

Chapter – VII

The New Class and Ethnic Formation

A new class consisting of the educated bureaucrats, professionals, managerial class, teachers in schools and colleges and political elite has come up with the introduction of the democratic process and developmental activities after the merger of Sikkim with India in 1975. This class is more like a 'class in itself', occupying similar position in the production relations and having a comparable life style, but the constituents of the class show little sign of forming a 'class for itself' since they are a fragmented lot divided on ethnic line and hardly have a class objective in terms of their political actions. The new class, which can be termed as the middle class as well, could, theoretically speaking, come out of their primordial identities and consciousness and form a progressive modern, secular class to give political and social directions. A contrasting possibility could have been to work for ruling class hegemony in a 'bourgeois' social formation. A third possibility is that the members of the new class work as individuals with a self defined personalised agenda, which are not part of any class consciousness and whatever collective consciousness they adhere to is ethnic consciousness. The members of the new class belonging to a particular ethnic group show some degree of solidarity with the cause of their respective ethnic group.

In the previous chapter, the developmental profile and the process of emerging new educated class among three ethnic groups, in the post-merger Sikkim has been discussed. Also been discussed their access in various educational and occupational opportunities.

Since ethnic communities are created and transformed by particular elite in modernising societies, it is proposed to explore certain questions: who constitute the new class ? What makes them so ? The basic queries would also attempt to bring out the socio-economic background of the new class and their opinion on the major ethnic issues. Answer to these queries would highlight their contribution in functioning and formation of ethnic communities. However, the information presented here is based on a survey of 103 respondents belonging to three ethnic communities, with the help

of questionnaire. Although nearly 200 questionnaires were distributed, only 103 responded.

Personal Background of the Informants

Age: Dividing the respondents into four age-groups, i.e. 25-35 years, 35-40 years, 45-55 years and 55 +, we have found that the majority of the respondents i.e. 80% belonged to 25-45 age group. Nearly 1.9% of the respondents were above 45 years. It shows that the majority of the respondents were relatively young. Table 7.1 would give us the distribution of the respondents in various age groups.

Table 7.1: Age of respondents

Age (in years)	Number	Percentage
25-35	33	32.03
35-45	51	49.51
45-55	17	16.5
55 +	02	1.9
Total	103	100.00

Place of birth: A large majority i.e. 72.8% of the respondents were born in rural areas and 27.1% in urban areas (Table 7.2). Hence, there has been a shift from the place of birth to the place of work for the majority of the respondents.

Table 7.2: Place of birth of respondents

Place of birth	Number	Percentage
Rural	75	72.8
Urban	28	27.1
Total	103	100.00

House ownership: Almost 52% of the respondents still owned one house only at the place of birth. They live in the hired houses at the place of work. However, a significant section of the respondents, comprising 48.5%, owned two houses, one at the place of birth and another at the place of work (Table 7.3). It shows that while keeping relationship with the natal village, the new educated service class has established new houses in the place of work in urban areas too.

Table 7.3: House status of the respondents

No. of household	No. of respondent	Percentage
Dual household	50	48.5
Single household	53	51.4
Total	103	100.00

Length of service of respondents: A significant part i.e. 29.1% of the respondents have been working for more than 21 years whereas the rest, nearly 70%, were recruited in the post-merger era; 13.7% of whom were recruited in the last four years. The length of service of rest of the respondents ranges between 5 to 20 years. Table 7.4 shows the length of service of the respondents.

Table 7.4: Length of service of the respondents

Length of service	Number	Percentage
1 – 4 years	14	13.7
5 – 8 years	11	10.6
9 – 12 years	17	16.5
13 – 16 years	16	15.5
17 – 20 years	15	14.5
21+ years	30	29.1
Total	103	100.00

Ethnicity, Religion and Language: Ethnicity has always been a basis of resource distribution and access to political authority in Sikkim. Earlier, 'parity' system was followed and now the membership to the state legislative assembly is decided following a reservation policy on ethnic line. Hence, it would be highly useful to know the ethnic background of the respondents.

Table 7.5: Ethnic background of respondents

Ethnic group	Number	Percentage
Lepcha	19	18.4
Bhutia	27	26.12
Nepalese	57	55.3
Total	103	100.00

The largest group of respondents i.e. 55.3% was drawn from numerically dominant Nepali community, followed by the Bhutias (26.12%) and the Lepchas (18.4%). Representation of the Lepchas was low partly because they were shy of returning the schedule-cum-questionnaire. A look at the caste composition of the Nepali respondents would show that the Bahuns with 22.8% constituted the largest group, followed by Rai, Limboo and Tamang with 12.2% representation for each caste, while another 8.7% belonged to Chhetri and Newar castes. Other castes/ethnic-groups like Magar, Thakuri, Kami, Sherpa had a very small representation with 1.7% each. 7% of the respondents did not specify their ethnic sub-groups. Table 7.6 gives the caste break-up of the Nepali respondents.

Table 7.6: Caste break-up of Nepali respondents

Caste/ Ethnic sub-groups	Number	Percentage
Bahun	13	22.8
Rai	7	12.2
Limboo	7	12.2
Tamang	7	12.2
Chhetri	5	8.7
Newar	5	8.7
Gurung	4	7.0
Kami	2	3.5
Sherpa	1	1.7
Magar	1	1.7
Thakuri	1	1.7
Not specified	4	7.0
Total	57	100.00

Religion: Buddhism and Hinduism are two predominant religions in Sikkim comprising 27.1% and 68.4% respectively of the total population as per 1991 Census. Table 7.7 shows the ethnic and religious backgrounds of the respondents.

Table 7.7: Ethnicity and religion of respondents

Religion	Ethnic Group (Number and Percentage)			
	Nepalese	Bhutias	Lepchas	Total
Hinduism	43 (75.4)	-	-	43 (41.7)
Buddhism	08 (14.03)	26 (96.2)	14 (73.6)	48 (46.6)
Christians	01 (1.75)	01 (3.70)	05 (26.3)	07 (6.7)
Yamaism	05 (8.7)	-	-	05 (4.8)
Total	57 (100.00)	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

The Table reveals that of the Nepali respondents 75.4% were Hindu, 14.3% Buddhists and 1.75% Christians. 8.7% of the Nepalese belonging to Limboo community mentioned their religion as Yamaism. Most of the Bhutia respondents, more than 96%, were Buddhists and an insignificant minority (3.7%) were Christians. Among the Lepchas 73.6% were Buddhists. A significant part of the Lepcha respondents (26.3%) were Christians. Over all, the largest group among the respondents was Buddhist with a share of 46.7%, followed by Hindus with 41.7%; 6.7% and 4.8% of total respondents were Christians and Yamais respectively.

Language: Nepali language is the lingua franca and a means of communication for all the communities in Sikkim. Moreover, the state government has recognized Nepali, Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo as the official languages of the state. Recently, the Sikkim Democratic Front Government has recognised Newar, Rai, Gurung, Magar, Sherpa and Tamang languages as the official languages of the state following the provisions of the Sikkim Official Languages (Amendment) Act, 1995. Table 7.8 gives the distribution of the respondents according to their mother tongue.

Table 7.8: Mother Tongue of the Respondents

Mother Tongue	Number	Percentage
Nepali	50	48.5
Lepcha	19	18.4
Bhutia	27	26.2
Limboo	06	5.8
Sherpa	01	0.9
Total	103	100.00

It is important to mention here that although the Nepali sub-cultural stocks like the Gurung, Newar, Rai, Magar, Tamang etc. have their own dialect, the respondents have recorded their mother tongue as Nepali the language commonly used. Table 7.8 shows that 48.5% of the respondents were Nepali speaking, 26.2% spoke Bhutia and 18.4% spoke Lepcha. The Limboo speaking section of the respondents accounted for 5.8% while 0.9% spoke Sherpa.

Being educated all the respondents were multilingual and could communicate in English and Hindi besides their mother tongue. A section of the respondents studied in various states of India and could speak Marathi, Tamil, Kannad, Bengali

and other Indian languages too. Hence, this new educated class, although operates in a wider social space and in a wider communication network, has been able to maintain its own social boundary by adopting a common life style.

Occupational Status: The new class hierarchy comprises internally stratified groups, which are differentiated according to range of skills, function, education, authority-cum- responsibility etc. As such, the higher occupational categories comprise those officials and professionals, who occupy senior gazetted ranks. The members belonging to gazetted ranks are again classified into Group A and Group B. The group B officers are relatively junior to those of group A, but are differentiated from group C, who are non-gazetted officials. As such, majority of the respondents, i.e. 48.54%, were of group B category, followed by group A officers comprising 29.12%, while 19.4% belonged to group C non-gazetted category (Table 7.9).

