



during his stay in Sikkim. The system of annual taxation and a fixed system of revenue such as *Bahpa*, *Zolung*, a tax on forest produce and *Tshong-skyed*, a system of income tax was introduced for the first time in Sikkim (Subba, 2011 p. 31).

Namgyal Phuntshog faced a number of invasions by Bhutan, Nepal and Limboos (Tsongs). Deb Raja of Bhutan conspired a plan with the Mangars but was suppressed. Again in 1752, the Tsongs posed an uprising against the Chogyal which was also suppressed by Chandzod Karwang. Consequently, the Gurkhas under Raja Prithivi Narayan Shah of Nepal posed a rebel against Sikkim the following year. This was settled by concluding a treaty with Nepal in 1755 which established a new Nepal-Sikkim boundary line at Sango chu, Sangdidzong, Mallayang and Lhachu. The Gurkhas, notwithstanding the treaty, occupied Elam and Topzong in western Sikkim and proceeded further into Sikkim. Bhutan made its second invasion in 1772. This time the issue was settled by negotiation at Rhenock in east Sikkim, which urged the Bhutanese to withdraw from Sikkim.

Namgyal Phuntshog had three marriages, of which the third wife, daughter of Deba Shamshed Khiti Phukpa, bore him a son as the next heir of Sikkim. The sixth Chogyal was Tenzing Namgyal (1769-1793), who ascended the throne in 1780. He married Anyo Gyelum, a daughter of Changzod Karwang.

Continuous confrontations with Nepal took place after Tenzing Namgyal started ruling. Nepal's attack was thwarted by Chandzod Chothup, brother of Maharani Anyo Gyelum and son of Chandzod Karwang, along with his colleague DebaTakarpo and drove the Gurkhas from Elam. History says that the Sikkimese forces actually entered as far as Chainpore in Nepal. Eventually, Sikkim was defeated in the battle near Bilungjong in 1787 due to the death of DebaTakarpo and hence, Chandzod Chothup withdrew his force from the battle. The war did not end here. The Gurkhas again attacked Sikkim in 1788-89 under the Gurkha General Jahar Singh. This time the Gurkhas captured Rabdentse palace, causing Chogyal Tenzing Namgyal to flee with his wife and son to Lhasa in Tibet for shelter. Meanwhile, in Sikkim, the Gurkha invaders were pursued by Chandzod Chothup and his troops.

The reign of Tenzing Namgyal ended in 1793. He died in Lhasa and his son, Tsughnud Namgyal, came back to Sikkim and ascended the throne in Rabdentse palace as the seventh

Chogyal. Born in 1785, he ruled from 1790 to 1864.

During his reign, Sikkim's political scenario underwent a wave of change. First and foremost, was the advent of Britishers. In those years, the Britishers had established their paramountcy over India and were in the verge of extending their influence towards the Himalayas. Their journey to the Himalayas was not political in nature but was interested in the establishment of trade route to Lhasa in Tibet and then towards Peking in China through Sikkim. In 1814-15, the Anglo-Nepali war broke out in which Sikkim took the side of Britishers. Together, Sikkim and British fought against the Gurkhas at Nagri Jong fort. The Gurkhas were defeated and treaties of Sugouli (1815) and Titalia (1817) restored the boundary between Sikkim and Nepal. The treaty established the eastern and western boundaries of Sikkim (Risley, 1894, p.18-19).

Chogyal Tsughnud Namgyal engaged in building a palace at Tumlong, North Sikkim in 1814, as frequent wars with Nepal posed danger to Rabdentse palace, as it was situated in the western part of Sikkim and in close proximity to Nepal and too far from Tibet. Eventually, the capital of Sikkim was shifted from Rabdentse to Tumlong as the third capital of Sikkim. A disagreement arose between the Chogyal and his Chief Minister Chandzod Bolot, with regard to the shifting of capital from Rabdentse to Tumlong. The problem, however, got dissolved for the moment as Chief Minister and his family were assassinated in 1826. Sensing a threat to their lives, Bolot's loyal supporters, the Kotapas, fled to Unthoo in Nepal with 800 Lepcha tribesmen. However, this did not end the problem here. A dispute erupted along the borders of Sikkim and Nepal. In this context, in 1828, Captain Lloyd, a British officer was sent to Sikkim by the British East India Company to study the situation and report on the events. On their expedition to Sikkim, Captain Lloyd was accompanied by Mr. J.W. Grant.

