

Chapter IV

Role of Bhutias in Sikkim's Journey towards Democracy and their Gradual Marginalisation in Politics

Ethnic communities have always played a dominant role in the socio-economic and political development of a state, country, or a region. Today, no state is homogeneous in terms of race, religion, language, script, customs, traditions ideas and ways of life. The development of a state demands for a shift in emphasis from the individual's growth to the growth of a larger section of society. In this regard, the role of ethnic group in socio- economic and political development has always gained momentum.

Cohen, in his published work in 1974, stated that ethnic group "is a collection of people who share some patterns of normative behaviour and form a part of a larger population, interacting with people from other collectivities within the framework of a social system" (Timothy Baumann, 2004).

Different ethnic groups at different times have played an important role in shaping the state structure. The politics of north-eastern states of India is always understood to be affiliated with ethnic politics. Ethnic-based politics has been the intrinsic feature of politics. The politics of Sikkim no doubt developed from this very nature of ethnic politics. The continuity of such a political system is persistent even today (Chettri, 2013, p.96). The study of politics and the formation of political structures in Sikkim is relatively different from that of other parts of the country. The chapter tries to understand the role played by the ethnic groups in moulding and shaping the political structures, especially in the formation of a democratic state of Sikkim.

The democracy that has prevailed through a long history of the world is the essence of different forms and concepts about freedom and rights. Though democracy is not free from continuing challenges, it continues to evolve as the most widely accepted form of government in the world. In Greek, the word 'Democracy' means '*demos*' meaning 'people'. It means that the people have power, who are the guardians of their own freedom and rights. The core characteristics of a democracy are that it is ruled by the majority and individual rights.

Democracies may be categorised into two types: direct democracy and representative democracy. Direct democracy encompasses the people's rule in the decision-making policies. This type of democracy is not feasible to a large group of people. It may be successful only in a small

community organisation, or tribal groups, or the local units living within the larger group. On the other hand, representative democracy views the system where the people elect their representatives to take decisions and rule on their behalf (Douglas, 2013, p. 83). The history of the past shows that a representative form of democracy is the most common form of democracy that has ruled nations. The form of democracy that Sikkim has chosen is the representative democracy.

In the process of formation of political structure in Sikkim, the Bhutias have played a vital role. Their representation was seen as the ruling elite in the pre-merger period. Although the merger brought some changes in the power equation, the Bhutias have been well represented in Sikkim politics in the post-merger period as well even though they are the minority group and are gradually marginalised in politics.

Many definitions and meanings of marginalisation have been provided by various authors and scholars. In general, 'marginalisation' is described as the actions or temperament of a society where human beings exclude some individuals and groups as undesirable. The people or groups who are excluded are known as marginalised groups. In his book '*Personality and Ideology*', Peter Leonard (1984, p.180) defines marginality as ". . . *being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity*".

The debate on marginalisation has received much attention in terms of political, sociological and economic discussions in the world. Marginalisation may vary with different levels of development in society, different types of culture and most importantly, the level of economic status. For Devesh Saksena, 2019, marginalisation takes place when a minority group becomes the victim of discrimination and subjugation; when the marginalised groups fight for common identity and common social rules; and when the groups prefer marrying within their own groups. Marginality, an experience faced by many minority groups in every society, is excluded from the mainstream of political and socio-economic systems. To Burton, M and Kagan, C. (2005, p. 5), marginalisation is a multi-layered concept in which exclusion takes place to the entire society at the global level, ethnic groups and communities within society and families or individuals within localities. Further, marginalisation is a shifting phenomenon that is linked to political and social status. The marginalisation of Bhutias as an ethnic group may be discussed on the same grounds as discussed by Burton, M and Kagan. Bhutias once enjoyed individual and group status, but with the shift in the political power, they claim to be the marginalised group.

The marginalised group or community is one that is pushed to the lower position in society. Such groups have the least role to play in the political, social, economic, and cultural activities of society. Social marginalisation of a group takes place when the group is deprived of all levels of education, employment and gender-related opportunities and to a large extent, the group or community does not get much entry into the power structure and decision-making processes in the state. In marginalisation, exclusion of groups in the pattern of income distributions, occupational status, social relationships, religion and gender takes place (Burton, M and Kagan, C. 2005). Social marginalisation itself is political marginalisation. As always seen in different types of political settings in the world, different groups at different times have secured political, social and economic authority, marginalising the rest of the groups. The case of the marginalisation of Bhutias in Sikkim may be addressed in a similar manner. For a very long time, they were the rulers, a dominant group occupying a high position in the country and leaving the rest of the communities at the edge of the power politics and the state structure. Marginalisation is the core of the exclusion of individuals, groups and communities from the main stream, who have relatively less influence on the available resources in the state. The impact of marginalisation may be viewed in terms of developing low self-confidence and self-esteem, isolating them from the larger group in society. This may have an immense impact on the development of individuals as human beings and on society at large (Devesh Saksena, 2019).

In the Indian context, Saksena (2019) states that the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes (SC) are mostly considered to be marginalised groups. The Scheduled Tribes are mostly marginalised based on ethnicity. Around 84.3 million of Scheduled Tribes population in India are viewed as socially and economically deprived groups. The percentages of Scheduled Tribes population are represented differently in different states. This group primarily consists of the landless labourers particularly agricultural and industrial labourers who have little control over resources such as land and forest. They constitute the lowest stratum of society. However, the case of Scheduled Tribes in Sikkim is different from that of the other Scheduled Tribes in India. In that case, Bhutias as Scheduled Tribe do not represent the lowest strata of society, but they are the elites in Sikkim.

This chapter proceeds in four sections. Section I discusses Sikkim's Journey towards democracy and examines the democratic principles underpinning the challenges posed to Bhutia rule by the formation of various groups in the form of political parties in Sikkim. The section further

discusses the establishment of constitutional democracy with one vote one man as the inherent right of the citizens, which forms the basics of democracy. The second section deals with the role of the Bhutias in Sikkim politics in the pre-merger period and how they retained their hold in politics till 1974-75. Section III covers the role of Bhutias in politics in the post-merger period. The section tries to analyse how Bhutia has been able to play vital role in politics through the reservation of twelve BL seats in State Legislative Assembly. Section IV discusses the marginalisation of Bhutia in politics in Sikkim.

Section I

Sikkim's Journey towards Democracy

Sikkim's journey towards democracy can be traced to the 1940s with the formation of political parties and organisations to uproot the monarchic and feudalistic rule in Sikkim. The kingdom was marked with internal resistance from various political parties and organisations demanding constitutional representation, abolition of feudalism and ultimately the accession of Sikkim with Indian Union, setting the stage for establishment for democratic state.

A brief discussion of the administrative structure, feudalistic elements and social relations among the people may lead to better understanding of the factors underlying such demand and uprising. Analysing the demand for having a democratic instead of a monarchy state originated from the fact that the people (all communities) of Sikkim during Bhutia's rule were under the subjugation of the ruler and did not enjoy equal rights. The resentment against monarchical rule is rooted in feudalism and feudalism is based on the exploitation of the common people.

Feudalism¹⁸ was the basis of the rule during the Namgyal dynasty, which defined the social structure of the country. Sikkim followed the Tibetan pattern of social structure and a feudalistic society as existed in the medieval ages. Historians argue that feudalistic social structures entrust responsibility, powers and authority to high official and the elite class. These high-class people became the lords of these lands. This brought differences and divisions in the social relationships

¹⁸ Medieval Europe during the period of 9th to 15th century was characterized by Feudalism. The social structure mainly revolved around three strata of people: the lords, the vassals, and the fiefs or the peasants. The lords were the land owners, and they were rich with much authority and power from the King. They ruled their territories as the highest-class people in the society. The Vassals, were mostly poor people who served and worked in the lands of lords. These people received a small share from the cultivations. Their lives were controlled by the landlords.

among the different groups of people. Similarly, in Sikkim, the feudalistic structure divided the land into *Dzongs* or *Elakhas*, leased out to *Dzong-pons* or Governors. Later, they were given the title of *Kazis* who actually ruled rural Sikkim. This distribution of land divided the people on social and economic grounds. The feudal character that existed in Sikkim exploited the common people to a large extent, making the *Kazis*, *Thekedars* and *Mandals* superior over the people and vesting them with administrative powers. The *Kazis*, *Thekedars* and *Mandals* extracted labour from the people and exploited them under the system of *Adhiadars* and *Kutiyadars*. A detailed discussion on the administrative structure in pre-merger Sikkim is already presented in the preceding chapter III.

For administrative purposes, Chogyal had established a Secretariat. The administration of the kingdom was carried through various departments which formed the Secretariat and the Chogyal was called the '*Durbar*', where all orders and proclamations in the name of *Durbar* were signed by the Chogyal. The departments were headed by officers appointed by the Chogyal himself. There existed four departmental secretaries: the General Secretary, Financial Secretary, Judicial Secretary (also under the charge of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs) and the State Engineer, who also acted as Secretary in the Department of Public Works. The secretaries and the higher departmental officers were mainly appointed from the Buddhist and educated individuals. In most cases, the *lamas* (monks) with modern education were appointed to look after the administration (Bhattacharya, 1994, p.109-110). The administrative powers were controlled by the Bhutias.

In the process of Sikkim's political development, several socio-political phenomena occurred, which led to the marginalisation of minority communities. The Bhutia elite dominated the country's culture, leaving the other communities in an inferior position. Critical examination of the Bhutia rule indicates the implementation of discriminatory policies that created persistent dissatisfaction among the different communities. The success of the Bhutias in politics as an ethnic community, which had historic growth from early 15th century onwards till the merger period in 1975, has been well researched in recent years. From the period of British entry into Sikkim, the demography of Sikkim changed. Waves of migrations from outside, particularly the Nepalese ultimately leading for the demands by the ethnic communities to protect their own identity and privileges. The dominant Bhutia group tried to dominate the immigrant Nepalese, leading to outbreaks of democratic demands and resistance.

Initially, the democratic establishment in Sikkim paved its way through the abolition of feudalism and its ill practices of exploitation of the people. The resistance to the Chogyal was not a demand for the direct formation of a democratic government. The domination by the *Kazis* and of different and unequal treatments of civil laws, revenue laws and unequal representation of various communities led to dissatisfaction and uprising among the people, especially the Nepalese. By this time, people from Nepal and India had migrated to a large extent. Larger the group, bigger the demand became the order of the day. The representation issue in the administrative processes contributed to the emergence of dissatisfaction amongst the people.