Table 7.9: Ethnicity & Occupational Status

Occupational Status	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Group A	14 (51.8)	01 (5.26)	15 (26.3)	30 (29.12)
Group B	10 (37.03)	09 (47.36)	31 (54.38)	50 (48.54)
Group C	03 (11.11)	09 (47.36)	08 (14.03)	20 (19.4)
Not Specified	-	-	03 (5.26)	03 (2.9)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

The officers in group A includes senior doctors, engineers, administrators, departmental heads at state and district level, who occupy the highest position in the occupational hierarchy.

The Bhutias have the highest share (51.8%) of group A officers whereas the Nepalese have the highest representation (54.38%) in-group B category. The Lepchas have an equal representation comprising 47.36% in both B and C groups. The Bhutias, thus, are numerically dominant among the most powerful Group A officers of state bureaucracy.

Occupation of the respondent's father: With the merger of Sikkim with the Union of India, large-scale developmental activities have been introduced. This has diversified the occupational structure and opened up new employment avenues for the Sikkimese. In order to understand the inter-generational occupational mobility it is

vital to see the occupational status of respondent's father. Table 7.10 gives the community-wise break-up of respondents' fathers and their occupations.

Table 7.10: Occupation of respondent's father

Occupational Category	Ethnic Groups (No. & Percentage)			
	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Government Service	11 (40.74)	02 (10.52)	15 (26.3)	28 (27.18)
Farmer	15 (55.55)	08 (42.10)	29 (50.87)	52 (55.04)
Priesthood	01 (3.70)	02 (10.52)	02 (3.50)	05 (4.85)
Contractor	-	-	04 (7.0)	04 (3.8)
Business	-	-	03 (5.26)	03 (2.9)
Politician	-	-	01 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
Mondal	-	01 (5.26)	-	01 (0.9)
Not mentioned	-	06 (31.5)	03 (5.26)	09 (8.7)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103(100.00)

Table 7.10 shows that 55.04% of the respondents' fathers were farmers and 27.18% were in government service. Among the rest were priests (4.85 %), contractors (3.8%), businessmen (2.9%), politicians (0.9%) and Mondals (0.9%). Nine respondents did not specify their fathers' occupation. A simultaneous look at the respondents' and their fathers' occupational status substantiates the fact that there has been an occupational mobility and shift in the occupational structure from farming, priesthood etc. to emerging new occupational categories like administrators, professionals, technicians and other white collar jobs requiring higher qualifications. With high salary, status and privileges the neo-elite professionals and government officials constitute a new class with exclusive life style and status. This class moves around with enormous power in everyday life. It deserves special mention that the majority of the respondents are first generation employees.

Educational Status: Education is the vehicle of social transformation and the main instrument to modernization of a backward society like Sikkim. Since modern education can provide the resource for entry into the new class, it is necessary to see the educational background of the respondents.

An analysis of the educational status of the respondents (Table 7.11) shows that 65.04% had Bachelor degree in various discipline like Medicine, Engineering, Veterinary Science, Agricultural Science, Technology, Science, Arts, Commerce and Law, 23.3% had Masters Degree and only 9.70% studied at the under-graduate level.

Among the respondents 1.94% had Ph.D. as well. The largest share of the respondents (37.5%) with Masters Degree in various disciplines was from the Bhutia

Table 7.11: Education level of the respondents

Level of Education	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total		
<i>Batchelor Degree:</i>						
Medical Science	02	02	02	06		
Engineering Science	-	-	02	02		
Veterinary Science	01	-	05	06		
Agricultural Science	-	01	08	09		
B. Technology	02	01	01	04		
B.A., B.Sc., B.Com. & LL.B.	10	09	21	40		
Total	15 (55.5)	13 (68.42)	39 (68.42)	67 (65.04)		
<i>Master Degree :</i>						
Medical Science	02	-	03	05		
Veterinary Science	02	-	01	03		
Agricultural Science	03	-	01	04		
M.A./M.Sc./M.Com.	03	-	09	12		
Total	10 (37.5)	-	14 (24.56)	24 (23.3)		
Ph.D.	01 (3.7)	-	01 (1.75)	02 (1.94)		
Diploma in Hotel Management	-	-	02	5.26	02	9.70
Higher Secondary	01 (3.7)	06 (31.5)	01	08		
Grand Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)		

community, 24.56% from the Nepali community. None of the Lepcha respondents had Masters degree. Among the Lepcha respondents 68.42% had Bachelor degree. The educational background of the respondents shows that most of the respondents have studied outside state of Sikkim in various professional, technical colleges and other centres of higher studies.

Educational status of respondent's father: To understand inter-generational mobility in education, it is necessary to see the educational background of the respondent's father.

A comparative analysis of respondents' and their fathers' educational status would show (Table 7.12) that there is an apparent gap in terms of their educational achievement. Almost 48.53% of the respondents' fathers were illiterate or 'literate upto primary level', who could just read and write, and 24.27% had studied between

Table 7.12: Educational status of respondent's father

Level of Education	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Illiterate	06 (22.22)	03 (15.78)	10 (17.54)	19 (18.44)
Literate upto Primary Level	09 (33.33)	05 (26.31)	17 (29.82)	31 (30.09)
Middle School Level	-	01 (5.26)	03 (5.26)	04 (3.88)
Matric/Higher Secondary	07 (25.92)	03 (15.78)	15 (26.3)	25 (24.27)
Graduate	04 ((14.81)	01 (5.26)	03 (5.26)	08 (7.76)
Lamaist/Priesthood	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	02 (3.50)	04 (3.88)
Not Specified	-	05 (26.31)	7 (12.28)	12 (11.65)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

class X to XII. A small percentage of 7.76% were graduates and another 3.88% had religious or priestly education. 11.65% of the respondents did not specify the educational status of their father.

An ethnic break-up of the respondents' fathers and their education would reveal the same trend as that of the respondents. The Bhutia respondents had the highest percentage of graduates (i.e.14.81%); the percentage of graduates among the Nepalese and Lepchas was much less at 5.26% among each group (Table 7.12). This substantiates the fact that there has been an upward mobility in terms of educational status from the fathers' - to the respondents' generation.

Social position of the family: The members of the new educated class had relatively simple family status in the past generation. As high as 80% of the respondents had origin in average family of commoners. Only 8.7% of the respondents were of aristocratic origin. Among others, 4.85% were drawn from priestly families, 2.9 % from business families and 0.9% from traditional artisan families (Table 7.13).

An ethnic breakup of the respondents' social position would show more or less a similar picture; most respondents having an average family background. The Bhutias had the largest share (22.22 %) of families with aristocratic background. The Nepalese with 85.96% and Lepchas with 78.94% had the highest number of respondents with average family background. Thus, despite having non-aristocratic

Table 7.13: Social position of respondent's family

Details	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Commoners	19 (70.3)	15 (78.94)	49 (85.96)	83 (80.58)
Aristocratic/Local ruling Family	06 (22.22)	02 (7.40)	01 (1.75)	09 (8.7)
Priestly	01 (3.70)	02 (7.40)	02 (3.50)	05 (4.85)
Business Community	-	-	03 (5.26)	03 (2.9)
Traditional Artisan	-	-	01 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
Not Mentioned	01 (3.70)	-	01 (1.75)	02 (1.94)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

background most of the respondents have succeeded in raising their social position remarkably by means of education, personal initiative and hard work

Land holding and income level: Since it is difficult to collect reliable information on total income, the salary of the incumbents has been taken into account to measure their income. The members of the new service class of Sikkim have a secure source of income, which varies according to the position in the occupational structure.

Table 7.14: Monthly income of the respondents

Income	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total and Percentage
Upto Rs. 7,000/-	02	06	06	14 (13.59)
Rs. 7,000 – Rs. 10,000	03	07	11	21 (20.38)
Rs. 10,000 – Rs. 12,000	03	03	15	21 (20.38)
Rs. 12,000 – Rs. 14,000	08	01	10	19 (18.44)
Rs. 14,000 +	10	01	11	22 (21.35)
Not Specified	01	01	04	06 (5.82)
Total	27	19	57	103 (100.00)

Table 7.14 shows how the income of the respondents varies with their occupational status. The junior non-gazetted officers, who had a monthly income of less than Rs. 7,000 (as basic pay), constituted 13.59% of the respondents. The highest income group, with a monthly income of more than Rs. 14,000/-, constituted 21.35% of the respondents; the rest fell in the middle income groups with a monthly income between Rs. 7,000 and Rs. 14,000.

Land: Another factor that should be taken into consideration is access to landed property. Sikkim being an agrarian economy, land still holds a prominent place in people's priorities. However, the respondents were hesitant in disclosing information about the amount of land they held. Table 7.15 shows the amount of land held by the

informants. Some of the informants do not own land and have specified the land owned by their parents.