In course of their visit to Sikkim, their interest fell on the Darjeeling hills and they started negotiations for its transfer in 1834-35. The deal supported Sikkim with military assistance to curb the Kotapas incursion supported by Nepal in the Terai region. Sikkim needed to end this at the earliest and the British took this opportunity. A deed of grant for cession of Darjeeling was signed between Tsughpud Namgyal and the British in February 1835. The British agreed to pay Rs. 3000 on a yearly basis as compensation for the cession of Darjeeling from the year 1841. Later, the grant was increased to Rs. 6000. The grant came to a stop in 1849 when Dr. Hooker and Dr. Campbell, while travelling to Sikkim with prior permission of the Chogyal were taken as

prisoners because they had crossed the boundary which they were not supposed to do (Risley, 1894, p. 20, Namgyal & Dolma, 1908, p.66 and Kotturan, 1983, p.61). In course of time, Darjeeling developed into an attractive hill city of international reputation with plantations all around it. The Chogyal had not been able to foresee this.

Tsugphud Namgyal died in 1863 and was succeeded by his eldest son Sidkeong Namgyal. (The eldest son from the second wife of Tsugphud Namgyal). Sidkeong Namgyal was the eighth Chogyal of Sikkim. The first thing that happened in his time was that the grant from British as a rent for Darjeeling was restored in 1862. As Chogyal Sidkeong Namgyal died in April 1874, not much events could take place under his rule.

Sidkeong Namgyal's half-brother, Thutob Namgyal (son from the fifth wife of their father Tsugphud Namgyal) ascended the throne after him as the ninth Chogyal of Sikkim. Thotub Namgyal, born in 1860, became the next Chogyal in 1874, whose reign lasted for forty years. The period of Thotub Namgyal can be seen as the most startling and unsettling one. The most pertinent issue was the issue of Nepali settlement in Sikkim. Some administrative changes also took place. The British Officer, John Claude White, the first Political Officer of Sikkim arrived in 1889. Secondly, the Nepali migration into was at large during this time. Many lessee landlords were created and many Nepalese settlements were allowed to develop in different parts of Sikkim in 1890. Chogyal was charged with using forced labour in the country by John Claude White and addressed the issue to the Prince of Wales at Calcutta. Knowing this, Thotub Namgyal tried to flee towards Doptah, an enclave of Sikkim near Khampazong in Tibet. However, the Nepalese seized him at Wallung valley and he was handed over to the British. Thotub Namgyal was confined at Kurseong for two years and in 1895, was shifted to Darjeeling for another six months and then released from confinement and returned to Sikkim (Risley, 1894, p.24-25; Subba, 2011, p.44). Since then, the British established authority in Sikkim. The change here can be expressed as Sikkim losing its sovereignty as a kingdom. J.C White had established his power in Sikkim. What made it easy for him to do so was that the country lacked an organised army, systematic law courts, proper education and health systems. A major step taken by White was the introduction of diarchy system of taxation in 1889 and encouragement to expand agriculture and production in order to increase revenue. The diarchy taxation system embarked the ethnic community resentment in Sikkim. Thotub Namgyal's rule ended in 1914. He was succeeded by his son Sidkeong Tulku. His reign was the shortest of all the Chogyals of Sikkim, who ruled for

only 10 months and was left without an heir.