For the ruler in Sikkim in the 1940's, the spread of World war II and the engagement of British in the war was a great opportunity to rebuild the state power and restructure the administrative system again. After long years of agitation against the British, India became an Independent country in August, 1947. This effectively ended British paramountcy in India and Sikkim, restoring Chogyal's autonomy over internal matters in the country. Nevertheless, the years after this event, Sikkim witnessed a new phase of democratic demands and the abolition of long-established Bhutia dominance. This, in fact, was a crucial moment in Sikkim's political structure. This took Sikkim in a new direction of political momentum that brought political and economic reforms to Sikkim.

The democratic movement in Sikkim can be traced to the first underground movement at Namthang and a secret meeting at Tendong hill in South Sikkim. The movement was led by the Nepalese under the leadership of Dhan Bahadur Tewari and Gobardhan Pradhan of Temi Tarku (Basnet, 1974, p. 79). This democratic drive was initiated by formation of political parties like Praja Sudharak Samaj, Praja Sammelan and Praja Mandal at Gangtok in 1947 by Tashi Tshering, Dhan Bahadur Tewari and Kazi Lhendup Dorji, respectively. Kazi Lhendup Dorji himself belonging to the kazi family was taking the lead against the feudalism and monarchy. The three newly born parties merged into one as Sikkim State Congress on December 7, 1947 with three-fold demands: i) abolition of Landlordism; ii) formation of interim government as a necessary precursor of a democratic and responsible government; iii) accession of Sikkim to Indian Union (Dhamala, 1986, p. 5-6).

The birth of new political parties brought a new equation to the political power. A new class of people, especially young, educated Sikkimese people of all communities, came up with ideas of democracy and liberation from the prevailing feudal society. This gave a major setback to the power and position of the Bhutias in Sikkim (Bhattacharya, 1994, p. 77). Chogyal, with the dream of re-establishing the Sikkimese political and social structure after being set free from the British interference, received a great setback when the political parties started demanding the end of long established Bhutia rule. The demand of representation was made by the new group, basically the Nepalese, because the demographic picture of Sikkim had taken a different shape. The inflow of Nepalese during the British period had enabled this group to prepare themselves in a representative body.

Ethnically and culturally completely different from the Bhutias, the Nepalese realised that acceptance of theocratic state under the control of Bhutias, *Lamas* and *Kazis* would amount to religious, cultural and economic submission to the Bhutias. Alarmed, he formed a political party in 1948, named Sikkim National Party, representing the aristocrats and the elite, mostly from the Bhutia and Lepcha communities. The party of the Chogyal was supported by the lamas, who had always been his support in ruling the country. The Chogyal's main intention in formation of the National Party was to counter the demands made by the Sikkim State Congress and safeguard the Status quo of Bhutias (Dhamala, 1986, p.6). On the other side, the acceptance and adoption of the democratic model by the Bhutia rulers would create a loss to the Bhutias as a ruling community and their hold over Sikkim politics. In response to these demands, the Sikkim National Party of the Chogyal passed a resolution on April 30, 1948, which declared that *Sikkim has its close relationship historically, culturally, socially and linguistically with Bhutan and Tibet; geographically Sikkim is not a part of India, it was only politically interfered; ethnically and religiously it has no affinity with India; and the policy of Parity system is to be maintained to preserve its integrity* (Bhattacharya, 1994, p.78).

Chogyal, in 1953, trying to protect his hold as a ruler, brought in some administrative reforms through a proclamation called the '*Constitutional Proclamation*'. The proclamation created the representative bodies; State Council and the Executive Council that introduced a diarchal system.¹⁹ A critical look at the proclamation of 1953 shows how it paved the way towards the

¹⁹ Through the Diarchy system, powers were distributed into reserved and transferred subjects. The Chogyal reserved some important powers and transferred some powers to the Executive Councillors, nominated from the members of State Council. The Chogyal controlled the Reserved Subjects like Ecclesiastical, External Affairs, State

division of ethnic communities along the lines of Buddhism and Hinduism in the coming election of the State Council (A. Bhattacharya, 1994, p.79). The formation of the State Council and the Executive Council in 1953 marked the beginning of a representative state, with the members of Executive Council being appointed by the Chogyal. The Proclamation of 1953 introduced a system called ‘Parity Formula’, wherein the three communities would have equal representation in the State Council (Bhadra, 1992, p. 85). The 1950s, in fact was the period of political turmoil that ultimately culminated in the development of early 1970s and the ultimate change in the political status of Sikkim and the termination of the political authority of the Bhutias.

The proclamation initiated the process of elections and the gradual marginalisation of the Chogyal. An account of these political developments are given below.

The Himalayan Kingdom went for first time election in 1953. The election was to be conducted in two phases: Primary level and General level. The election process was arranged in such a complicated manner that the Bhutia-Lepchas were supposed to contest the election twice both at primary and general levels. Only if they won in both the levels, they would be declared elected candidates. The election was conducted through the division of the country into four constituencies: Pemayangtse constituency in the West, Namchi constituency in the South, North Central constituency covering North and Gangtok constituency in the East. Each constituency had seats reserved for all three communities: Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali (Table 4.1.1). The 1953 proclamation also gave the Chogyal the power to nominate five members to the State Council, taking the total strength to 17. Herein we see the process of purposive political participation of all communities taking place in Sikkim.

Table 4.1.1. Distribution of Constituency and Seats – 1953

Sl. No.	Constituency	Seats
1	Pemayangtse Constituency	Bhutia-Lepcha:1 Nepali: 2
2	Namchi Constituency	Bhutia-Lepcha:1 Nepali:2

Enterprises, Home and Police, Finance, Land Revenue, Rationing and Establishment. The Dewan, appointed by the Government of India was the administrator of the Reserved Subjects. The Transferred Subjects like Education, Public Health, Excise, Press and Publicity, Transport, Bazars, Forests and Public Works were under the Executive Council (Dhamala, 1986, p. 4 and Bhattacharya, 1994, p. 78). This pattern of administration operated till the revolution of 1973.

3	North Central Constituency	Bhutia-Lepcha:2 Nepali:1
4	Gangtok Constituency	Bhutia-Lepcha:2 Nepali:1
5	Total seats	12 (Bhutia Lepcha-6 Nepali: 6)

Source: Encyclopaedia of North East India, Volume III-Sikkim, 2007.

The State Council, established in 1953, comprised of a total 17 seats. 12 members were elected and the Chogyal appointed 5 members (including that of the President). Of the total of 12 elected members, 6 seats was reserved for Nepalese and 6 seats for the Lepchas and the Bhutias.

In the history of Bhutia rule in Sikkim, representatives were elected to govern the country. In fact, the Nepalese were to be represented in the government for the first time. Furthermore, the Chogyal nominated five members to the Council.

This new representation system was an attempt to maintain balance amongst the existing Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepalese communities. This new seat sharing in the government initiated the sharing of power of the ruling Bhutias with the Nepalese. A closer observation of the distribution of seats reveals that while Bhutia-Lepcha seats were 6, the actual share of the Bhutias was much less as they shared their seats with the Lepchas. On the whole this equation would lead to equal representation of Nepalese and Lepcha- Bhutias in all the state bodies too, in the administration as well in the state economy.

In the election, equal number of seats were won by both the Sikkim National Party and the Sikkim State Congress, with 6 each. All the seats won by the Sikkim National Party were Bhutia-Lepcha seats and all the seats won by the Sikkim State Congress were Nepali seats.

Table 4.1.2. State Council Election Results, 1953

Party	Nepali seats	Bhutia- Lepcha Seats	Total seats
Sikkim National Party	0	6	6
Sikkim State Congress	6	0	6
Appointed	-	-	5
Total	6	6	17

Source: Encyclopaedia of North East India, Volume III-Sikkim, 2007.

This period witnessed a constant struggle for the Bhutia ruler to maintain its status quo in relation to other minority groups with distinctly different histories and cultures. For the protection of rights of the ethnic inhabitants (Lepcha-Bhutia), a proclamation was issued on August 30, 1956 (Bhattacharya, 1994, p. 77). Whereby, the Chogyal announced the elimination

of different types of rate for payment of land revenue by the Nepalese, Bhutias and Lepchas. He also proclaimed the reinforcement of the 1917, Revenue Order No. 1²⁰. Thirdly, the Chogyal declared a constraint on non-indigenous (outsiders) who have settled in North Sikkim without prior permission from the Sikkim Darbar. This was to safeguard the interests of the indigenous people of Sikkim. The *Sangha* seat, which was introduced in 1958 to retain the influence of the Bhutia monks (Lamas) in politics, was also towards the safeguard of the Bhutias in particular (Bhattacharya, 1994, p. 77). More changes were brought in the representation of members in the State Council in 1958. In the second election to the State Council in, three more seats were added. One to represent monasteries and *lamas*, one for the Sikkimese general population, and one for Limboos (Tsongs). The total number of seats was increased to 20.

Table 4.1.3. State Council Election Results, 1958

Party	Nepali seats	Bhutia- Lepcha Seats	Total seats
Sikkim National Party	6	1	7
Sikkim State Congress	0	5	6
Appointed	-	-	7
Total	6	6	20

Source: *Encyclopedia of North East India*, Volume III-Sikkim, 2007.

In this election, the Sikkim State Congress could secure all six seats, one Bhutia-Lepcha seat and the General seat. The Sikkim National Party, the party of the Chogyal won five Bhutia-Lepcha Seats and one *Sangha* seat.

The next significant political development was the advent of a new political party, the Sikkim National Congress (SNC), in May, 1960. The party was the result of merger of Swatantra Dal, Rajya Praja Sammelan and dissidents of the then dominant parties, Sikkim State Congress and Sikkim National Party under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorjee (Basnett, 1974, pp. 116-117). The party represented all ethnic groups in Sikkim that opposed the monarchy and worked for democratic reforms. As the opposition to Chogyal's party, this party, in the election to the State Council, it secured a total of 8 seats out of 24.