Table 7.15: Land held by the respondent

Land (in acres)	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total and Percentage
Landless	-	-	04	4 (3.8)
1 – 5	4	5	14	23 (22.3)
6 –10	4	4	6	14 (13.8)
11-15	2	-	1	03 (2.9)
15 +	3	-	3	06 (5.8)
Not Specified	14	10	29	53 (51.4)
Total	27	19	57	103 (100.00)

A large majority i.e. 51.4% of the respondents did not specify the land they held. Hence they are not represented. 3.8% of respondents all belonging to Nepalese ethnic stock were landless. A high percentage (i.e. 22.3%) of the respondents had small holdings between 1 and 5 acres, 13.8% owned land in between 6 and 10 acres, 2.9% had land between 11 and 15 acres and 5.8% held more than 15 acres of land. There was none among the Lepchas, who could be termed as big landowner but among the Bhutias and Nepalese there were 3 big landowners in each group.

Table 7.16: Length of Residence in Sikkim

Length of residence (in years)	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total (Percentage)
Since birth	27	19	52	98 (95.14)
30 years	-	-	05	05 (4.85)
Total	27	19	57	103 (100.00)

Table 7.16 shows that 95% of the respondents are staying in Sikkim since birth. However, small minority of 4.85% belonging to Nepali community lived in Sikkim for the last 30 years and were first generation migrants. The majority was in Sikkim for generations.

Organizational affiliations: Although not all but a significant part of all three ethnic communities were found associated with some caste or religious associations.

Table 7.17: Organizational affiliations of the respondents

Name of organisation	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total Percentage
Sikkim Tribal Association	03	-	-	03
Sikkimese Survival	01	-	-	01
Ronzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum	-	7	-	07
Religious Organisations	09	7 8	17	33
Sikkim Yakthung Sapsok Sangjumbo	-	-	06	06
Sikkim Kirat Rai Sangh	-	-	05	05
Newar Guthi	-	-	02	02
Scheduled Caste Association	-	-	02	02
Sherpa Associations	-	-	01	01
Not Specified	14 (51.85)	05 (26.31)	24 (42.10)	43 (41.47)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

On the whole, 58.25% of the respondents belonging to three ethnic groups were members of some kind of caste or religious associations. A significant percentage of 41.47% of the respondents did not specify the associations they were associated with. Among the Bhutias 48.14% were members of Sikkim Tribal Association, Sikkimese Survival and other religious organizations. 74% of the Lepcha respondents were members of 'Ronzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum' (Sikkimese Lepcha Progressive Association) and religious associations like Buddhist Associations, members of Churches and Kyong Tarjum (Village Level Lepcha Association). A significant 51.85 % of Bhutias and 26.31% of Lepchas respondents did not specify (Table 7.17) the names of their associations.

Among the Nepalese, the members of different sub-cultural stocks were members of caste associations like 'Akhil Limboo Kirat Chumlong', 'Sikkim Yakthung Sabsok Sangjumbo' (Sikkim Limboo Literary Association), 'Akhil Kirat Rai Sangha', 'Newar Guthi', 'Scheduled Caste Association', Sherpa Associations and other religious associations like Chinmaya Mission, Sri Sai Samity, Buddhist Associations, Church Members and Pranami Mandir etc. It appears one-fourth of the respondents were organisationally active in various capacities. The organisation may be put into two broad categories – Religious and Caste Associations. The increasing number of the members of various associations shows the increasing ethnic consciousness among the new class too. The growing awareness and tendency of new educated class to be the member of caste association, obviously plays an important role in ethnic group formation.

Affiliation to Political Party: Living in a small state the intellectuals and professionals know each other personally and people hesitate to express their political opinion and their political affiliations in fear of being identified. It often works in the mind of the people in government service that if their association with an opposition party is disclosed, they may be victimized and discriminated against. Hence, 18.4% of the total respondents preferred not to disclose their political preferences or affiliations (Table 7.18).

To the questions "which political party are you ideologically sympathetic to? Why do you support? a wide range of responses was available: 17.4% of the respondents had shown preference for the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front, 26.2 % did not show any preference to any political party. Not showing any sympathy to any political party, a fifty years old Nepali Group A officer commented – 'Instead of being a medium of higher social achievement, modern political parties have degenerated into a profession. I do not have any sentimental and emotional attachment to any political party. It is only a compulsion that you have to choose a lesser evil'. Another Group B Officer commented ' All Political Parties make false

Table 7.18: Preference for Political Party

Political Party	Ethnic Groups (Number and Percentage)			
	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Sikkim Democratic Front	3 (11.11)	1 (5.26)	14 (25.56)	18 (17.4)
Sikkim Sangram Parisad	-	2 (10.52)	1 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
Indian National Congress (I)	2 (7.40)	1 (5.26)	2 (3.50)	05 (4.8)
Regional Party	4 (14.8)	2 (10.52)	20 (35.08)	26 (25.2)
National Party	1 (3.70)	1 (5.26)	01 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
Leftist	1 (3.70)	-	01 (1.75)	02 (1.9)
None	11 (40.74)	10 (52.6)	06 (10.5)	27 (26.2)
No Comment	05 (18.51)	02 (10.52)	12 (21.05)	19 (18.4)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

promises'. A Bhutia Officer said – 'All political parties are thugs'. Not supporting any political party, 33 years old Karma Loday, a Group B officer belonging to Lepcha community, who was also the General Secretary of 'Renjong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum' (Sikkim Lepcha Progressive Association) commented 'No political party has come out openly to support the cause of Lepcha community'. Voicing in the same tone Mr. Ugen Shipmoo, another Lepcha Officer, opined – 'I do not have any faith in any political party. Since the advent of democracy in Sikkim, no government (even opposition) has voiced any concern and interest for Lepcha community. Since we are in minority, I do not expect that our community will ever have a favourable government in future too'. The same feeling of apprehension was noticed when a 40 years old Lepcha teacher denied any sympathy to any political party, since no party thinks about the upliftment of the minority community.

Showing preference for the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front a young 28 years old non-gazetted government servant belonging to Nepali Rai community commented, "S.D.F's manifesto are excellent. Moreover, the president i.e. present Chief Minister is our "Rai Raja". Another Nepali officer had shown preference for the ruling party for its pro-poor policy. Another officer opined that 'the present Sikkim Democratic Front has implemented Other Backward Commission's bill in Sikkim'.

Instead of specifying any particular political party, 25% of the respondents had indicated preference for a regional party, whereas those supporting National Party were only 2.9 %. Justifying preference for a regional party, a 41year old Bhutia-Officer commented, ‘A regional party is more concerned about the local issues and it does understand and safeguard the regional interest and aspiration of the Sikkimese people much more than a National party’. Another 40 years old Nepali officer answered in the same vein, “if we support the national party there will be more influx of the people from other states, which would affect our economy badly”. Another officer justified his support for regional party saying ‘it would safeguard article 371(f)’.

The respondents supporting Sikkim Sangram Parisad and Leftist were 2.9% and 1.9% respectively.

Relationship with the people of own community holding high posts: We received varied responses to the query, if the respondent knew the people from own community holding high posts. If so, who are they? Table 7.19 lists down the diverse views and responses.

Table 7.19: Members of community holding high posts

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Yes, I know my relatives	20 (70.07)	05 (26.31)	32 (56.14)	57 (55.3)
They are many to name	02 (7.40)	01 (5.26)	02 (3.50)	05 (4.8)
They keep aloof	-	01 (5.26)	01 (1.75)	02 (1.9)
I can't bother	01 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
I don't know	04 (14.8)	03 (15.78)	12 (21.05)	19 (18.44)
They are very few	-	8 (42.10)	03 (5.26)	11 (0.6)
All Sikkimese are my Community	-	-	01 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
No Comment	-	1 (5.26)	06 (10.52)	07 (6.7)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103(100.00)

About 70.07% of the Bhutia respondents maintained in the affirmative that ‘they were their relatives’, whereas those with similar response among the Lepchas and Nepalese were 26.31% and 56.14% respectively. A large section of the Lepcha respondents, comprising 42.10%, considered that people of their community holding

high posts were few, whereas 5.26% of the Nepali respondents gave similar response. 7.40% of the Bhutia respondents maintained that ‘there were many to name from their community who were holding high administrative posts’. The Lepcha and Nepali respondents airing similar response accounted for 5.26% and 3.50% of the respondents respectively. 14.8 % of Bhutias respondents held that ‘they didn’t know others in administration from their community. The Lepchas and Nepalese in the same response category were 15.78% and 21.05% respectively. One Nepali respondent reported that ‘all Sikkimese are my community’. 1.9% considered that ‘they keep aloof from the mass’. A Nepali respondent held, “I know many but they are of little help for the development of my community”, whereas another Nepali Officer affirmed, ‘High posts are represented by almost all communities’. 5.26% of the Lepcha and 10.52% of Nepali respondents refrained from commenting.

Problems of development of fellow community people: To the query, ‘what are the major problems of development of the fellow people of your community?’ wide range of responses was found.