Tashi Namgyal (1893-1963) succeeded Sidkeong Tulku as the eleventh Chogyal of Sikkim in 1914. He was the half-brother and the first son of the second wife of their father, Thutob Namgyal. He initiated many developmental works and reforms. For the first time, there was a total reform in the judicial structure in Sikkim. The Chief Court was established in 1916 and the High Court in 1955, which detached judiciary from the executive. The landlords no longer enjoyed their judicial functions as they were abolished in 1948. The practices of forced labour like *Jharlangi* and *kuruwa*<sup>14</sup> were abolished in 1946 and 1947. It was during his rule that Sikkim Nationalised Transport was started. It was in 1945 that the developmental plans were designed and the Five-Year Plan was introduced since 1954-60 and 1961-1965. The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (the only institution on Buddhist studies) was established in 1957. The institution still serves as one of the prime institutions for Buddhist studies in Sikkim. According to Government of Sikkim, Notification No. S/277/61 dated 3rd July 1961, the concept Sikkim Subject was introduced for the persons of Sikkim origins- Bhutias, Lepchas, Limboos and Nepalese in 1962. Despite many developments in the country, the period of Tashi Namgyal also saw the rise of political parties that demanded the formation of a constitutional government. The first movement against the Chogyal and monarchical form of government was the meeting held at Temi Tarku under the leadership of Dhan Bahadur Tewari and Gobardhan Pradhan and opening of a first political party 'Praja Sammelan' in 1947. His rule came to an end in 1962 (Subba, 2011, p. 48).

Palden Thondup Namgyal, the last and twelfth Chogyal of Sikkim, was the second son of Tashi Namgyal. Born in 1923, he became the Chogyal at the age of forty, i.e., in the year 1963. He married two wives, Sangey Deki from Tibet and gave birth to two sons and one daughter. His second wife was Miss Hope Cooke of United States of America. Palden Thondup Namgyal had one son and one daughter from Hope Cooke. With the initiative taken by Hope Cooke, education and the handicraft industry in the country received much importance. Traditional arts and crafts like carpet weaving and Thangka painting were given priority. Accordingly, trainings were provided to Sikkimese boys and girls. The period was politically important. Political movements

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<sup>14</sup> *Jharlangi* is a form of forced labour on peasants without any payment for the labour provided to the zamindars and thekedars under the zamindari system in Sikkim. There was no fixed time and place for such labours. Similarly, *Kuruwa* is also a forced and obligatory labour, which means long wait. In this, the peasants had to wait for their turn in every two weeks to provide labour services.

started in the 1950's. Political parties were formed and the decade 1970's was very crucial for the Chogyal. A political dispute arose between the people and the Chogyal administration over the Council's election of 1973, leading to the revolution in 1973. Several demands were raised for the formation of a written constitutional system, the prevalence of direct representation and many other reforms related to electoral processes. The administration of Sikkim was taken over by B.S Das as Chief Administrator on April 9, 1973. The 1973 agitation came to an end with the signing of a tripartite agreement by Chogyal, Palden Thondup Namgyal, the leaders of political parties of Sikkim and Government of India at Gangtok on May 8, 1973. The agreement made Chogyal the constitutional head of the country. Accordingly, the first historic election took place in April, 1974. The election dealt a great blow to the long established Bhutia rule of 333 years under the Namgyal dynasty. The Sikkim National Congress won the election with a total of 31 seats from the total of 32 Assembly seats. The party of the Chogyal, the Sikkim National Party, could secure only one seat. Eventually, Sikkim was merged with the Indian Union as the 22<sup>nd</sup> state on May 16, 1975 (Gurung, 2011, p. 203-205).

## Section II

### Status of Bhutias in Pre-merger Period

The previous section discussed the historical development of Sikkim under the Chogyals. This part of the chapter looks into the role of the Bhutias in Sikkim's administration during this period. Before the establishment of Namgyal dynasty in 1642, the Bhutias came to Sikkim mostly as traders and herdsman. They came as herders with their folks to the lowlands in search of green pasture for their herds, and travelled to Sikkim as traders. They brought salt and sold it to Lepchas for rice (Kotturan, 1983, p.24). They preferred to live in high altitude and hilly regions. Only after 1642, with the consolidation of political power, changes in the social structure took place in Sikkim.