The position of the Chogyal became more critical when the Indo-Chinese clash took place in

²⁰ It was the first 'modern' law regarding land transfers, passed by the British Political Officer John Claude White in 1917. The order mentioned that Bhutias and Lepchas should not 'sell, mortgage or sublet any of their lands to any person other than a Bhutia or Lepcha without the express sanction of the Durbar' and cancelled land transfers passed without approval from the government during the previous twenty-five years.

October, 1962. National emergency was declared in India. Similarly, Sikkim being the protectorate of India and also for its close proximity to Tibet, a state of emergency was declared in Sikkim too. All the trade routes of Sikkim were closed and Indian army was deputed to the borders of Sikkim and Tibet and sealed till January, 1963. The 1962, election of the State Council was not held and the State Council got dissolved. However, the functioning of the Executive Council continued.

In 1966, four more seats were added, one each for the Nepali and Lepcha/Bhutia communities, one for the Tsongs (Limboos) and one for the Scheduled Caste group. Thus, the structure of the State Council was increased to 24.

Table 4.1.4. State Council Seat Reservation, 1966

Sl. No.	Seats	Total
1	Bhutia-Lepcha	7
2	Nepalese	7
3	General	1
4	Sangha	1
5	Schedule Caste	1
6	Tsongs	1
7	Nominated seats	6
8	Total	24

Source: L.B Basnett, 1974. p.128.

Earlier, there were no separate seats reserved for the *Tsongs* (Limboos) in the State Council. They were included in the Nepali community. The 1967, State Council saw them as a separate community. One seat for the Scheduled Castes was reserved in the State Council in 1967.

In the election of the State Council in 1967, the Sikkim National Congress Party under Kazi Lhendup Dorji emerged as the most popular party, securing the highest number of seats. The party of the Chogyal, the Sikkim National Party won five seats. The following table illustrates the results of the 1967 election to the State Council.

Table 4.1.5 State Council Election- 1967

Party	Seats won
Sikkim National Congress	8
Sikkim National Party	5
Sikkim State Congress	2
Limboos	1
Schedule Caste	1
Sangha	1
Appointed	6
Total.	24

Source: AC Sinha, 1975, p. 31.

Right before the fourth election to the State Council, the National Party suffered a split. However, it could not become the party of all the communities. A new party was born out of it, the Sikkim Janata Party, on December 18, 1969, under the leadership of Lal Bahadur Basnett. The party contested the election in April, 1970. The election results are shown in the table below.

Table 4.1.6. State Council Election Results, 1970

Party	Seats won
Sikkim National Party (both factions)	8
Sikkim National Congress (Kazi faction)	5
Sikkim State Congress	4
Schedule Caste (Independent)	1
Appointed	6
Total	24

Source: L.B Basnett, 1974.p.128.

The election result shows light that the Sikkim National Congress, which had become the most popular party in the 1967 election, could secure only five seats out of 18 elected seats. The Sikkim National Party appeared to be the largest party, securing eight seats out of twenty four. In October 1972, a new political party, Sikkim Janata Congress was formed through the merger of the Sikkim State Congress and the Sikkim Janata Party, both of which contested the election of 1973.

On September 23, 1972, the date for the fifth State Council election was announced. It was scheduled for January 1 to 23, 1973. On February 15, 1973, the election results were announced according to which the Sikkim National Party became the largest winning party, securing 11 out of a total of 18 elected seats. The newly formed party, the Sikkim Janata Congress, secured 2 seats and the State National Congress won 5 seats.

Table 4.1.7. State Council Election Results, 1973.

Party	Bhutia-Lepcha	Nepali	Tsong	Scheduled Caste	Sangha	General	Total
Sikkim National Party	7	2	-	1	1	-	11
Sikkim National Congress	-	3	1	-	-	1	5
Sikkim Janata Congress	-	2	-	-	-	-	2
Total	7	7	1	1	1	1	18

Source: L.B Basnett, 1974.p.128.

The Sikkim National Party won the election by absolute majority. Unhappy with the election results, the Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim Janata Congress boycotted the inauguration of

the new Council by Chogyal on March 28, 1973. The Nepalese, under the banner of Sikkim National Congress and Sikkim Janata Congress held a rally in Gangtok with slogans and flags. There seemed to be political unrest in Gangtok that led the Chogyal to deploy police to control the situation. More than a hundred demonstrators were injured in the lathi charge by the police. The situation got worse when the agitation spread to other parts of Sikkim too. The Sikkim Janata Congress and Sikkim National Congress formed a Joint Action Committee (JAC). Kazi Lhendup Khangsarpa became the chairman of the JAC. The JAC laid an ultimatum to the Chogyal to fulfill their demands of responsible government. The Chogyal paid no heed to the demands submitted by the JAC. In April 4, 1973, around 5000 people held black flags and anti-Chogyal slogans in Gangtok and in the district headquarters of South, West and East. There was a civil unrest in the country. Arrest warrants were issued against the political leaders leading the agitation.

At this juncture, the Chogyal had no other option but to request the Indian Government to take over the law and order in their hands. The Indian army, which was based at the border areas since the Chinese incursion took over the situation. A new Chief Administrator, B.S Das was appointed by the Indian Government on April 9, 1973.

The Tripartite Agreement was concluded on May 8, 1973, between the Foreign Secretary of Government of India, the Chogyal and the leaders of political parties of Sikkim. The agreement spells out that a fully responsible government would be established in Sikkim. The agreement made many new arrangements in the country which accorded Chogyal as the constitutional head and not the real ruler of the state (Basnett, 1974, p. 185-188). The agreement also altered the State Council into Sikkim Legislative Assembly. The agreement retained the parity formula as the norm for distribution of seats amongst the Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepalese. Two reserved seats were abolished by the agreement, one Tsong (Limboo) seat and the other was the nominated seats by the Chogyal. The first election (1974) was held on the arrangement of seats reserved as per the agreement of 1973. The election was conducted under the purview of the Election Commission of India.

Election of April 13, 1974, was the first democratic election based on universal suffrage and also the last of the independent country. The result of the election shows that the Sikkim National Congress swept the poll by winning 31 of the 32 seats. Kazi Lhendup Dorjee became the first Chief Minister of Sikkim.

Table 4.1.8. Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election Results, 1974.

Sl. No	Name of the Party	Total seats won
1	Sikkim Congress	31
2	Sikkim National Party	1
3	Total	32

Source: Sikkim Assembly Election, 1974, Election Commission of India.

The rising consciousness of the people into politics may be noted from the number of voters turnout in this election. Total voters turnout was recorded at 34,996, of which 26,767 voted for Sikkim Congress, 1040 voted for Sikkim National Party and 7189 voters voted for independent candidates.

Table 4.1.9. Total Number of Voters (Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election), 1974.

Sl. No	Name of the Party	No. of Votes polled
1	Sikkim Congress	26,767
2	Sikkim National Party	1040
3	Independent candidates	7189
	Total	34,996

Source: Information and Public Relations, Govt. of Sikkim 1974.

Accordingly, on May 10, 1974, a new Sikkim Assembly was constituted by the Chogyal with Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa as the first Chief minister of democratic Sikkim. In fact, this was a historical day for Sikkim, ending 333 years long monarchy in Sikkim and its journey towards democratic state.

Soon, differences between the Chogyal and the Chief Minister emerged over the Government of Sikkim Bill of April 1974, the Bill proposed for the restructuring of the entire administration of Sikkim. The provision of the Bill included a three-tier system of administration where the ruler (Chogyal) would be the constitutional head; the state administration would be led by the Chief Executive and the Chief Minister and his cabinet would be incharge of the non-reserved subjects (Sinha, 1975, p. 35). The Chogyal, initially reluctant to accept the Bill, finally signed the Bill on July 4, 1974, almost after three months of the introduction of the Bill in the Assembly (Bhattacharya, 1994, p. 83). His very ascent to the bill made him the constitutional head and he lost all his position and power as the real ruler. The Chief Minister, L.D Kazi, immediately approached the Indian Government for the arrangement of the provisions in Sikkim as per the Government of Sikkim Bill, 1974. Acting upon the request of the Chief Minister of Sikkim, the

Indian Parliament enacted the 36th Constitution (Amendment Bill) 1974, which made Sikkim an ‘Associate State’ of India. The Bill also made the provision of the inclusion of two members from Sikkim in both the Houses of the Parliament.

Back in Sikkim, the Government of Sikkim Act 1974, faced a challenge by the Chogyal in the Central Court in Gangtok. Knowing that the court has no jurisdiction, the Assembly in its emergent meeting passed a resolution which declared the institution of Chogyal to be altogether abolished and Sikkim, from then onwards would be the democratic state and part of India. The statement made it clear that Sikkim would be merged with the Indian Union and would not remain an independent country anymore. Sikkim went through an opinion poll whether to be part of India. The poll went in favour of the merger, thus, enabling the Indian Parliament to pass the 36th Constitutional Amendment Act on May 16, 1975. The Act recognized Sikkim as the 22nd state of India. This was the end of Sikkim’s existence as an independent state as well as the supremacy of the Bhutias. This was the change in the overall status of the Bhutias in Sikkim society.

Section II

Role of Bhutias in Politics in the Pre-merger Period

The evolution and growth of political Institutions and their inter-tribal relationship in Sikkim can be traced back to the Lepcha system. Before the Bhutias established their political hold in Sikkim, the Lepchas, the primitive group of Sikkim, had their own way of governing their clans and people. The Lepchas adopted a patriarchal system where people were divided into various patrilineal clans (*Ptso*). Each clan was under the chieftain (*Athang*). Along with this, there was a system of having a local lord called *Tur* who had number of clans under him. However, the king, *Punu* was the apex authority. This pattern of political system under Lepchas continued till the beginning of the 17th century, when the Bhutia rule started in 1642. As discussed in the earlier chapter, the coming of the Bhutias in Sikkim was the result of the Tibetan persecution of the Red- Hat Sect Buddhists by the Yellow- Hat Sect in Tibet, which led a large number of Tibetans to take refuge in Sikkim.

The initial journey of the Bhutias in Sikkim was faced with encounters with the then existing ethnic groups of Sikkim, particularly, the Lepchas, Magars and the Limboos (Roy, 2012, p 74).

The Bhutias required fertile lands and areas for their fodder, so they began to influence the Lepchas and tried to bring them into their fold. First thing the Bhutias did was converting the Lepchas into Buddhism. Lepchas, being the nature worshipper, was easily adapted to the new religion. Gradually, this conversion led to building of the Bhutia authority over the Lepchas, hence beginning the new era in political history of Sikkim.