Table 7.20: Problems of development of fellow people

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Poverty				
Lack of education and awareness	19 (70.0)	16 (84.21)	46(80.70)	81 (78.6)
Indifferent government’s policies and improper planning	7 (3.70)	2 (10.52)	3 (5.26)	06 (5.82)
Division in religion	-	01 (5.26)	-	01 (0.9)
Loss of Sikkimese identity	1 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
Lack of social cohesion	2 (7.40)	-	03 (5.26)	05 (4.85)
Reservation for others	-	-	4 (7.01)	04 (3.88)
Unemployment	-	-	1 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
Not Aware	1 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
No Problem	2 (7.40)	-	-	02 (1.94)
No Comment	1 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

Table 7.20 shows that a significant majority (78.6%) of the respondents considered poverty and lack of education as the main barriers in the way to development of the fellow people of their community. Among the ethnic communities

84.21% of the Lepcha respondents, 70% of the Bhutia and 80.70 % of the Nepali respondents singled out education and poverty as the major problems of development. 10.52% of the Lepcha-, 5.26% of the Nepali- and 3.70% of the Bhutia respondents identified 'indifferent government policies and improper planning' as the main barrier of development. One Bhutia respondent felt 'the loss of Sikkimese identity' as the problem of development of their fellow community. Another 7.4% Bhutia- and 5.26% Nepali respondents felt that 'lack of social cohesion' among the community members was hindering their development. 1.75 % of the Nepali respondents maintained 'unemployment' as the major problem. While 3.7% of the Bhutia respondents were not aware of problem, 7.4% of this community held the view that there was no problem at all. One Bhutia respondent abstained from commenting. 7.01% of the Nepali respondents felt 'reservation for others' as the major problem of development of the fellow people of their community.

Helping the community fellows to come up: Various opinions to the question 'How do you help the fellow people to come up?' have been presented in Table 7.21.

Table 7.21: How to help community fellows?

Response	Number and Percentage
Educative advice	61 (59.22)
Social Work	01 (0.97)
Through writ-up, songs and display drama	01 (0.97)
Guiding agriculture and animal husbandry in scientific way	06 (5.82)
Implementing economic development schemes	02 (1.96)
Extending all possible help	05 (4.85)
Making aware of rights and privileges	01 (0.97)
Helping through community association	08 (7.76)
Career guidance	04 (3.88)
Free health check-up	01 (0.97)
Not particularly personnel	07 (6.79)
No Comment	06 (5.82)
Total	103 (100.00)

Among the respondents 59.22% opined that fellow community men could be helped by extending 'educative advice', only 0.97% were in favour of helping 'through social work' and another 0.97%, thought that fellow community men could

be helped by raising an awareness through writings, songs and plays. Another 5.82% opined that guiding scientific methods in agriculture and animal husbandry could lead to development of the community and 1.96% thought that development is possible through implementation of economic development schemes. 4.85% of the respondents suggested extension of all possible help to the members of their community and 0.97% thought that development is possible by making them aware of their rights and privileges. Among other devices 7.76% were in favour of helping through community associations, 3.88% thought of helping through career guidance, 6.79% thought that there was no need for any special favour for their community fellows and 5.82% did not comment.

Feelings for other communities: Being asked about their feelings for other communities, the respondents came forward with a wide range of answers. The answers have been presented in the following Table.

Table 7.22: Feelings about other Community

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
Positive or Cordial	15 (55.55)	12 (68.42)	38 (66.00)
Should live in harmony	2 (7.40)	-	11 (19.2)
Depends on individual	1 (3.7)	-	-
Neutral	2 (7.40)	-	-
Except few rest are on equal footing	1 (3.7)	01 (5.26)	02 (3.50)
They out-numbered local	1 (3.7)	01 (5.26)	-
They don't understand Minority	1 (3.7)	02 (10.52)	-
Drag own community towards others	-	02 (10.52)	-
They are opportunists	-	-	02 (3.50)
Not friendly	-	-	02 (3.50)
No Comment	4 (14.8)	-	02 (3.50)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

As Table 7.22 would suggest, 55.55% of the Bhutia-, 68.42% Lepcha- and 66% of the Nepali respondents felt that the intercommunity relationship was cordial. 7.4% of the Bhutia- and 19.2% of the Nepali respondents felt that they should live in harmony. Among other Bhutia respondents 3.7% felt that the relationship would depend on individuals concerned, and another 3.7% opined, 'except few, rest are on

equal footing' This opinion has been shared by 5.26% of the Lepcha and 3.5% Nepali respondents. 3.7% of the Bhutia and 5.26% of the Lepcha respondents felt that the Nepalese, who have out-numbered the locals, do not understand the feelings of the minority. 3.5% of the Nepali respondents felt that other communities are opportunists and do not want them to prosper, and another 3.5% of the Nepali respondents admitted that the relationship with the members of other communities is not friendly. 14.8% of the Bhutia and 3.5% of the Nepali respondents did not comment.

Expressing his opinion about the Bhutias, a Nepali officer belonging to Group B said, 'the Bhutias of Gangtok with aristocratic background are communal'. Expressing similar sentiment, another Group A Nepali officer commented 'too much importance is being given to Bhutias though they don't deserve it'. A twenty eight years old non-gazetted government employee opined 'all communities except the Bhutias and Tibetans are friendly'. Replying the same question a Lepcha non-gazetted employee opined, 'the members of other communities always create trouble by resorting to violence.'

Respondents' Attitude Towards Other Communities: Related to the earlier question another question was asked: How do the people of your community express their attitudes towards other communities? The responses are arranged in Table 7.23.

Table 7.23: Attitude towards members of other communities

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
Positive/Sympathetic	17 (62.9)	10 (52.63)	33 (57.8)
Mixed	06 (22.2)	03 (15.78)	05 (8.77)
Negative	-	02 (10.5)	01 (1.75)
No Idea	3 (11.11)	01 (5.26)	05 (8.77)
Depends on Individuals & situation	-	01 (5.26)	07 (12.28)
Shows no Concern	-	-	02 (3.50)
No Comment	01 (3.70)	02 (10.5)	04 (7.0)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

Majority of respondents belonging to all three communities have expressed positive/sympathetic attitude towards the members of other communities. I could identify 62.9% of the Bhutia-, 52.63% of Lepcha- and 57.8% of the Nepali respondents who had this kind of attitude. Those who had expressed indifferent attitudes comprised 22.2% of the Bhutia-, 15.78% of the Lepcha- and 8.77% of the

Nepali respondents. 10.5% of the Lepcha- and 1.75% of the Nepali respondents expressed negative attitude towards the members of other communities. While a certain percentage of all three communities maintained that they had no idea, 5.26% of the Lepcha- and 12.28% of the Nepali respondents felt that it depends on individuals and the situation. A small minority of all the three ethnic communities did not comment.

Views on Some Major Issues

An attempt was made to know the positions of the respondents on a number of current issues, which had political and ethnic undertones. The sub-sections to follow would deal with the views of the new class on various such issues.

Exemption of Central Income Tax: The exemption of central income tax was one of the main issues in the 1994 Assembly election. It was on this issue that Mr. Bhandari's fourteen years old rule ended. The problem arose when exemption of central income tax to Scheduled Tribes was withdrawn by the Parliament, when the majority Nepali community too demanded similar tax exemption. A query was made on the question: to whom the central income tax exemption be given – the Scheduled Tribes or the whole of Sikkimese? It is to be noted that the Lepchas and Bhutias have been enlisted as Scheduled Tribes by Scheduled Tribe Order of 1978. The responses received are presented in Table 7.24.

Table 7.24: Who to exempt central income tax?

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
Scheduled Tribes to be exempted	06 (22.22)	04 (21.0)	-
Exempted to all	13 (48.14)	06 (31.5)	25 (43.85)
Sikkim should follow own income tax rule	01 (3.70)	-	01 (1.75)
Should be based on economic criteria to all	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	04 (7.01)
Should be extended to all communities	02 (7.40)	02 (10.5)	21 (36.84)
Must for business communities	-	-	01 (1.75)
No Comment	04 (14.8)	6 (31.5)	05 (8.77)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

The response (Table 7.24) shows that 22.22% Bhutias and 21% Lepchas regarded that only Scheduled Tribes should be exempted from central income tax. While 48.14% - a considerable majority of Bhutias with 31.5% Lepchas and 43.85%

of Nepalese regarded that it should be exempted to all three ethnic communities of Sikkim. While 3.70% of the Bhutias felt that Sikkim should follow its own income tax rule. Another 3.70% of the Bhutias, 5.26% of the Lepchas and 7.01% of the Nepalese held that income tax policy should be based on economic criteria alone. A significant section of the Nepalese (36.84%), 10.5% of the Lepchas and 7.40% of the Bhutias maintained that tax should be extended to all communities. One Nepali respondent opined that it should be imposed to the business communities only. A certain percentage from all three communities abstained from commenting on the issue.