Based on Risley (1894), the Bhutias of Sikkim can be categorised into three groups. Firstly, the four tribes descended from *Khye Bumsa* were *Zhan-tar-pa* or *Zhan-po-tar*, *Tshe-gyu-Tarpa* or *Tshes bChu-tar*, *Nyim-Gye-pa* and *Guru- Tashe-pa*.<sup>15</sup> They are regarded as the first four Bhutia

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<sup>15</sup> They are also called *Tungdu-Rusior*, the four families' of 1000 collections. The giYul-Thenpa and Lingzerpa are the descendants of the Pyak-Tsen-Tar (Pu-pun-Sum), three brothers of KhyeBumsa who migrated and settled in Hah in Bhutan.

families among the Bhutia clan in Sikkim. The second category of Bhutia are the descendants of *Beb- Tsan- Gyat*. This group constitutes the eight tribes: *Pon-pa*, *rGan-sTag-Pu Tshogs* or *tGon-gSang-Pa*, *Nam-g Tsang-sKho-pa* or *sKor-pa*, *sTag-Chhung- Tar-pa*, *tKar-Tshogs-pa*, *Grong-sTod-pa*, *bTshun-rGyal-pa* or *rGyas-pa* and *mDo-Khang-pa* or *Khamp-pa*. These 12 tribes are considered pure Bhutias or 'Lhorees' and are eligible for direct entrance into the Pemayangtse monastery as monks. Among the eight tribes, the *Pon-pa* were further sub-divided into five classes; *Nag-IDig*, *Lha-bSungs*, *Yos-IChags*, *Na-pons* and *Pon-Chhung-pa*. A group of Bhutia tribes who are considered to be inferior to the former ones comes after the twelve Bhutia groups. These groups are *Pu-Tsho- po-pa*, , *Lag-IDinpa*, *rGod-Rong-pa*, *Gyeng-pa*, *sTod-pa*, *Shar-pa*, *hBar-phong- Pu-Tsha-pa* (*Barphungpuso*), and *A IDan-Pu-Tsha-po* (*Adinpuso*). *sTod-pa* are subdivided into the following castes: *Toi- Lha-goi-pa*, *Toi- Jam-Yang-Pa*, *Toi- Chhu-Khapa* or *sTod-Chhu-Kha-Pa*. *Chombi-pa* comes after the above Bhutia groups. The *Chombi-pas* have migrated from Kham in Tibet and settled at Hah in Bhutan, later migrated to Sikkim. *Chombi-pas* are further subdivided into; *Lham-tar* or *Lha-ma-tar*, *Gue-ne-pu-Tshogs* or *TGebsNyen-pu-Tsha-pa*, *Agon* or *Ang-tGon*, *Athub-pu-Tshogs*, *Do-Shoi-pa* or *rDog-Zhod-pa* and *Khim-barpa*, *Khyim-hPar-pa*.

Apart from these Bhutia groups, there are also groups of Bhutias settled at Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim. They originally came from Paro and they are called *LaponLhundrub* caste. However, in the Bhutia community, there exist some lower or minor castes named after their place of origin, like *Assom-pa*, *Mang-sPod-pa*, *Na-Mangs*, *Shag-Tshang-pa*, *rDo-hRob-pa*, *sGang- rGyab-pa*, *La-hog-pa*, *Mang-Tshang-pa*, *sPa-Thing-pa*, *Peng-ri-pa*, *Ka-gye-pa* and *Dobta-po* (Risley, 1894, pp. 28-30).