The new political system established by the Tibetan settlers, so-called the Bhutias, was based on the agreement with the Lepchas. The Lepchas were treated as equals with the Bhutias as the rulers. In spite of some initial opposition from the Lepchas, the Bhutias were gradually successful in extending both spiritual and temporal influence in Sikkim.

The political roots under Bhutia monarchy in Sikkim were established under the three influential lamas: *Lapchh-yun Nakgha Jigme, Nagada Sempa Chhimpo and Katu Rinji Chhimpo*. With the coronation of Phuntsog Namgyal as the Dharma Raja (Chogyal) in the year 1642, the Buddhist embedded Bhutia rule began in Sikkim. The journey of Bhutias in politics in Sikkim can be divided in two periods: a) before the merger and b) after 1975 (after the merger).

The participation and role of Bhutias in politics in the pre-merger period was not seen as a issue as the Bhutia themselves were the ruling class in erstwhile Sikkim. The rule of the Namgyal dynasty portrayed the representation of only the high class Bhutia people in politics. The Bhutia commoners never entered into politics. There were no prescribed set of laws for the conduct of elections before the merger period. The elections were conducted based on various proclamations declared by the Maharaja with certain rules and selection formats. It was only in 1953 that the introduction of parity system paved way for the entry of other communities into politics. Before this, politics was reserved for Chogyal and his nominated people, especially the aristocratic family members. Till the first election under uniform electoral system in 1974, elections were conducted on the lines of Maharaja's declarations. However, the elections held in 1953, 1958 and 1967 gave lead into seat allotments to all communities in the State Council. So far, Bhutias were the sole community representing politics but the merger of Sikkim broke this hegemony and their representation and participation in politics saw some changes.

The introduction of electoral politics also saw the beginning of the gradual marginalisation of Bhutias in politics. The Chogyal tried to retain its hold on Sikkim in the later phases of its rule

when it was encountered with resistance by many groups. Attempts were made to protect the interest of the Bhutia and Buddhist Lepchas through the Proclamation of the Maharaja. The political development of this period have been discussed in the previous section.

Through the proclamation of Maharaja in 1953, the provision for the inclusion of other communities in the State Council was made. A total of 17 seats were arranged, where 12 seats were elected and 5 seats were appointed by the Chogyal. Though this representation brought new balance to politics and marked the beginning of power sharing among the Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese, politics remained centred on Bhutia domination. Even after implication of parity formula, not much difference was seen in the role played by Bhutias in politics. The position was easily maintained in the elections to the State Council, through election and nomination.

Table 4.2.1. Community-wise Representation in the State Council, 1953

Community	Seats won
Nepali	6
Bhutia- Lepcha	6
Nominated by Chogyal	5
Total	17

Source: *Encyclopaedia of North East India, Volume III-Sikkim, 2007.*

The introduction of *Sangha* seat in 1958 further allowed the Bhutias to extend their influence in politics. The changes in the representation of seats were in 1958 by adding two more seats in the State Council: one for *Sangha* (representing monasteries and *lamas*) and the other for Sikkimese general population, the total number being 20. In the election to the State Council in 1958, Nepali and Bhutia secured equal seats of 6 each. The added advantage to the Bhutias was that their number increased as the *Sangha* seat and the remaining nominated seats by the Chogyal went in their favour.

Table 4.2.2 Community-wise Representation in the State Council, 1958

Community	Seats won
Nepali	6
Bhutia- Lepcha	6
Tsong (Limboos)	1
General	1
Nominated by Chogyal	6
Total	20

Source: *Encyclopaedia of North East India, Volume III-Sikkim, 2007.*

The *Sangha* seat introduced in 1958, represents the role and domination of the Bhutias in Sikkim politics. The political leaders contesting the elections in 1953 and 1958 mostly belonged to the Bhutia community. It is obvious that the political party of Maharaja represented all Bhutia Lepcha candidates, but also the other political parties contesting the elections had most of their candidates from Bhutia community.

In the 1958 election, out of total 10 candidates from different political parties contesting the election from Gangtok constituency, 6 were Bhutia, 3 Nepali and 1 Lepcha.

Table 4.2.3. Community-wise Candidates Contesting the Election from Gangtok Constituency-1958

Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha
Narendra Narshing	Sonam Tshering	Tendup Lepcha
Haridas Pradhan	Kazang Wangdi	
Reshmi Prasad Alley	Chemgba Bhutia	
	Kazi Narbu Dadul	
	Karma Lama	
	Dubo Bhutia	

Source: Madhumita Bhadra, 1992, p. 130.

Similarly, candidates from the North-Central Constituency, out of a total of 8 candidates contesting the election, four were Bhutias, three Nepalese and one Lepcha.

Table 4.2.4
Community-wise Candidates Contesting the Election from North-Central Constituency-1958

Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha
Nakul Pradhan	Thendu Bhutia	Athang Lepcha
Harta B. Chhetri	Martam Topdan	
Ratna B. Khatri	Tashi Rinzim Kazi	
	Phurba Bhutia	

Source: Madhumita Bhadra, 1992, p. 130.

Namchi constituency had nine candidates contesting in the election, six of whom were Nepalese, two Bhutias and one Lepcha.

Table 4.2.5. Community wise Candidates Contesting the Election from Namchi Constituency-1958

Nepali	Bhutia	Lepcha
Kashiraj Pradhan	Kazi Norbu Wangdi	Nayen Tshering Lepcha
Shankhaman Rai	Dubo Bhutia	
Ratna Kamal Dewan		
Kulbahadur Thapa		
Kali Prasad Rai		
Kaiser Bahadur Thapa		

Source: Madhumita Bhadra, 1992, p. 131.

It is clear from the tables above that the highest number of candidates were Bhutias. The Lepchas are the least to contest the election. Nepalese had a close fight with the Bhutias.

Even the Sikkim National Congress (SNC 1960), which was in opposition to the Chogyals party, happened to be a Bhutia (Basnett, 1974, pp. 116-117). The year 1966 saw further inclusion of seats in the State Council. Four more seats were added, one each for the Nepali and Lepcha/Bhutia, Tsongs (Limboos) and Scheduled Caste. The distribution of number of seats of the State Council was increased to 24. This increase in seats for all communities may be seen as confirmation and more participation of people in politics. This, however, may not be considered danger posed to the ruling Bhutias but it enabled the community to be more participatory in the elected form. Along with other communities, more Bhutia people got the opportunity to be included into politics.

It is correct to mention here that the Proclamation of 1966 created special constituency known as the “*Sangha* Constituency”. The constituency was reserved for the representation of one *lama* (monk) as a member to the State Council. The elected *lama* would represent the electoral college of Buddhist monasteries. It is through this constituency the Bhutia monks of Sikkim are still directly involved in the political affairs of the state. The “*Sangha* seat” has been retained even today.

The representation of Bhutias (other than the royal family and nobility) started with the formation of political parties and rise of democratic movements against monarchy and feudalism. India’s independence in 1947 inspired the people and many political parties like Praja Sudharak Samaj, Praja Sammelan and Praja Mandal were formed. The point to be noted here is that leaders of the two political parties were Bhutias. Praja Sammelan was led by Lhendup Dorjee, Praja Mandal was led by Sonam Tshering, Kejang Tshering and Tashi Tshering and Praja Sudharak Samaj was led by Nepali leaders Shri Gobardhan Pradhan and Shri Dhan Bahadur Tewari (Subba, 2011, p. 60). The people, including Bhutias, who believed the monarchy system was discriminative in nature, found their ways of participating in politics through various political activities against the Chogyal.

The Community wise representation in the State Council, 1973, elicits that more seats were included in the State Council. Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepali secured 7 seats each and Tsong, General Sikkimese, Scheduled Caste and *Sangha* secured one seat each. Nepali communities together gave a tough fight to the ruling Bhutia, yet Bhutia managed to retain its hold until 1973.

Table 4.2.6. Community-wise Representation in the State Council, 1973

Community	Seats won
Bhutia-Lepcha	7
Nepali	7
Tsong	1
Schedule Caste	1
Sangha	1
General	1
Total	18

Source: L.B Basnett, 1974, p.128.

The seats reservation policy of Chogyal underwent a change with the signing of the agreement in May 8 , 1973, between the government of India, the Chogyal and the existing political parties of

Sikkim. The agreement replaced the State Council with the Legislative Assembly with total 32 seats. The agreement followed the same parity formula of sharing the seats amongst Bhutia, Lepcha and the Nepalese. The Tsong (Limboo) nominated seat by the Chogyal stood abolished. Bhutia and Lepcha enjoyed 15 seats in the previous elections to State Council but the redistribution of seats as per the Presidential Ordinance of 1979, the Bhutia- Lepcha seats were reduced to 12 from 15 seats. Since then, Bhutias and Lepchas have been contesting elections for the twelve seats as BL (Bhuita –Lepcha) in the State legislative Assembly (Basnett, 1974.p.128).

The election of April, 1974, the first democratic election, left the Chogyal with no more power to be the ruler. However, Kazi Lhendup Dorjee who was the principal anti -Chogyal political leader, was a Bhutia himself.

As rulers, the Bhutias never felt that their rights needed to be protected and they never had political organisation of their own till 1940's. Various proclamations issued by the Chogyal from time to time protected their interest. However, we cannot deny the fact that some kind of pressure groups of the landlords, *Kazi* and *Lamas* of monasteries existed since the very early days in Sikkim. Being loyal to the Chogyal, these groups were part of the decision makings of the royal government. Though these groups were non-associational group, yet they enjoyed both administrative and judicial authorities within their territorial jurisdictions. Similarly, the Bhutia *Lamas* also placed their position in politics in Sikkim. They were instrumental in maintaining the socio-cultural and political identity of Sikkim even after the merger (Sengupta, 1985, P. 128).

So, till the merger, Bhutia as a community is seen to be the most profoundly dominating people in all aspects of Sikkimese society. After the abolition of monarchy under the Namgyal dynasty, Kazi Lhendup Dorji was elected as the first chief minister of the state. However, the government under Kazi Lhendup Dorji could not last long. Since 1979, Sikkim has been ruled by five Chief Ministers mainly belonging to Nepali community. This increasing Nepali movement in Sikkim politics has brought major changes in the political structure of Sikkim. This act of Nepali taking over the politics of Sikkim into their hands has left some impact on the Bhutia and Lepcha. Accepting the political loss Bhutias also fear the cultural extinction as well (Raizada 2012, p.12).