Restoration of seats for Nepalese in Sikkim Legislative Assembly: The Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance, 1979, has reserved 12 seats for the 'Bhutia-Lepcha' ethnic stocks, one seat for the 'Sangha' and two seats for the Scheduled Castes. The Ordinance also scrapped the provision of reservation of seats for the Sikkimese of Nepali origin and made the rest of the seats 'general' or unreserved. Since then, restoration of reserved seats for the Nepalese in the State Legislative Assembly, which was existing before the promulgation of Ordinance, has been an important political issue. Probing their reaction on the contentious issue of 'restoration of reserved seats for Nepalese in State Legislative Assembly,' the following responses from the respondents of three ethnic communities were received.

Table 7.25: Response to the question of restoration of seats for the Nepalese in State Legislative Assembly

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
For Sikkimese Nepalese only	13 (48.14)	09 (47.36)	50 (87.7)	72 (69.9)
No Need	05 (18.5)	06 (31.57)	-	11 (10.6)
Upto to the government to decide	02 (7.40)	02 (10.52)	01 (1.75)	05 (4.85)
No reservation for any community	-	-	01 (1.75)	01 (0.9)
Representations to all ethnic group as per population ratio	-	-	03 (5.26)	03 (2.91)
No Comment	07 (25.92)	02 (10.52)	02 (3.50)	11 (10.6)
Total	27(100.0)	19(100.0)	57(100.0)	103(100.0)

Table 7.25 shows that almost 70% of the respondents of all communities maintained that reservation of seats for the Sikkimese Nepalese should be restored. This includes 48.14% of the Bhutias, 47.36% Lepchas and 87.7% Nepalese respondents. A certain section, comprising 18.5% of the Bhutia, 31.57% of the Lepcha respondents, felt that there is no need of restoration of seats for the Nepalese.

A small percentage, i.e. 4.85% of the total respondents of all communities felt, 'it is upto the government to decide', while 1.75% of the Nepali respondent held that 'there should be no reservation for any community.' Another 5.26% of Nepali respondents held the view that reservation should be given to all ethnic groups as per population ratio. 10.6% of the respondents were silent on the issue.

Inclusion of Bahun-Chhetri-Newar in the list of Other Backward Classes: Since the implementation of Mandal Commission report in the early 1990s for the reservation of seats in employment for the Other Backward Classes, inclusion of left-out Nepalese Bahun-Chhetri-Newar - the higher caste Nepalese into the list of other Backward Class has always been an issue in Sikkim. On the question 'how do you react on inclusion of higher caste Nepalese into the list of Other Backward Class?' divergent opinions were expressed. The Table below shows the opinions of the respondents.

Table 7.26: Should the Bahun-Chhetri-Newar Castes be enlisted as Other Backward Class?

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Not Necessary	8 (29.62)	05 (26.31)	11 (19.29)	24 (23.3)
They should be included	07 (25.92)	08 (42.10)	35 (61.40)	50 (48.54)
Let government decide	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	-	02 (1.94%)
On economic basis	01 (3.70)	-	06 (10.5)	07 (6.79%)
No Comment	10 (37.03)	05 (26.3)	05 (8.77)	20 (19.41)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

Table 7.26 shows that 23.3% of the total respondents (representing all communities) answered in the negative and held that it is not necessary. This comprised 29.62% of the Bhutia-, 26.31% of the Lepcha- and 19.29% of the Nepali respondents. Another 48.54% of the respondents, which included 25.92% Bhutia, 42.10% Lepcha and 61.40% Nepali respondents, held that 'they should be included'. A significant 19.41% of the total respondents (representing all three communities) did not express any opinion on the issue. A small section, i.e. 6.79%, that included

Bhutia- and Nepali respondents, held the view that it should be on economic basis, while 1.94% felt that it is a matter to be decided by the government.

Inclusion of Limboo, Tamang, and Gurung into the list of Scheduled Tribe:

Closely related to the above issue is the demand for inclusion of Limboos, Tamangs and Gurungs in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Since the inclusion of these communities into the list of Scheduled Tribes means sharing of the available resources meant for Scheduled Tribes, division of opinions surfaced among the respondents and in the general people of the state.

Table 7.27: Should the Limboo-Tamangs and Gurungs be enlisted as Scheduled Tribes?

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
Strongly support	05 (18.5)	04 (21.05)	29 (50.8)
Not necessary	04 (14.8)	07 (36.84)	11 (19.29)
Provided reservation quota is increased	10 (37.03)	02 (10.52)	-
Let government decide	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	04 (7.01)
Reservation of Scheduled Tribe to be abolished	-	-	01 (1.75)
No hamper to my community, if included	-	-	01 (1.75)
Limboo only should be included	-	01 (5.26)	01 (1.75)
Sikkim to be declared a tribal state	-	-	02 (3.50)
No comment	07 (25.92)	04 (21.05)	08 (14.03)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

The response Table (7.27) indicates that 50.8% Nepalese strongly supported the issue. This percentage among Bhutias and Lepchas, supporting the issue, was 18.5% and 21.05% respectively. 'Not necessary' was the answer of 36.84% of Lepcha-, 14.8% of Bhutia- and 19.29% of Nepali respondents. 37.03% Bhutia and 10.52% Lepcha respondents opined that 'they can be included provided reservation quota of Scheduled Tribe is enhanced.' The answer to this question was thus prompted by each community's concern for their share of resources; no community was prepared to accept that their share is further reduced because of changes in the reservation policy. The Bhutias and Lepchas, the Scheduled Tribes in the state were

not prepared to share their share of resources with new groups of people demanding inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Significantly, 3.5% of the Nepalese respondents maintained that 'Sikkim should be declared as Tribal State'. It is worth mentioning that 25.92% of the Bhutias, 21.05% Lepchas and 14.03% Nepalese did not comment. One Bhutia respondent opined that the term 'Scheduled Tribe' needs proper definition in Sikkim.

Granting citizenship to the stateless: The issue of citizenship has arisen out of Sikkim Citizenship Order 1975 issued by the Union Government following the merger. The Order says, "Every person who immediately before 26th day of April, 1975 was a Sikkim subject under the Sikkim Subject Regulation 1961, shall be deemed to have become a citizen of India". However, many people, who had domiciled in Sikkim but were left out in Sikkim Subject Register due to ignorance, administrative lapses and political consideration, became virtually stateless. Since then granting citizenship to the stateless has been an important political issue. In probing the respondents' reaction on the issue, we have come across divergent opinions, which have been listed in Table 7.28.

Table 7.28: Granting citizenship to the stateless

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Yes, to be granted	5 (18.5)	4 (21.05)	17 (29.8)	26 (25.2)
Not to be granted	4 (14.8)	4 (21.05)	07 (12.2)	15 (14.5)
For bonafide Sikkimese with proper identification	9 (33.3)	7 (36.8)	26 (45.6)	42 (50.4)
Let leaders decide as per Constitution	8 (29.6)	1 (5.26)	03 (5.26)	12 (11.6)
No Comment	1 (3.70)	03 (15.7)	04 (7.01)	08 (7.76)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

As Table 7.28 would suggest, 25.2 % of the respondents were in favour of granting citizenship to the stateless. Supporting the issue, one Lepcha respondent said, 'This category of people are found mostly in indigenous Lepcha community and their citizenship status is yet to be defined'. One Nepali respondent was of the view that "with proper scrutiny citizenship should be granted to the stateless as it would benefit many Nepalese as well". Almost 51% felt that 'it should be granted to genuine Sikkimese only with proper identification'. Commenting in the negative 14.5 % held

the view that 'it should not be granted to the stateless'. Expressing his opinion against the issue, one Bhutia officer opined 'No, it should not be granted. Where does it end?' Another Bhutia respondent expressed his anger by saying 'nobody was left out during merger; those who got citizenship later were foreigners'. Voicing concern in the same tone, one Lepcha officer held, 'it will add another 75,000 to the state population and any further influx would affect not only the tribals but also non-tribals'. One Bhutia respondent maintained that 'the availability of land should be identified before citizenship is granted'. Another informant felt, 'it should be granted to those who had settled down in Sikkim before 1960'.

Representation of Scheduled Tribes in the government: Under the 'parity' system equal number State Council seats were allotted to both Bhutia-Lepcha combine and the Nepalese. With the merger, however, the parity system has been abolished and according to the arrangement made by the People's Representation Act of 1979, twelve seats of thirty two members Legislative Assembly have been reserved for Bhutia-Lepcha, one for Sangha and two for Scheduled Caste. However, in one form or other, an ethnic balance has always been maintained in the formation of ministry. Reservation of seats to the State Assembly for the ethnic communities and composition of the ministry have created more problems than solving them.