With the inception of Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim, the Bhutias became the rulers over rest of the settlers and have always occupied high positions and have enjoyed the ranks of *Jongpons*, *Magpons*, *Dingpons*, *Chupons*, *Kyomee* and *Pipons*. The inflow of Nepalese was postulated to be a threat to the rule and position of the Bhutias in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The administrative set up of the new Himalayan kingdom from its very foundation at Yuksam shows that though the Bhutias were the rulers, the Lepchas were also a part of the new administrative set up of the kingdom. In the central administrative system of the country, the Lepchas were the *dzongpon* of twelve *dzongs* or districts and the Bhutias formed the council of twelve ministers.

The Lepchas were appointed as chiefs to the Chogyal (Namgyal and Dolma, 1908, p 20). Their hold was further strengthened when Bhutias entered into matrimonial relationships with the Lepchas. Chogyal Tenzing Namgyal, for example, married daughter of Lepcha Leader Chandzod Karwang, and she was half-sister to Chandzod Chothup. This relationship enabled him to involve more participation of the Lepchas in the administration.

### **3.2.1. Socio-economic Status of Bhutias in Sikkim**

The Bhutias occupied a high status in society and came to be regarded as elite. Their position was derived from their economic strength, which came mainly from land. Hence, it is important to discuss the land holding system in Sikkim, which gives a clear picture of the status of the Bhutias. As discussed earlier, Sikkim's state structure was influenced by Tibetan tradition. The Chogyal was the only owner of private estates and lands in the country. After the migration of Bhutias, the ownership of land shifted to the Bhutias and later to landlords and aristocratic class. The Lepchas were seen mainly as the cultivators. Some lands were gifted to the *Kazis* for rendering their services. Most of the land was rented out to farmers and cultivators. Village headmen were appointed to look after the rented lands. There existed the system of forced labour without any wages (Sinha, 2008, pp. 135-136). This was narrated in one of the case studies conducted at Tashiding in January 2019, when an 87-year-old Bhutia recollected how they were forced to work for mandal without any payments and had a difficult life during the monarchy.

The Land lords known as *Kazis*, were the next class of people to control the land holdings after the Chogyal. They discharged the task of collecting revenues from the farmers. The village headmen, called the *Mandals*, were given the charge of collecting revenues from the common people. The collected tax was paid to the landlords, who in turn paid the share to the Chogyal. The *Lamas*, who were mostly from the Bhutia community, were exempted from paying taxes. So, with respect to paying of taxes, the Bhutias enjoyed more relaxation than the other communities. For example, the Lepchas and the Bhutias had to pay 8 annas (half a rupee) per pathi of seed sown and the Nepalese were charged with 14 annas. The Council meeting of September 5, 1898, imposed unequal rate of taxation on those lands where the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese were settled together. Secondly, according to the Council meeting, discrimination occurred among the Lepchas and the Bhutias where they were allowed to graze three cattle free of charge, while the Nepalese and the Limboos were taxed eight annas per cattle. Besides this,

the farmers were required to provide free human services to the landlords, *Thekedars* and *mandals*. Hence, the people were exploited by the *Kazis* and *Thekedars*.

There were seventy-one (71) landlords in total, divided into three categories: 13 *Lamas*, 27 *Kazis* and 37 *Thikadars* (Debnath, 2009.p 47). The land revenue system of Sikkim took a major turn in 1925 when the '*elaka*' lease system was introduced by the Sikkim Durbar for a period of 15 years. An *elaka* was revenue-collecting unit under the a tax collector assigned by the Darbar. In case of death of a lessee during the term of his lease, the Government undertook to renew the lease in favour of his heir only in the male line of descent. According to Administration Report of the Sikkim State for the year 1929-30, there were 104 *elakas* in Sikkim (Debnath, 2009, p. 68). Out of a total 104 *elakas*, 15 *elakas* were directly under the control of the Chogyal as Private Estate. These estates were divided into 62 revenue blocks. Five *elakas* were under the monasteries, which consisted of 38 revenue blocks. Durbar appointed managers managed thirteen (13) *elakas*, while *Kazis* and *Thikadars* managed the remaining 71 *elakas*. The land at the block level was further distributed among the villagers called *bustiwalas*. The *mandals* acted as direct intermediaries between the villagers and the *Kazis*. The *kazis* acted as the intermediaries between the *mandals*, *bustiwalas* and the Chogyal.