The next section of the chapter tries to see whether the change in power equation has been able to change the Bhutia dominating feature in Sikkim politics.

Section III

Bhutias in Politics in Post-merger Period

The merger of Sikkim with India brought about a fundamental change in the administrative as well as the social structure of Sikkim. Not only did the Bhutias lose their position as the ruling class of an independent kingdom, but Buddhism too ceased to be the state religion. It naturally curtailed the role of the *Lamas* in administration. Yet, in recognition of the erstwhile status of Sikkim, certain special characteristics were retained through the constitutional amendment.²¹ Among these were the *Sangha* seat, the Ecclesiastical Department and of course, the parity system. The existence of the *Sangha* seat and the Ecclesiastical Department was the acceptance of the significance of religion. Yet, with the passage of time, one can observe a gradual secularisation and of course the gradual marginalisation of the Bhutias in politics. I have tried to trace that trend in the next section.

After the merger, the issue of Scheduled Tribe order by the Indian Government in 1978 further dismantled the position of the Bhutias in the state. Bhutias and Lepchas were included in the Scheduled Tribe list with eight other sub-tribes of Bhutias such as Drukpa, Sherpa, Chumbipa, Yalmo, Tibetan, Kagatay, Tromopa and Dophapa. Though unhappy with the inclusion of some more communities at par with them under the name 'Bhutia', the Bhutias strove to retain their domination in terms of politics.

The share of 12 BL (Bhutia-Lepcha) seats enabled the community to have their share in politics. Among the 12 BL seats, Bhutias always had a majority. Most of the reserved BL seats were contested by the Bhutias.

The first Assembly Election in the state (1974) saw an increase of Bhutia representation in politics. The election was held following the 32 seat reservation policy of the Proclamation of Representation of Sikkim Subjects Act of 1974. The proclamation further enhanced the numerical strength of the Legislative Assembly from 24 to 32, where Bhutia-Lepcha reserved seats were increased to 15, while 15 seats were for Nepalese, 1 for Scheduled Caste and 1 for *Sangha*. So, including *Sangha* seat Bhutias-Lepchas had 16 seats reserved in the State Assembly.

²¹ 36th Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution came into force on 26th April, 1975. Sikkim became full fledged State of the Indian Union.

Table 4.3.1. Distribution of Seats in 1974

Sl.No	Community	Seats
1	Bhutia-Lepcha	15
2	Scheduled Castes	1
3	Sangha	1
4	Nepali	15
5	Total	32

Source: Statistical Report, Assembly Election, 1974, Election Commission, Govt. of India.

The Sikkim's politics, even after its merger was characterised by rifts in representation among communities. The community wise representation and distribution of seats in the Assembly election occupied a prominent place for discussion and criticism amongst political parties and political organisations. It has become the major issue in Sikkimese politics since the merger. The political parties were not happy with the increase of the Bhutia-Lepcha seats to 15. The political parties like Sikkim Janata Congress and Sikkim Prajatantra Party submitted the proposal for amendment of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 for the abolition of 15 reserved seats for Nepalese and the reduction of reserved seats for Bhutia- Lepchas from 15 to 12. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 1979 (Bill No.79) was proposed by the Sikkim Janata Government in May, 1979. There was some political blockade in the passing of the bill due to the dissolution of Lok Sabha. Nevertheless, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance, 1979, was issued by the President of India and sought to amend Section 5 A of the Representation of the People (Act), 1951. The ordinance added new features:, reservation of 12 seats for Bhutia-Lepcha, out of 15 seats, reservation of 2 seats for Scheduled Castes, 1 seat was to be retained for *Sangha* and 17 seats declared as general. The Ordinance abolished the provision of seats for Nepalese and included the right of the plainmen to contest the election from the General seats. However, the ordinance benefited the Bhutia and Lepcha as they were allowed to contest elections for the general seats as well in addition to their 12 reserved seats (Basnett, 1974.p.128).

This new seat reservation set up in Sikkim created apprehensions among the Nepalese to a greater extent as they had to share their seats with others, especially the plainmen, Bhutias and Lepchas in the Assembly. If we look the community-wise representation ratio in state politics, we can see that Bhutias and Lepchas benefited the most and could have stronger hold in state decision making.

By virtue of being the original inhabitants and the ruler, these communities still enjoyed certain privileges in state politics. In spite of a feeling of deprivation of political power and fear of losing their identity in the new democratic set up, the Bhutias have been able to represent themselves as the most influential group (politically, socially and economically) in Sikkimese society.

The hope of retaining their original status was given by the new political party, the Sikkim Janta Party, under the leadership of Nar Bahadur Bhandari in the election campaign of 1979. Sikkim Janta Party raised the issue of anti-merger and the reduction of BL seats during the previous government led by L.D Kazi. The Sikkim Janta Party received widespread support from all sections of society by winning 16 seats out of 32 in 1979. He was also able to win the lone *Sangha* seat.

The Bhutias, as a single community, had a larger share in the government. Out of 32 seats, 12 were reserved for Scheduled Tribes, out of which 9 were won by Bhutias, 6 from Sikkim Janta Party, the ruling party and 2 Bhutias from Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary), 1 seat from SPC and 3 seats were won by Lepchas, 2 from Sikkim Congress (R) and the other from Sikkim Janata Parishad.

Table 4.3.2. Election Results of BL Seats in State Legislative Assembly -1979

Sl. No.	Constituency	Name of the Winner	Political Party
1	Tashiding	Dawgyal Pentso Bhutia	Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP)
2	Rinchenpong	Katuk Bhutia	Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP)
3	Ralong	Chamla Tshering	Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary)
4	Pathing	Ram Lepcha	Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary)
5	Djongu	Athup Lepcha	Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP)
6	Lachen Mangshila	Tenzing Dadul Bhutia	Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP)
7	Kabi Tingda	Sonam Tshering	Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary)
8	Rakdong Tintek	Dugo Bhutia	Sikkim Prajatantra Congress
9	Martam	Samten Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP)
10	Rumtek	Dadul Bhutia	Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP)
11	Assam Lingjey	Sherab Palden Lepcha	Sikkim Congress (Revolutionary)
12	Ranka	Dorji Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP)
13	Total	12 (Bhutia=9, Lepcha =3)	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 1979.

In the general assembly election of 1979, 9 Bhutia candidates and 3 Lepcha candidates were elected amongst the 12 BL seats. Though from different political parties, Bhutia candidates secured the highest number of votes. So, out of a total of 32 seats, the Bhutia representation was 31.25 percent in the new government under Nar Bahadur Bhandari in 1979. The Lepchas and Bhutias benefited the most from the Bhandari government. During the government, a new language policy was introduced in 1981, where Bhutia and Lepcha languages were to be introduced and taught up to class ten in government schools in Sikkim. The Bhutia and Lepcha languages got acceptance and recognition as optional subjects up to class XII by the CBSE board in 1984-85. The new government also tried to restore B L seats to 16, but the process was incomplete.

In the next general election in 1985, Nar Bahadur Bhandari contested the election under the banner of a new political party, Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) and became the Chief Minister again. In this election, the Bhutias retained 9 seats in the Assembly, leaving 3 with the Lepchas. This time, all the Bhutia candidates won from the ruling party (SSP), except one from the Indian National Congress (INC) party. The Bhutia representation was 28%.

Table 4.3.3. Election Results of BL Seats in State Legislative Assembly, 1985

Constituency	Name of the Winner	Political Party
Tashiding	Ugen Pintso Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Rinchenpong	Ongdi Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Ralong	Sonam Gyatso Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Pathing	Ram Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Djongu	Sonam Choda Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Lachen-Mangshila	Thokchok Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Kabi Tingda	Kalzang Gyatso Bhutia	Indian National Congress (INC)
Rakdong Tintek	Phuchung Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Martam	Chamla Tsering Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Rumtek	Ongay Tob Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Assam Lingjey	Sonam Dapden Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Ranka	Dorjee Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Total	12 (Bhutia- 9, Lepcha -3)	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 1985.

The fourth general Sikkim Assembly election of 1989 brought a different picture of politics. The election of 1989 witnessed 118 candidates in total contesting the election: the Indian National Congress, regional parties, namely the Sangram Parishad and the Rising Sun Party and independent candidates. This time also, the election verdict went in favour of Sikkim Sangram Parishad, securing all 32 seats in the State.

Table 4.3.4. Election Results of BL Seats in State Legislative Assembly, 1989

Constituencies	1989	Political Party
Tashiding (ST)	Ugen pintso Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Rinchenpong (ST)	Chong lamu Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Ralong (ST)	Sonam Gyatso Kaleon	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Pathing (ST)	Ram Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Djongu (ST)	Sonam Choda Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Lachen Mangshila (ST)	Tasa Tengey Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Kabi Tingda (ST)	Hangu Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Rakdong Tintek (ST)	Phuchung Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Martam (ST)	Chamla Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Rumtek (ST)	O.T Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Assam Lingje (ST)	Sonam Dupden Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Ranka (ST)	Dorjee Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Total	12 (Bhutia- 8, Lepcha -4)	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 1989.

In this election, out of 12 BL seats, the Bhutias secured 8 seats, leaving 4 with the Lepchas. Bhutias emerged as a single community, taking the lead with 25% seats in the state. In the government formed by Sikkim Sangram Parishad in 1989, out of 13 cabinet ministers, (6) 44.4% was given to Bhutia-Lepchas. Though a small proportion of population in the state, the Bhutia-Lepchas were well represented in the government. The winning of the election in 1989 and formation of the government was the third time victory of Nar Bahadur Bhandari.

Table 4.3.5. Election Results of BL Seats in State Legislative Assembly, 1994

Constituencies	1994	Political Party
Tashiding (ST)	Thutop Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Rinchenpong (ST)	Phur Tshering Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Ralong (ST)	Dorjee Dazom Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Pathing (ST)	Ram Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Djongu (ST)	Sonam Ghyoda Lepcha	Indian National Congress
Lachen Mangshila (ST)	Hissey Lachungpa	Sikkim Democratic Front
Kabi Tingda (ST)	Thinley Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Rakdong Tintek (ST)	Mingma Tshering Sherpa	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Martam (ST)	Dorjee Tshering Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Rumtek (ST)	Menlom Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Assam Lingjey (ST)	Tsheten Tashi Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Ranka (ST)	Rinzing Ongmu Bhutia	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Total	12 (Bhutia- 6, Lepcha -5 Sherpa-1)	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 1994.