Table 7.29: Scheduled Tribes' representation in the government

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese
50% of B.L. seats to Lepchas	-	06 (31.57)	-
60% of seat to be reserved for Scheduled Tribe	05 (18.51)	-	-
It should be according to population ratio	-	-	20 (35.08)
More than adequate	06 (22.22)	01 (5.26)	18 (31.57)
Equal for tribes and non-tribes	-	01 (5.26)	01 (1.75)
Not tribal but-B.L.	3 (11.11)	-	-
Equal from each community	-	-	01 (1.75)
Not enough for Lepchas	-	06 (31.57)	-
No Comment	13 (48.14)	05 (26.31)	17 (29.82)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)

Table 7.29 indicates that there were divergent opinions on the issue of 'representation of tribals in the government'. 31.57% of the Lepcha respondents felt

that 50% of the seats reserved for the tribes should be allotted to the Lepchas. Whereas 18.51% of the Bhutias maintained that 60% of the seats of the State Legislative Assembly should be reserved for Scheduled Tribes. 35.08% of the Nepali respondents held that 'reservations for Scheduled Tribes should be according to population ratio'. A significant percentage of the Bhutias (22.22%), Lepchas (5.26%) and Nepalese (31.57%) believed that the number of seats already reserved for the tribes is adequate. 11.11% of the Bhutia respondents believed that reservation should be not for Scheduled Tribes but for the Bhutia-Lepchas. 31.57% of the Lepchas considered that reservation was not enough for Lepchas. Other opinions were 'it should be equal for tribes and non-tribes or it should be equal for each community'

Hence, the opinion expressed here substantiates that each community tries to maintain its hold over the limited opportunities and resources.

Sikkim's Merger: The merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union has always been an issue debated with anger by the average Sikkimese. The merger bore different implications for different peoples. Thus, diverse opinions surfaced on the issue of Sikkim's merger. The responses have been listed in the Table below.

Table 7.30: Reaction on Sikkim's Merger

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Unfortunate step	07 (25.9)	07 (36.8)	14 (24.56)	28 (27.18)
Good step	08 (29.6)	08 (42.10)	23 (40.35)	39 (37.86)
Too early	01 (3.70)	-	02 (3.50)	03 (2.91)
Technique of merger not appropriate	-	01 (5.2)	-	01 (0.9)
Closed chapter	1 (3.70)	-	02 (3.50)	03 (2.91)
Too early to comment	-	01 (5.2)	-	01 (0.9)
No Comment	10 (37.03)	02 (10.5)	16 (28.07)	28 (27.18)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

Table 7.30 indicates that 27.18 % of total respondents considered the merger of Sikkim as the 'most unfortunate step'. The respondents sharing this view include 25.9% Bhutias, 36.8% Lepchas and 24.56% Nepalese. A Bhutia officer commented – 'It was the saddest moment and most illegal and unfortunate for tribals'. Another Lepcha officer felt 'It was illegal and undemocratic. I feel really sorry for losing

sovereignty?' Voicing the same tone one Nepali official, held 'I hate L.D. K. Kazi, the merger veteran'. Another respondent commented 'leaders of that time should be killed'. A Lepcha officer wrote 'merger was deceitful and great loss of Sikkim's identity'. Ugen Shimpoo, a 34 years old Assistant Director of Lepcha language in Education Department, held 'merger has not benefited the Lepchas. The Leaders could have made more important provisions to safeguard the interests of the Sikkimese, the Lepcha/Bhutia/Nepalese, during the time of merger. It has brought more outsiders'. A Nepali officer added 'merger was not appropriate; it would have been better to have our own kingdom'.

However, 37.86% of the respondents (community break-up being 29.6% Bhutias, 42.10% Lepchas and 40.35% Nepalese) regarded merger as a positive step for the development of the state. Supporting the merger, one Nepali officer opined, 'it was an appropriate step for dynamic development'. Another 28 years old Anil Raj Rai said, 'this was a big boon to the people of Sikkim belonging to lower strata. Probably, I would be carrying a *Kalo bhari* had Sikkim remained a kingdom. Only those close to king like the Kazis would have had a good life'. A Bhutia officer supported the merger and opined 'it was a good change for the poor. The poor have benefited'. A Lepcha officer maintained 'people saw new hopes and aspiration. The people got liberated from the bondage, suppression and discrimination. It was a blessing for the weaker and backward communities'. A Nepali officer justified the merger by saying 'it was a noble task since the people of Sikkim got an opportunity to get exposed to the world outside'.

2.91% of the respondents felt that the 'merger was too early', while 0.9% felt 'the technique of merger was not appropriate and time allotted for referendum was not enough'. Another 2.9% held that 'It is now a closed chapter' and 0.9% felt, 'it is too early to comment. Mr. R.K. Tamang, a 39 years old Group A officer, held 'It is still to see whether there would be dilution of article 371 (F) in the long run'. A considerable section of the respondents, 27.18%, did not comment on the subject. Taking a neutral stand, a Nepali officer maintained 'Our Sikkim should have been a democratic kingdom like Nepal'.

Ethnic Tension: A question was asked: 'Could you give details of any case of ethnic tension that you have heard or experienced in your life?' The responses received are presented in Table 7.31.

Table 7.31: Information about Ethnic Tension

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Not heard	15 (55.5)	06 (31.57)	26 (45.61)	47 (45.63)
In 1973 - during democratic agitation	8 (29.62)	03 (15.7)	14 (24.56)	25 (24.27)
1994 – Income Tax Issue	3 (11.11)	03 (15.7)	11 (19.29)	17 (16.50)
Lepchas protest against reservation	-	01 (5.26)	-	01 (0.97)
Historically	-	01 (5.26)	-	01 (0.97)
No Comment	1 (3.70)	05 (26.03)	06 (10.52)	12 (11.65)
Total	27 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	103 (100.00)

On the issue of ethnic tension, 45.63% of the respondents (comprising 55.5% Bhutias, 31.57% Lepchas and 45.61% Nepalese) said that they did not hear of ethnic tension in Sikkim. 24.27% of the respondents (29.62% Bhutia, 15.7% Lepcha and 24.56% Nepali) said that ethnic tension took place in 1973 during democratic agitation. 16.50% reported that in 1994 the Income Tax Issue gave birth to ethnic tension' while 5.26 % of the Lepchas respondents felt that their protest against reservation system in 1996 created a situation of ethnic tension. Another 5.26% of Lepcha respondents held that they heard of ethnic tension only historically. 11.65% did not comment.

Talking historically Mr. Ugen Shipmoo, a Lepcha officer, remarked "in regard to ethnic tension there were many cases when the Bhutia community had done atrocities on the Lepchas since 1742. Atrocities were committed in the field of Land and money transactions, keeping Lepcha boys and girls as their servant without any provision of payment". Another Lepcha non-gazetted official held that 'our community felt discriminated when our Lepcha boys had to protest against the government for non-allotment of reserved seats for higher studies in technical and non-technical college. We felt bad when most of the agitating Lepcha youths were arrested and sent to jail'.

Talking about ethnic tension in 1973 agitation a Nepali official remarked 'It was fuelled by the politicians, which nearly engulfed the entire population'.

Reasons for increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim: To know their analysis of increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim, a question was asked ‘what do you think are the reasons for increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim?’ There was wide range of responses, as usual.

Table 7.32: Reasons for increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim

Response	Bhutias	Lepchas	Nepalese	Total
Political motivating using community as a vote bank	13 (48.14)	7 (36.8)	24 (42.10)	44 (42.7)
Not aware of ethnic tension	05 (18.5)	01 (5.26)	07 (12.2)	13 (12.6)
Yearning for identity and division of community	01 (3.70)	02 (10.5)	03 (5.26)	07 (6.7)
Imbalance in population ratio	01 (3.70)	-	-	01 (0.9)
Social insecurity to minority	-	02 (10.5)	01 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
Reservation Policy	-	01 (5.26)	12 (21.05)	12 (11.6)
Discriminatory Policy	-	-	01 (1.75)	02 (1.94)
Influx	2 (7.40)	-	01 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
Favouratism	01 (3.70)	01 (5.26)	01 (1.75)	03 (2.9)
No Comments	04 (14.8)	05 (26.3)	7 (12.28)	15 (14.5)
Total	27(100.00)	19(100.0)	57(100.00)	103(100.00)

As Table 7.32 would show, a large section (42.7%) of the total respondents of all three ethnic communities felt ‘politicization of ethnic issues for vote bank as the main reason for increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim. 12.6% of respondents, who include Bhutia (18.5%), Lepcha (5.26%), Nepali (12.2%) respondents, held that they are not aware of ethnic tension. A Bhutia officer felt ‘political leaders with malicious attitude’ are responsible for increasing tension in Sikkim. Another respondent remarked ‘economic disparity due to immature politicians leads to corruption and then increasing ethnic tension’. A Nepali official voiced in the same tone that ‘the foolish politicians are the casual organisms, who talk of son of soil and local protection act and later run for chair and cash’. Another Nepali officer remarked ‘Foul play by some political leaders and some higher rank bureaucrats lead to ethnic tension’. Forty-one years old Yugal Nepal remarked ‘it is due to match stick played by power hungry politicians’.