Again, a difference was created in the distribution of land between the *mandals* and the *bustiwalas*. A *Bustiwala* could hold only 20 acres of land, whereas the *mandals* were allowed to hold 30 acres of land. Further, the lands were given on lease to *Adhiadars*, *Kootidars*, *Chakhureys* and *Pakhureys* for the purpose of cultivating the land. The *bustiwalas* owed the right to cultivate the land as hereditary and transferable. All the tasks related to fixation and assessment of the revenue to be paid by the tenants, *bustiwalas* and *mandals* were decided by *Kazis* and *Thekidars* on behalf of the Chogyal (Gurung, 2012 p 61). However, the revenue of the private Estates of the royal family was managed by Chogyal's own agency. The agency collected revenue from only 18 revenue blocks and the revenue of the remaining 44 blocks was collected by the government through respective district officers. The revenue was distributed in percentages, like 7 percent was saved as *mandals* commission, 10 percent as supervision charges and remaining amount was deposited in the Private Estate account.



Various kinds of taxes were collected by the ruler. The tax for the use of forest was called *Zo lung*<sup>16</sup>. Another kind of tax was the trade tax, or *Bah pa* which means an income tax to be paid by the trader. During those days, salt was brought from Tibet, so most of the trade was in buying and bringing salt from Tibet to Sikkim. This had become a regular source of income for Sikkim, especially the Chogyal. A tax was collected on the import and export items called *tshong- khyed*. This tax also included a tax for carrying business or trade within the country.

In the Bhutia kingdom, there existed different levels and modes of payment of revenues. The Nepalese were the most affected by the prevailing revenue system. They had to pay more revenues as compared to Bhutias and Lepchas.

The introduction of a new lessee system by J.C White, the first political officer of Sikkim and the introduction of Revenue Order No. 1 (Annexure 3) by the Chogyal Tashi Namgyal restricted the transfer of Bhutia- Lepcha land to others. This embarked to a social confrontation, particularly among the Nepalese. The best description of the role and position of Bhutias under the feudalistic regime gives the idea that the landlords who are Bhutias also possessed magisterial powers in both civil and criminal matters.

### **3.2.2. Bhutias' Role in Administration**

Like in Tibet, Sikkim's administrative system was religion-oriented. Bhutias continued to live in the Tibetan way, as they used to do before coming to Sikkim. Hence, it is obvious they would adopt the same pattern in socio-economic and political arrangements in which they were familiar with. All the powers, executive, legislature, judicial and religious were vested with the Chogyal. He was the source of all authorities. Nonetheless, *Lamas* (monks) were also entrusted with administrative powers. Later it was extended to the *Kazis*. *Lamas* played a dual role during the Bhutia rule. They performed spiritual affairs as well as acted as political advisers to the Chogyal. The Bhutia ruler was also recognised as an incarnate *Lama*, he is called the Dharma raja.

In this kind of practice, Sikkim, thus, was a theocratic state where religion was totally integrated with politics. The *Lamas*, mostly the high *Lamas*, those representing the important monasteries, played a determining and decisive role in the policy making of the country. This pattern

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<sup>16</sup> *Zo lung* was as a tax paid for using the forest produce such as timber, bamboos and other products from forests. This tax was paid in the form of food grains, wine, milk and butter, as per the production from the people.

continued till the early 1950's. After 1950, certain changes were made in the administrative field when new political institutions like the Executive Council, State Council, Village Councils and Baazar Committees were formed in 1953 (Sinha, 2008, p.155). Even though an elective system was introduced, the *Lamas* continued to enjoy the privileges as before. *Lamas* always represented in the State Council as a nominated member. Later on, the monasteries had one elective seat in the State Council, a reserved seat as *Sangha* seat, which is still preserved in the State Assembly. Consequently, the monasteries (*lamas*) directly participated in the body politic for which its political role has been recognised and legitimised.