The 1994 election saw the decline of the Bhutias in securing the BL seats. 6 out of 12 was won by Bhutias, 5 seats were taken by the Lepchas and Sherpas could win 1 seat. This is an interesting twist that the Sherpas, for the first time received a chance to represent in the Legislative Assembly by winning one seat. It must be noted that Sherpas received the status as one of the sub-tribes of Bhutia group in 1978 when Bhutias were declared as Scheduled Tribe. Before this, the Sherpas were not recognised as Bhutias, though they are of Tibetan origin. The Representation of People Act (Amendment Act) of 1980 clearly stated that the 12 BL seats are also meant for the sub-groups of Bhutia that were included in 1978.

Table 4.3.6. Election Results of BL Seats in State Legislative Assembly, 1999

Constituencies	1999	Political Party
Tashiding (ST)	Thutop Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Rinchenpong (ST)	Ongden Tshering Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Ralong (ST)	Dorjee Dazom Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Pathing (ST)	Sonam Dorjee	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Djongu (ST)	Sonam Gyatso Lepcha	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Lachen Mangshila (ST)	Hissey Lachungpa	Sikkim Democratic Front

Kabi Tingda (ST)	Thinley Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Rakdong Tintek (ST)	Mingma Tshering Sherpa	Sikkim Sangram Parishad
Martam (ST)	Dorjee Tshering Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Rumtek (ST)	K.T Gyaltzen	Sikkim Democratic Front
Assam Lingjey (ST)	Tsheten Tashi Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Ranka (ST)	Tsheten Dorjee Lpcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Total	12 (Bhutia-7, Lepcha -4 Sherpa-1)	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 1999.

The election of 1999 again saw the distribution of 12 BL seats among the Bhutias, Lepchas and Sherpas. Bhutias won 8 seats, Lepchas 4 and Sherpas won 1 seat. Since the very beginning, there has always been a tug of war between the two, where Bhutia always emerged as the winner. However, the 2004 general election saw a change in the Bhutia-Lepcha representatives. The Lepchas won the majority seats from the 12 BL reserved seats. Lepchas were ahead of Bhutias with 6 seats, Bhutias with 5 and Sherpas with 1 seat.

Table 4.3.7. Election Results of BL Seats in State Legislative Assembly, 2004

Constituencies	2004	Political Party
Tashiding (ST)	D. N Thakarpa (Bhutia)	Sikkim Democratic Front
Rinchenpong (ST)	Dawcho Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Ralong (ST)	Dorjee Dazom Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Pathing (ST)	Mingma Tshering Sherpa	Sikkim Democratic Front
Djongu (ST)	Sonam Gyatso Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Lachen Mangshila (ST)	Hissey Lachungpa	Sikkim Democratic Front
Kabi Tingda (ST)	Thinley Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Rakdong Tintek (ST)	Norzang Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Martam (ST)	Dorjee Tshering Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Rumtek (ST)	Menlom Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Assam Lingjey (ST)	Kunga Zangpo Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Ranka (ST)	Nimkit Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Total	12 (Bhutia- 5, Lepcha -6, Sherpa-1)	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 2004.

A decline in the Bhutia representation has been noticed since 2004, after the new party, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), formed the government. This reduction of seat occupation by the Bhutias in state politics has somehow impacted their influence and their importance as the ruling elite in the state. A consistent decrease in the representation of Bhutias is seen in the remaining elections in the state. The number of Bhutia representation in the 2004 election came down to 5, whereas the Lepcha representation was increased to 6. In the earlier elections where the parity formula was applied, the Bhutias were the dominant group. It is seen that since merger, only 20 percent of Lepchas are represented in the Assembly, as compared to 80 percent of Bhutias.

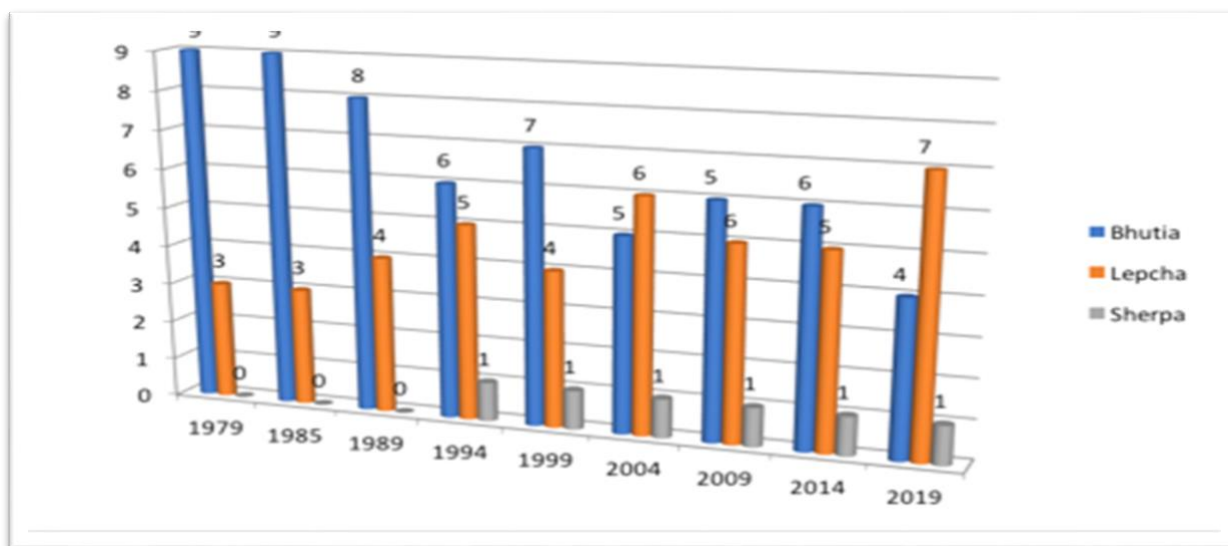
The elections of 2009, 2014 and 2019 were based on the delimitation of the parliamentary and Assembly orders, Election Commission of India, 2008. There was a change in the constituency arrangement for the purposes of both the election and the administration of the state. The delimitation process changed the electoral map of Sikkim. The earlier reserved constituencies for Bhutias/Lepchas were rearranged with the allocation of new territorial coverage. Except for the five constituencies of Rhenock, Rinchenpong, Melli, Shyari and Dzongu, the rest of the constituencies were created through total territorial redistribution. The demand put forth by the political parties and especially by the Bhutia-Lepcha communities that the earlier constituency wise reservation of seats had a lower number of voters belonging to the two communities was somehow meted out by the new delimitation process. The delimitation, however, did not increase the assembly seats, but the population arrangement was made as per the community voters.

Table 4.3.8. B-L Seats in State Assembly Elections (1979-2019)

Community	1979	1985	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019	Total
Bhutia	9	9	8	6	7	5	5	6	4	60
Lepcha	3	3	4	5	4	6	6	5	7	42
Sherpa	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	6

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, (1979–2004).

Fig. 4.3.1.
Graphical Presentation of Community-wise Representation of B-L Seats in State Assembly Elections (1979-2019)



Source: Prepared on the basis of Table No. 4.3.8.

The state Assembly election results (1979 -2019) in the state after the merger brought the significant fact that initially Bhutia representation had been greater than Lepchas in the 12 B-L reserved seats, but the trend changed from 2004 onwards. In the 2004, 2009 and 2019 elections, Lepchas won the majority seats, as many as 7 seats in 2019. It is seen that from 1994 election onwards, Sherpa has been representing at least one seat in the BL category.

The following tables (Tables 4.3.9, 4.3.10 & 4.3.11) presents the distribution of BL seats in the Assembly elections of 2009, 2014 and 2019.

Table 4.3.9. Election Results of BL Seats in State Legislative Assembly, 2009

Constituencies	2009	Political Party
Yoksam-Tashiding (BL)	Dawcho Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Rinchenpong (BL)	D.N Thakarpa (Bhutia)	Sikkim Democratic Front
Daramdin (BL)	Tenzing Sherpa	Sikkim Democratic Front
Barfung (BL)	Sonam Gyatso Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Tumen-Lingi (BL)	Ugen Gyatso Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Gnathang-Machong (BL)	L.M Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front

Kabi Lungchuk (BL)	Thiney Tshering Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Djongu (BL)	Sonam Gyatso Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Lachen Mangan (BL)	Tshering Wangdi Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Gangtok (BL)	Dorjee Namgyal Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front
Martam-Rumtek (BL)	Menlom Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front
Shyari (BL)	K.T Gyaltzen	Sikkim Democratic Front
Total	12 (Bhutia-5, Lepcha -6, Sherpa-1)	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 2009.

Table 4.3.10. Election Results of BL Seats in State Legislative Assembly, 2014

Constituencies	2014	Political Party
Yoksam-Tashiding (BL)	Sonam Dadul Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Rinchenpong (BL)	Karma Sonam Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Daramdin (BL)	Da Norbu Sherpa	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Barfung (BL)	Dorjee Dazom Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Tumen-Lingi (BL)	Ugen T. Gyatso Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Gnathang-Machong (BL)	Dorjee Tshering Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Kabi Lungchuk (BL)	Ugen Nedup Bhutia	Sikkim Kranti kari Morcha (SKM)
Djongu (BL)	Sonam Gyatso Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Lachen Mangan (BL)	Tshering Wangdi Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Gangtok (BL)	Pintso Chopel (Lepcha)	Sikkim Kranti kari Morcha (SKM)
Martam-Rumtek (BL)	Mechung Bhutia	Sikkim Kranti kari Morcha (SKM)
Shyari (BL)	Kunga Nima Lepcha	Sikkim Kranti kari Morcha (SKM)
Total	12 (Bhutia- 5, Lepcha -6 Sherpa-1)	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 2014.

Table 4.3.11. Election Results of BL Seats in State Legislative Assembly, 2019

Constituencies	2019	Political Party
Yoksam-Tashiding (BL)	Sangay Lepcha	Sikkim Krantikari Morcha(SKM)
Rinchenpong (BL)	Karma Sonam Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Daramdin (BL)	Mingma Norbu Sherpa	Sikkim Krantikari Morcha(SKM)
Barfung (BL)	Tashi Thendup Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Tumen-Lingi (BL)	Ugen T. Gyatso Bhutia	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Gnathang-Machong (BL)	Dorjee Tshering Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)

Kabi Lungchuk (BL)	Karma Loday Bhutia	Sikkim Krantikari Morcha(SKM)
Djongu (BL)	Pinto Namgyal Lepcha	Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF)
Lachen Mangan (BL)	Samdup Lepcha	Sikkim Krantikari Morcha(SKM)
Gangtok (BL)	Yon Tshering Lepcha	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)
Martam-Rumtek (BL)	Sonam Venchungpa (Bhutia)	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)
Shyari (BL)	Kunga Nima Lepcha	Sikkim Krantikari Morcha(SKM)
Total	12 (Bhutia- 4, Lepcha -7, Sherpa-1)	

Source: Election Commission of India-State Elections, 2019.

A comparative study of community wise representation in Sikkim Legislative Assembly (1974-2019) is presented in the table below.

Table 4.3.12.

Election wise / Community wise Representation in Sikkim Legislative Assembly: 1974-2019

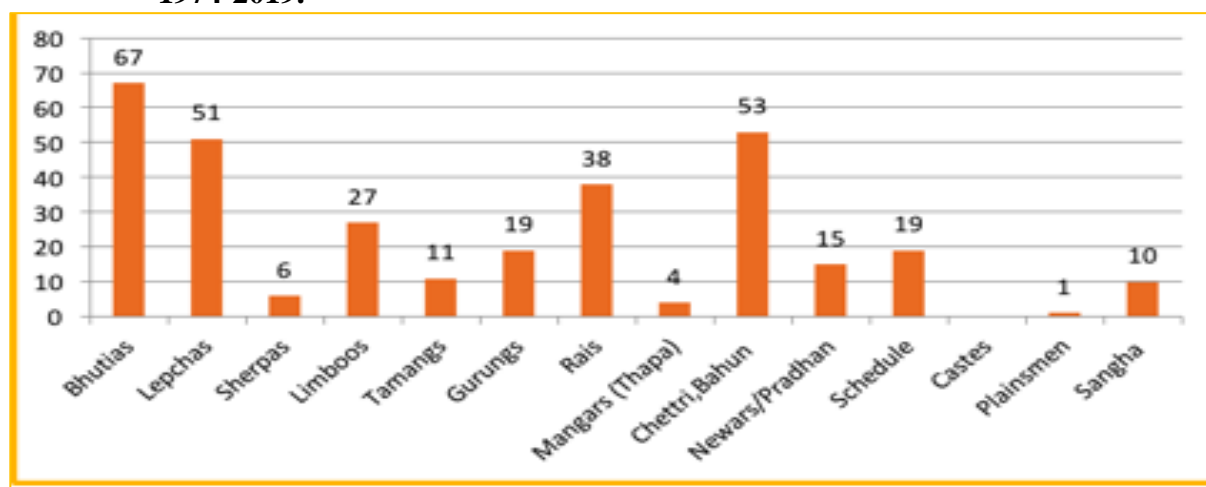
Communities	1974/ 1979	1979/ 1985	1985/ 1989	1989/ 1994	1994/ 1999	1999/ 2004	2004/ 2009	2009/ 2014	2014/ 2019	2019	Total
Bhutias	8	9	9	8	6	7	5	5	6	4	67
Lepchas	8	3	3	4	5	4	6	6	5	7	51
Sherpas	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Limboos	1	3	2	2	3	4	4	3	3	2	27
Tamangs	0	1	0	0	1	2	1	2	1	3	11
Gurungs	2	4	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	0	19
Rais	3	1	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	2	38
Mangars (Thapa)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	4
Chettri,Bahun	7	7	7	6	3	3	4	4	4	8	53
Newars/ Pradhan	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	15
Schedule Castes	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	19
Plainsmen	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sangha	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10

Source: Statistical Report on General election, 1974 to 2019, Legislative Assembly Election of Sikkim, Election Commission of India.

A notable feature of the State Assembly elections in Sikkim since the merger is that the Bhutias have been elected in the state, with a total of 67 elected leaders since the 1974 elections. No doubt, the community has been contesting the election on the 12 seats reserved for BL. Next to

Bhutia, the communities represented most are Chettri and Bahun, with a total of 53 elected leaders. So far, Lepcha has represented Sikkim politics with a total of 51 elected leaders. The next community represented highly in state politics is Rai, with altogether 38 elected leaders. The sequence is followed by Limboo with 27, Gurung with 19, Scheduled Caste with 19, Newars with 15, Tamang with 11, Sherpa with 6 and Mangar with 4. The Plainsmen, so far have been able to represent in Sikkim politics only once.

Fig. 4.3.2. Total Representation of Communities in the State Legislative Assembly – 1974-2019.



Source: Prepared on the basis of Table No. 4.3.12.

A brief study on community wise women's participation in politics shows that Bhutia women too have been elected to the Legislative Assembly since 1989. A community wise comparative study on the depiction of women in Sikkim politics highlights that Nepalese women have the highest number of representation with 11 in total. Two Bhutia and two Scheduled Caste women had their representation in politics. Women have been represented once from Lepcha community. Though women got their entry into politics quite late, the number has been increasing in recent years. Yet, women's representation in Sikkim politics is comparatively low.

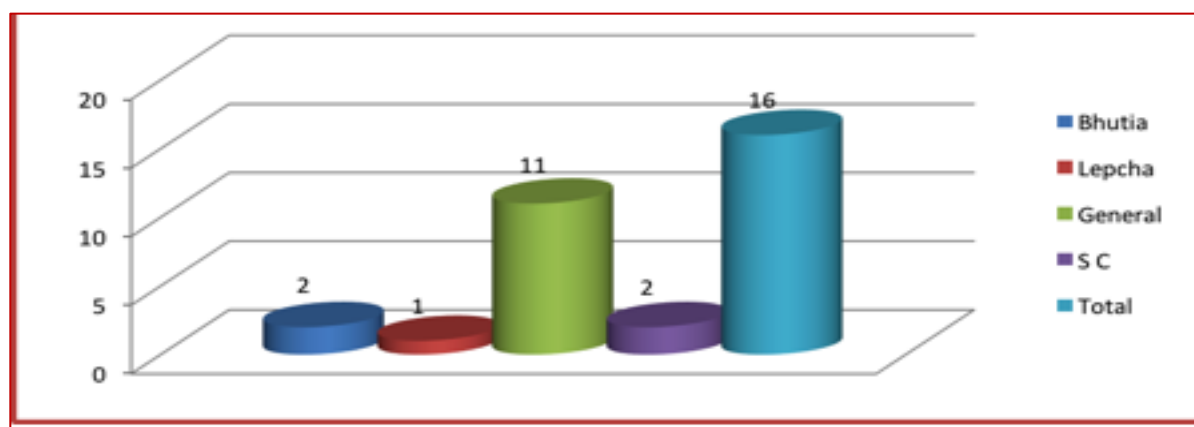
Table. 4.3.13. Women Participation in Sikkim Legislative Assembly (1979-2019)

Sl. No	Year	Bhutia	Lepcha	General	S C	Total
1	1979	0	0	0	0	0
2	1985	0	0	0	0	0
3	1989	1	0	1	0	2
4	1994	1	0	0	0	1

5	1999	0	0	1(Subba)	0	1
6	2004	0	1	1(Subba) 1(Thapa)	0	3
7	2009	0	0	1(Subba) 1 (Gurung)	1	3
8	2014	0	0	1(Subba) 1 (Rai) 1(Gurung)		3
9	2019	0	0	1(Thapa) 1(Tamang)	1	3
10	Total	2	1	11	2	16

Source: Statistical Report on General election, 1979 to 2019, Legislative Assembly Election of Sikkim, Election Commission of India.

Fig. 4.3.3. Community-wise Women Representation in State Legislative Assembly (1989-2019)



Source: Prepared on the basis of Table No. 4.3.13.

The Bhutias have been active in the post-merger period through various political and social organisations like the *Denzong People's Chogpa* (DPC), a registered political party, the *Denzong Tribal Yargay Chogpa* (DTYC), the Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association (STWA), the *Denzong Lhaday Yangki Chakchen* (Association of Buddhist Monks of Sikkim) and the *Bhutia Kay-Rab-Yargay Tsogpo* (BKRYT), (1983).

It is evident from the discussion in the above data that political power before the merger was controlled by the minority Bhutias. In post-merger Sikkim politics, Bhutias, though not rulers anymore, continue to have a good share in state politics. The Bhutia MLAs came down, but considering their proportion in the population, their representation is considerable. This has been possible due to the parity formula. The representation of Bhutia monks (*Lamas*) introduced by the Proclamation of 1966 has continued as a special constituency known as the “*Sangha*

Constituency”. Monks of the Sikkim monasteries are allowed to elect one member to the state Legislative Assembly. Thus, the Buddhist monks of Sikkim are still directly involved in the political affairs of the state.

Section IV

Marginalisation of Bhutias in Politics

In the previous section, it is discussed how the monarchy in Sikkim was replaced by democratic practices and the formation of the representative body, the State Council and the Executive Council were the political institutions were based on the parity formula. This parity formula enabled the Bhutias to retain their considerable presence in state electoral politics, which is more than in proportion to the Nepalese and other communities. However, the changing demographic profile of the state has contributed to the marginalisation of the Bhutias in the long run.

The study on the marginalisation of Bhutias is important because it allows us to discuss their representation in the political, social, economic and civil administrations in the new democratic set up. This has happened when the other groups, especially the Nepalese have been able to overcome their isolation and be in the mainstream of politics. The marginalisation of the Bhutias in Sikkim politics was noticed much earlier when the British began to exercise control on the Chogyal.

B.S.K Grover (1974), for example, observes that the articles related to the treaty of Titalia of 1817 clearly reveals that the power of the Bhutias in Sikkim has been decreased. As per the articles of the treaty, the ruler of Sikkim would refer any issue and dispute arising between the ruler and the subjects and also any issues with the neighbouring countries to the British government and the decision of the latter would be implemented. Hence, the treaty relegated the position of Sikkim from independent Kingdom to a buffer state. The writings of Arpana Bhattacharya (1992) also points out that in the Peking Conventions in April 27, 1906, China confirmed that Sikkim was the protectorate of the government of India. The appointment of J.C White as the political officer of Sikkim in 1889 further dismantled the administrative set up of Sikkim by reducing the Bhutia power (Bhattacharya, 1992, p.74).