In the pre-merger period, at the apex of the administration was the Chogyal with absolute power and authority in the country. The ruler was assisted by the Royal Adviser, who provided advice to the Chogyal on various political matters. It was more than a statutory post, it was created as a reward from the ruler. Next, there was the Sidlon or Dewan<sup>17</sup> which was the highest bureaucratic post in the country. Sidlon headed the administration and was the president of the State Council, appointed by the Chogyal. The Executive Council, which is also called the State Cabinet, was formed in 1953, initially with three members. Later in 1958, the number of members was increased to five (Gurung, 2011, p. 168). The state administration was carried out through the establishment of a number of departmental secretaries, namely, the General Secretary, Financial Secretary, Judicial Secretary, who looked after Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs, and the State Engineer, who acted as Secretary for the public Works Department. The secretaries and other higher-ranking officials in the department mostly comprised of Bhutias. In almost all cases, the *Lamas* with modern education and knowledge were appointed and assigned the administrative functions.

Right from the very inception of Bhutia rule, Bhutias have been represented in the highest bureaucratic posts. When the country was divided into 12 districts, Chogyal Phuntsog Namgyal appointed twelve *Kalons* or ministers from Bhutia community. Essentially, Sikkim's bureaucracy was a feudal bureaucracy in which the *Kazis* dominated. The occupational affiliation of the dominant ethnic communities in 1975 (Table 3.2.1) indicates that the bureaucratic positions in Sikkim were dominated by 36.30% of the Bhutias and 34.68% belonged to the aristocratic

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<sup>17</sup> John C. Lall, I.C.S. was appointed as the first Dewan of Sikkim in 1949. During the last Chogyal, the post was termed as Principal Administrative Officer. He functioned on behalf of the Chogyal in his absence.

class. The figures show that there were 27.42% of *Kazis* and 7.26% of Newar who held posts as bureaucrats. The recruitment procedure for the bureaucrats was purely feudal in nature. In the cross examination of the bureaucrats, around 63.11% had close affiliations to the ruler and the royal family. Out of 63.11%, 8.33% were relatives of the Chogyal (Sinha, 1975, p.76) Interestingly, the bureaucrats formed a forum called the ‘Sikkim Study Forum’.

**Table 3.2.1. Occupational Affiliation of the Dominant Ethnic Communities, 1975.**

Sl. No	Occupation	Bhutia	Lepcha	Kazi	Newar	Nepalese	Indian	Unclassified	Total
1	Higher bureaucracy	45	2	34	9	2	1	31	124
2	Trade and business	3	-	-	1	3		11	55
3	Contractor-cum soldiers in voluntary politics	12	1	2	1	2	37	33	51
4	Agriculture	2	-	4	-	8	-	33	47
5	Professions	1	-	1	-	2	-	9	17
6	Priesthood and monkhood	8	3	-	-	-	4	4	15
7	Ownership of estate	-	-	5	-	-	--	-	5
8	Others*	1	-	-	-	-	4	12	17

Source: A.C Sinha, 1975

### 3.2.3. Bhutia Influence and the Government

No doubt, the Bhutias were the rulers in Sikkim. The top most offices in the country during the Chogyal’s (himself a Bhutia) rule were assigned to the Bhutias. Before the 1953 Proclamation on the formation of the new representative system, the Bhutias enjoyed all privileges in the Bhutia government. The need for the inclusion of people belonging to other communities or parties was never felt. As discussed in the earlier section, all the power holders in the country were Bhutias and some Lepchas who became part of the system from the very inception of Bhutia rule. Nevertheless, Sikkim’s political picture of the 1940’s seemed to be different from the previous one. The demand for equal representatives from all sections of society that urged the Chogyal to change the governing pattern to a representative one. The factor that led to this was that the demography of Sikkim had undergone a total shift. The original inhabitant tribes, the Lepchas and Bhutias, were outnumbered by the migrated Nepalese. Possibly, the formation of State Council and the Executive Council was the way out to hold the representation of all the groups

on equal footing.

The State Council comprised of the president appointed by the Chogyal, 12 elected members, six each from Bhutia and Lepcha communities and the remaining six from Sikkim Nepalese and five members nominated by the Chogyal, as a discretionary power. The Proclamation of 1953 still preserved the rights of the Bhutias as rulers. The elite Bhutia-Lepcha and lamaist group were projected as the pressure groups in the administration as well as in policy-making decisions. Even today, Bhutia-Lepcha have their special 12 seats and one *Sangha* (monks representing monasteries) reserved in the state Assembly. Indeed, this is a special status for them as Bhutia and Lepcha take a share of 37.5 % and they are also given equal share in the cabinet. This ensures that, though a minority, its power and position are still secured in Sikkim politics.

The study of A. C. Sinha (1970), which covers a field-based survey project (Table 3.2.2 and Figure 3.2.1), shows that 18.75% of the surveyed Bhutia respondents opined that the Bhutias dominated the government. While 7.80% of respondents said that the Bhutia bureaucrats were dominating the administration. It was found out that 28.90% of respondents (Bhutias), which is the highest number, felt that *Kazis* dominated the government.

Since the Chogyal was the only source of all legislative authority in the state, the governance was based on the 16 pure basic human laws of Tibet. These laws are also called the 'Old Laws' of Sikkim. The Bhutias always desired to bring other communities into their fold. The main point for having these laws in the political system was to integrate all the people into Buddhism. The 16 laws encompass:

1. General rules to be followed in times of war
2. Rules for those who are defeated and cannot fight
3. Rules for officers and Government servants
4. Law of evidence
5. Law for grave offences
6. Fines levied for offences
7. Law of imprisonment
8. Law for offenders and defaulters who refuse to come to court
9. Law for murder
10. Law for bloodshed
11. Law for those who are false and avaricious
12. Law for theft cases

13. Law for disputes between near relatives, between man and wife, between neighbours who have things in common
14. Law for adultery
15. Law of contract
16. Law for uncivilised people.

**Source:** *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, 1984, pp. 46-47

Regarding the practice of the laws, the Bhutias, mainly the *Lamas* were not liable from following of such laws. They were exempted from such laws. Bhutias in almost all cases, relished more liberty than the other communities.

Besides all these, the Bhutias left a great mark on the spread of art, crafts and culture in Sikkim. Lepchas, culturally and socially, were hunters and nature worshippers. Very little of art and craft practices was known in Sikkim before the coming of the Bhutias. Influenced by the Tibetan culture and traditions of art and crafts, the Bhutias carried it with them while they migrated to Sikkim. In the course of time, the Bhutias were successful in spreading art and craft industries in Sikkim.

Finally, we can sum up that even though the Bhutias became numerically less over the years, they continued to be the most dominant group in Sikkim. They started their journey as traders in Sikkim. Gradually, they were able to overshadow the Lepchas and were successful in establishing their position and status as the ruling elite in Sikkim for 333 long years. The following tables from A. C Sinha's book will illustrate their position.

**Table 3.2.2. Categories of People Dominating the Sikkimese Government, 1970**

Sl. No.	Categories of the people	Number	Percentage
1	Kazis	37	28.90
2	Bhutias	24	18.75
3	National	08	06.24
4	Big bureaucrats	10	07.80
5	Newars	08	6.24
6	Members of the study forum	03	02.34
7	Not applicable	33	25.74
8	No information	05	03.90
	Total	128	99.91

**Source:** A.C Sinha, 1975, p.83.

**Fig. 3.2.1. Categories of People Dominating the Sikkimese Government,1970**



**Source:** Based on table 3.2.2.