In his book '*Sikkim- Feudal and Democratic*, 2008,' A.C Sinha explains the administrative situation in Sikkim when J.C White took up as Political Officer. To quote J.C White, 'Sikkim

was full of chaos. There was no revenue system, no court of justice, no police, no public works, no education...”. The first thing J.C White did to organise the administrative set up was the appointment of an Advisory Council to run the administration. A representative body consisting of Khangsa Dewan, Phodang Lama, Sheo Dewan, Lari Lama (Pemayangtse monastery), all *Kazis* of Gangtok, Rhenock, Enchey and Tashiding and lamas from Bhutia and Lepcha communities was formed. Even the Chogyal, Thutop Namgyal and the queen were removed from the throne for three years (1892-1895) and exiled to Kurseong on the ground that Chogyal refused to appear in Darjeeling in May 1887 when summoned by the British to explain the issue at ‘Longtu’.²² He was restored back to the throne in 1895 on a 10 point understanding worked out by J.C White (Sinha, 2008, p. 91-93).

Sinha writes that since 1861, the involvement of the British in Sikkim’s political affairs saw a reduction in the influence and powers of the *Kazis* and *Lamas*. The encouragement of the Nepalese migration to Sikkim by the British also posed a great threat to the powers and positions of the Bhutia rulers. Many confrontations with regard to the influx of the Nepalese population were noticed. According to Risley, “*the influx of Nepalese would revive and change the political and social structure in Sikkim*” (Bhattacharya, 1994, p. 94). Nepali people were known spread as businessmen, industrialists and agriculturists. Among the Nepalese groups, Newars emerged to be the counterparts of the Lepcha-Bhutia *Kazis*. They even got the title of ‘*Thikadars*’ during the Chogyal period. The Nepalese migration to Sikkim, encouraged by the British administration, was a great worry to the existing Bhutia Lepchas in Sikkim. The British created a landlord class among the Nepalese too, posing equal economic power with the Lepcha-Bhutia *Kazis* and landlords. This power balance between the new power holders, Nepalese and the existing power group, Bhutia Lepcha had to protect themselves from newly created power group of Nepalese. The Chogyal tried to subjugate the Nepalese through various policies in administration at different times. In this regard, the Lepchas and Bhutias attempted to prevent land alienation. The Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917 prohibited land alienation by the Bhutias and the Lepchas in favour of a person of another community without express permission of the Durbar. Civil Courts were also debarred from sanctioning sales of land of Bhutia-Lepcha communities in favour of persons of other communities without the prior sanction of the Durbar. In fact, the immigration

²² Longtu is a border area near Jelep-la that separates Tibet and Sikkim. Tibet occupied Longtu and established checkpoints with armed forces. The matter was brought to the Tibetan Khashag (cabinet) which replied that ‘it was no harm in protecting its own territory and were prepared to resist the British attack’. Chogyal Thutop Namgyal commented by saying that Longtu was in Tibet.

of the Nepalese had coupled with British intervention in administration began to pose a threat to the power and political authority of the Chogyal and the Bhutia community. The merger was the elimination of the trend and the trend was further taken in the post merger period.

The challenge to the Bhutia rule began to take shape in the 1940s. Sikkim State Congress under Tashi Tshering led 'No Rent' and 'No Tax' protest rally demanding the end of the *zamindari* system and the formation of an interim government in Sikkim. The protest rallies ('No Rent' and 'No Tax') organised by the party at Rangpo in February, 1949 and later at Gangtok in May, 1949 led to the formation of 'Popular Ministry' in Sikkim on May 9, 1949. The ministry was a five member Council under the Chief Ministership of Tashi Tshering. This ended the chapter on feudalism and Bhutia power, opening a new chapter on democracy in Sikkim. The interim government was dismissed on June 6, 1949 by the then political officer, Harishwar Dayal, as differences were elevated between the Chogyal and the Ministry regarding the reforms brought by the ministry (Basnet, 1974, p.88-90).

The Indian intervention in Sikkim's politics after India's Independence and withdrawal of the British accentuated the marginalisation of Bhutias. During this time, Sikkim was going through political turmoil. Hence, in 1949, the government of India advised Chogyal to appoint a Dewan (Indian) to head the administration in Sikkim. Chogyal, always wanting to bring political stability agreed upon the appointment of the Dewan. In the name of Dewan, the administration of Sikkim went into the hands of the Indian Government.

During the tenure of J.S. Lall, the Indian Civil Servant, on August 11, 1949, a significant development in political history was the signing of Indo-Sikkim treaty on December 5, 1950, between the Indian Political Officer and the Chogyal, Sir Tashi Namgyal. As per the Article II of the agreement, Sikkim's status as Protectorate was confirmed (Basnet, 1974, p.95). Till 1974, the Indian Government had been regulating the external relations, political, economic and financial aspects of Sikkim, thereby curtailing the power of Chogyal.

Thus, in the pre-merger period, while it was the Bhutia rule that exerted the marginalisation of the other communities like the Limboos, the Lepchas and of course the Nepalese, the Bhutia ruler himself was losing his sovereign power to the British rulers and to the Government of Independent India.

In the post-merger period, the Bhutias were accorded Scheduled Tribe status. But they were quite apprehensive when they were added in the Scheduled Tribe list of India in 1978 along with other tribes of Bhutia origin like the Chumbipas, Dothopas, Kagatey, Sherpas, Yolmos, Drukpas, Tromopas and Tibetans (Gurung, 2011, pp.142-144). Initially, Bhutias were only those people of Tibetan origins who had settled in Sikkim since the establishment of Namgyal dynasty till 1961, the year Sikkim Durbar recognised them as early settlers as legal settlers. They were issued Sikkim Subject Certificates under the Sikkim Subject Regulations, 1961. But this equal identity and the inclusion of eight other communities as Bhutias has put the identity of Bhutias at stake. This fear got further aggravated when in 2002, the Limboos and Tamangs were also listed as Scheduled Tribes. This led to another tension over the sharing of 12 Bhutia-Lepcha (BL) seats in the state Assembly, which is mostly monopolised by the Bhutias. Since their incorporation in the Scheduled Tribe list, the Tamangs and Limboos are demanding their share in the state Assembly and the Bhutias and Lepchas are not ready to share their seats with them, as these 12 seats, as per the Representation of Peoples Act, 1950/51 (as amended in 1976 and 1980) is specifically meant for BL.

Many organisations were formed to represent the issues of Bhutia- Lepchas in the state. Four social tribal organisations; *Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association (STWA)*, *Sikkim Lho-Men Youth Council (SLYC)*, *Rangjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarzum (RMRT)* and, *Muyal Pronzom (MP)*, were set up to voice the demands for the reorganisation and delimitation of the constituencies according to the population of tribal voters (Kazi, 2003).

Further, to accelerate the demands of the Bhutia - Lepchas, a Joint Action Committee (JAC) was formed under the banner of *Sikkim Tribal Welfare Association (STWA)* on October 9, 1985. The committee raised the demand for the restoration of 16 seats in the Assembly for the Bhutia-Lepchas (Kazi, 2003). *Denzong Lho Mon Chodrul*, formed in August 1992, represented the interest of the Bhutia- Lepchas and demanded restoration of 15 reserved BL seats instead of 12. The demand was put forward for the original distribution of 50-50 seats with the Nepalese as the 1979 Presidential Ordinance had reduced the number into 12.

Many members of the tribal associations of the Bhutia-Lepchas have joined the state parties and contested in the State Assembly elections. So far, not a single political party is being formed under Bhutia- Lepcha leadership in the state. An apex body of the Bhutias and Lepchas, the *Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC)* ensures fair political representation of the BL in the state. The demand for equitable BL seats from the existing 12 to 17 is been put forward by

SIBLAC, when the proposal for the increase of number of Assembly seats from 32 to 40 will be approved by the Central government.

The state government under Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) tried to field tribal candidates belonging to groups other than the Bhutias and Lepchas from the BL reserved seats for the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls in 1999. These associations of Bhutia- Lepcha protested the move of the government with a protest rally and one-day hunger strike in the state. The following year, in 2000, SIBLAC submitted a memorandum to the State government demanding that the 12 BL seats be reserved solely for Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepchas. It requested the exclusion of other tribal communities listed as Bhutias from the group of 'Bhutias' included in the ST list. The *Bhutia Lepcha Protection Force* (BLPF) is also constantly striving towards the protection of Bhutia-Lepcha against the growing Nepali majority in the state.

It can be argued that democracy in Sikkim resulted in the consolidation of political power by the Nepalese, eventually leading to the ethnic Bhutia and Lepcha community as minorities.

After the merger in 1975, when Sikkim was transformed from a monarchy to a democracy and the Bhutias were no longer rulers, the end of Bhutia dominated politics was witnessed. As we have seen, it is they who have been marginalised in politics over the years. The formation of so many organisations over the issue of reserved seats indicates their apprehension of vulnerability. At the same time, the impact of the Bhutias on the overall social and administrative ambience of Sikkim is still continuing. Buddhist culture, as it was always in the erstwhile Sikkim, has been the most vital determining force in the state. The government calendar in the state is being followed based on the Buddhist calendar. The Bhutia elite continues to exist as a pressure group in the state politics, as they have the highest secured position in the state with 13 seats, including one *Sangha* seat, reserved out of 32. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance of 1979, which was passed to elect the new Sikkim Legislative Assembly, and the Representation of the people (Amendment) Act of 1980, under which the next Legislative Assembly was elected, retained the *Sangha* seat (Gurung, 2011, p. 277). Eventually, under the Election laws of the country and the allotment of 13 seats (including *Sangha*) to the Bhutia-Lepcha community in the state, it clearly signifies the influence of the Bhutias even in the political process in Sikkim. The continuation of old laws in Sikkim, even after its merger, has provided weightage to this community. Article 371F (Appendix 4) of the Constitution of India, further secures their position in Sikkim. The constitution was amended and taking into consideration the history and the status of Sikkim some special concessions are provided.