6.7% held the view that ‘yearning for identity and division of community’ as responsible factor, while 3.7% Bhutias felt ‘imbalance in population ratio’ is the cause of ethnic tension. Other small section of the respondents felt ‘reservation for one community depriving other’ is responsible for increasing ethnic tension. Anil Raj Rai, a twenty-eight years old officer, hinted ‘Leaving out Bahun, Chhetri and Newar castes from the other backward class (OBC) list will be a major reason for increasing ethnic

tensions in Sikkim. This will be further aggravated by selfish motives of some political leaders'. Another officer viewed in the same tone that 'Reservation of seats in Legislative Assembly, panchayats, jobs in government departments for a certain section of people is making the Sikkimese more conscious about their caste/race/ethnic group'. Another respondent felt the reason being the 'Feeling of frustration and relative deprivation in socio- economic development'.

'Differential economic benefit to some communities like exemption of tribals and not others from direct taxes is the chief reason of ethnic tension in Sikkim' – a Nepali respondent added. Only 1.94% felt that "it is due to unequal treatment and discriminatory policy of ruling government; while others felt that 'increase in influx and favouritism' as the basic reason of increasing ethnic tension in Sikkim.

Ethnic situation in Sikkim – Role of Political Parties: A number of questions were asked informally during the course of interview regarding the course and cause of ethnic tension in Sikkim. The responses received would help people's perception on the issue. Here are some of the responses:

- (1) A Limboo official opined "the communities residing in the state should be treated equally in all aspects. For their narrow electoral interest political parties create division and disturb communal harmony in urban as well as rural areas. Left to themselves the rural people in particular do not have any communal feeling".
- (2) Another Nepali officer held "unequal opportunity leads to feeling of difference and deprivation and if government continues the policy of resource distribution in selective manner community-wise, this may lead to ethnic tension."
- (3) 'Political parties will have to stop creating vote banks on ethnic lines, as there is no end to this' was the opinion of another respondent.
- (4) Another Nepali officer maintained – "A feeling of difference crops up when reservation or jobs, assembly and panchayat seats, developmental schemes are done on the basis of caste. When a particular caste is deprived of social and economic rights because of reservation policy of the government, ethnic tension is bound to result. Reservation should be done on the basis of economic criteria and not on the basis of caste".

- (5) A Lepcha respondent remarked “ethnic situation in the state in the future would depend on the strategy of the political parties. The ignorant common people normally dance to their tune.”
- (6) Mr. M.K. Gurung, another respondent, remarked – ‘The present trend is toward political disintegration of the Nepali community. Political parties are selfish money makers and power mongers. They divide an ethnic group into sub groups to remain in power. The relative deprivation won’t create ethnic tension. The Bhutias are well off. Nepalese are passive, Lepchas don’t bother’.
- (7) Mr. A.D. Chhetri commented ‘Ethnic situation may take the course of bloody war. So privileges and facilities should be provided as per social and economic position of the people and not on caste basis. The government policies and programmes have contributed a lot to such ethnic tension. The policy of Income Tax exemption for Scheduled Tribes, who are leading frivolous life as compared to the Nepalese has resulted bad blood among the communities. Land Revenue Order No. 1 is also discriminatory as it doesn’t protect the land of Sherpas although they are Scheduled Tribes.’
- (8) Mr. Trilochan Sharma, a 41 years old Group A officer held ‘It is due to political exploitation of communal sentiment and not the diverse cultures of the communities that causes ethnic tension’.
- (9) Dr. P.K. Rai, a 41 years old medical practitioner, feels that ‘in future there will be unavoidable civil war. The solution lies in dissolving old and special rules protecting non-Nepali communities and treat everyone as equal citizen of Sikkim’. He further added, ‘when the rich are getting special facilities by virtue of their being tribes while the members of the non-tribal communities are deprived of same, no matter how poor he/she might be, it definitely affects communal harmony.’
- (10) Dr. H.P. Dhakal, another informant observed, ‘Brothers and sisters who were equal earlier to a great extent economically and educationally in pre-merger era are now divided into multiple factions politically. Sense of insecurity and underdevelopment with resultant bad feelings between the haves and have-nots is expected to weaken the social fabric and increase communal tension.’
- (11) Another Nepali officer maintained ‘the ethnic situation will get worsened if the political leaders misguide the people for their personal gain. The

responsibility of maintaining communal harmony lies on the educated lot, who must realize that the Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalese are members of one family and no force can separate us or challenge our identity by virtue of article 371(F)'.

- (11) Anil Raj Rai said, 'Government policies and programmes are completely biased. It is the government that reproduces ethnic consciousness among the people by using and legitimizing the terms like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes in government documents and government policies thereby fuelling jealousy among left out classes'. He further refers to one of his Bahun colleague who often laments 'there is absolutely no future for our children in this state.'
- (12) Ajay Rai, another respondent said, 'The fact that the tribal communities get more than other communities in terms of seat and job reservation ultimately leads to ethnic tension.'
- (14)A Lepcha officer remarked 'the government policies and programmes have cultivated seeds of division between different communities in Sikkim. Discriminatory policy of government, disrespecting culture and heritage of the minority and backward communities especially the Lepchas, has created apprehensions.'
- (15) Dr. Pemba Tanyot said, 'The game of divide and rule played by the politicians has created casteism, which in turn, has created a sense of insecurity, terror and mistrust among three ethnic groups'.
- (16) A Bhutia respondent remarked 'Deprivation surely leads to ethnic tension. It leaves the ethnic minority in the museum for the tourists to see. If the ethnic minorities do not wake up, we will have to face worse situation than the present one.'
- (17)Dr. Kesang Chewang Bhutia explained, 'The feeling of differences and relative deprivation largely twisted by the leaders to their advantage by propagating the feelings of insecurity to a particular community is the principal reason for the lack of harmony among the ethnic communities.'
- (18) Tshering Bhutia held that 'the ethnic tension is never because of diverse culture or feeling of difference. It is the ill feeling created deliberately by political parties for political interest that destroys harmony in interethnic relations. The

government should follow a balanced programme of equal rights and developments by specially protecting the minorities’.

The Role of Community Associations

Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum (Sikkim Lepcha Progressive Association)

The Renjyong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum, an association of the Lepchas, has reportedly been created with an objective to community development in the backdrop of low representation of the Lepchas in all spheres of economy and polity. The movement for revival and development of Lepcha culture and heritage, social reforms and educating people about their rights and duties had started way back in 1960’s during Chogyal’s regime, when the Lepchas formed Shejum (Lepcha association) in Sikkim. But within a few years of its formation the Shejum became non-functional due to various reasons. Efforts have been made in the post-merger period by the Lepcha intellectuals to revive the association in keeping with the privileges and rights granted under the Constitution of India.

In the post merger period as well the government did not show much interest in addressing the problems of the Lepchas. In order to take stock of the conditions of the Lepchas a cultural club called ‘Mayel Prongzum’ toured all districts of Sikkim where they encountered with various problems of the members of this tribal community. The necessity of an association was strongly felt and the old ‘Shejum’ was revived with a new nomenclature. Derived from Lepcha language the term *Tar* means ‘to move forward’ and *Jum* means the ‘collection of people’. So Sikkim Lepcha Progressive Association which was finally registered in 1982 was named ‘Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum’. ‘The Association could not make much headway in realising its objectives in the 1980s. It was revamped in 1994, when an ad-hoc body was formed. The election was conducted in April 1996 in a democratic manner and a seven member executive body was formed. Since then, RMRT has been playing a vital role in creating social awareness among indigenous Lepchas about their development, their rights and constitutional privileges.

Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum is a non-political and non-sectarian organisation. The members of the Executive Committee are mostly the employees being stationed in capital Gangtok although some are from all parts of Sikkim. They

represent the creamy layer or the intellectual group of the community on whom Lepcha brethren residing in villages and remote areas have rested hopes and aspirations. RMRT has its branches all over Sikkim and on behalf of Lepcha community it has been placing its various socio-economic and political demands to the state and central governments.

The Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum has a three tier organizational structure – (I) Central Executive Committee; (II) District Branches and (III) Block Level Branches. The district branches monitor the activities of block/village level Tarjums under their jurisdiction in consultation with the headquarter in Gangtok.

The head quarter office in Gangtok directly monitors the North and East district Tarjums. Block level branches (*Kyong Tarjum*) were opened in all villages of North district except Dzongu area, where a local registered club ‘Mutachi Lom Aaal Shejum’ is functioning on the advice of Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum. Apart from the parent organisation Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum has other branches like ‘Renjyong Mutanchi Ringmom Kurmom’ (Sikkim Lepcha Literary Organisation), ‘Renjong Mutachi Rong Ong Shejum’ (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association) and Sikkim Lepcha Women’s Forum ‘Mayel Amu Aachok’ associated with it.

The Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum is a common platform of the Lepcha intellectual class to unite the people for a common cause ‘to speak for the people, to awaken the Lepchas about their rights and demands.’ Table 7.33 would give us some idea of the social background of the Executive Committee members of the organization.

Working in various capacities in the state government offices, the members were born in various parts of Sikkim. One member, however, was born in Kalimpong. This shows that the new educated class, the relatively advanced section of the community, is providing leadership in raising ethnic consciousness among the Lepchas in the state by talking about protection of their rights and the privileges.

The ‘Renjyong Mutachi Rong Ong Shejum’, a registered body since 1992, has been working on various charters of demands and forwarding them to the state and central governments from time to time. The main demands being:

Table 7.33: Office bearers of RMRT in 1996-1998

Name	Education	Occupation	Religion	Age	Place of birth
Mr. Y.T. Lepcha (President)	B.A.	Retd.Suptd. of Police	Christian	61	Sombaray, West Sikkim
Mr. C.T. Lepcha (Vice-President)	Under- Matric	-	Buddhist	50	Pakyong, East
Karma Loday Lepcha (General Secretary)	B.A., LL.B.	Editor, IPR Deptt.	Buddhist	37	Phensang, North
Chuksung Lepcha (Jt. Secretary)	B.Sc.	Assitant Education Officer	Buddhist	32	Khamdong, East
Sonam Wangdi Lepcha (Jt. Secretary II)	XII	Hotel Management	Christian	34	Namchi, South
Phurjang Lepcha (Treasurer)	XII	Accountant	Buddhist	35	Lindok, East
Ugen Lepcha (Publicity Secretary)	B.A.	Assist Director (Education)	Buddhist	38	Burtuk, East
Mrs. Ukee Lepcha (Jt. Treasurer)	XII	Lower Division Clerk	Buddhist	35	Gangtok
Dorjee Wangdi (Cultural Secretary)	H.S.	Lepcha Language Teacher	Buddhist	45	Kalimpong

- i) Special constitutional protection for Lepcha tribe
- ii) 50% of the jobs in public sector and government undertaking reserved for Scheduled Tribes should be earmarked for the Lepchas alone,
- iii) 50% of the seats in all technical and professional colleges from the Scheduled Tribe quota should go to the Lepchas,
- iv) Amendment of Land Revenue No. 1,
- v) 50% of fund from the tribal sub plan should be earmarked for the Lepchas.

The Rong Ong Shejum in a letter dated September 27, 1996 has drawn the attention of the Governor to the relative deprivation of Lepchas in the area of higher studies; the Lepcha youths were being denied seats from the tribe quota. When repeated requests for appointment with the Chief Minister and Education Minister were turned down, the Lepcha Youth Association resorted to poster campaign in the state. The government tried to suppress the campaign by taking 30 Lepcha youth into custody in various parts of Sikkim. The slogan of the campaign was approved by the executive members of Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association on 14th September, 1996 and the posters carrying the slogans were displayed in three districts head quarters viz. Mangan, Namchi, Gangtok and Jorethang and Ranipul. The slogans would indicate how Lepcha youth were enraged due to their deprivation as compared to Bhutias.

The slogans were:

- (a) 'Do the Lepchas have enough engineers, doctors, forest personnel and other officers? Where is our reservation quota?
- (b) We want justice from state government and administration. Why are our students denied of their rights to go for higher studies year after year?
- (c) Reservation for tribes?
'No Lepcha student gets admission in M.B.B.S., Engineering, Forestry Courses, Why?
- (d) Who gets the benefits meant for the tribes?
- (e) Bhutia Lepcha Bhai Bhai
Ha – Ha – Ha
Who is responsible? - Government or bureaucrats?
- (f) Give us our seats. We are exploited in our homeland!
- (g) Every field has its tale to tell
Lepcha are ignored and deprived as well
To whom do they turn is yet to see
With roving eyes, they look up to Thee.

The Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association resorted to hunger strike from 27th October, 1996 at Mangan, the North district headquarter to press for their following three fold demands and protesting against their exploitation :

- i) 50% of seats of the tribe quota should be made available to the Lepchas students in the field of higher studies;
- ii) Prohibition of sale of land owned by Lepchas in the wake of development projects undertaken by government of Sikkim.
- iii) Amendment of Land Revenue Order No. 1 of Sikkim.
(Gangtok Times, Vol. 3, No. 42, November 4-10, 1996).

Another important issue of protest was the setting up of Teesta Hydrel Project by NHPC in the Dzongu area – a protected area under notification no. 3069, a Royal proclamation by Sir Tashi Namgyal. In Bulletin No. 3, published by Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association, it has been mentioned that the following land belonged to the Lepchas:

- i) Assam Rifle Camp in Chungthang (North);
- ii) Area of central school, government quarters in Syari (Gangtok);
- iii) The Army Cantonment in Bhusuk and Aritar (East Sikkim);
- iv) NHPC Project in Leksep;
- v) Area demarcated for helipad in Burtuk.

Hence, the Association gave several representations to the government demanding a formula of rehabilitation of the Lepchas, who had lost land as a result of these development projects and in other places where the government and NGOs might take over their land. It also condemned the meager cash that was offered in the form of compensation to those who were made 'landless' or 'Sukhum basis'.

Protest against land alienation: In some other areas also the Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum has been helping the ignorant and poor Lepchas living in villages. A poor and helpless Lepcha litigant from Khamdong Thasa Block (East) Shri Ongchuk Dorjee Lepcha is being extended help in the form of collection of documents – data, papers etc., in consulting lawyers and in attending court on dates. Although the petition has been dismissed in trial court an appeal has been made in the High Court. The aim in supporting such victims was to ensure that the Lepchas do not become *Sukumbasis* (land less) and *kutiyadaar* (tenant) in their own ancestral land. According to Chuksung Lepcha, the Joint Secretary of Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum from the village itself, Mr. Sonam Tshering Bhutia, a rich contractor, bought land from Ongchuk Lepcha. He was forced to sign the paper while intoxicated against a paltry sum of Rs. 20,000 for a plot of land worth much more. The son of Ongchuk Lepcha objected to the deed and he filed a case. The Lepchas under guidance of the organization wanted amicable solution and approached the buyer with a customary gift of slaughtered pig, silken scarf and few bottles of liquor requesting to take back money and restore the land back to the Lepcha owner but the contractor didn't agree. The case is now pending before the High Court. It is to be mentioned here that the Revenue No. 1 allows transaction of land within Bhutia-Lepcha communities only. But this legal provision has failed to stop alienation of land from the hands of the impoverished and ignorant Lepcha villagers. The Lepcha Association is firm in its demand for amendment of the said order so that land transaction is limited among the Lepchas only.

Appeal to boycott of state-legislature election 1999 by Renzong Mutanchi Rong

Tarjum : In a press release dated 9.9. 99, the Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum had expressed deep anguish over the Sikkim Sangram Parisad's design to overlook the demand of the Lepchas that 50% of Bhutia-Lepcha reserved seats in state legislative assembly should be allotted to the Lepcha candidates. It is to be noted that the Sikkim Sangram Parisad had talked about 50% of reserved B.L. seats to Lepchas in 1994 election. A similar press release was issued by the Sikkim Lepcha Women's Forum on 19.9.1999, appealing to all Lepcha candidates of all political parties to initiate steps in support of the demand. In the Assembly Election 1999, Mr. Tseten Lepcha, the candidate nominated by Sikkim Pradesh Congress(I) in Lachung Mangisla constituency had withdrawn his candidature in response to the appeal, since the party was not prepared to meet the demand raised by the Lepcha Association.

Reasons for backwardness of the Lepchas in Lepcha perception:

In order to understand how the Lepchas themselves understand and interpret the reasons of their backwardness some members of Renzong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum were interviewed:

Francis Lepcha, aged 45 years and a Christian by religion, feels that the Lepchas knowingly or unknowingly suffered a lot under both monarchy and democracy. Even though they have faith in their own 'Namthar' their loyalty to monarchy was unquestionable. However the oppression of their culture, language and religion continued under the rule of the kings. Even after the merger commitment given by the democratic government to safeguard their interests through article 371(F) has remained unfulfilled. They feel, "Even Government of India has discarded us. While already overfed and healthy communities are granted special care and nourishment, the impoverished Lepchas languish in ignorance."

In response to a query about poor representation in bureaucracy, in leadership and in ministry he said that oppression of the Lepchas for 333 years under monarchy is the possible reason. Even after merger the Chief Minister's door was closed for the Lepchas; their frontal organisation RMRT was not allowed any discussion until the middle of the 1990s. While the Bhutias constituted the dominant layer of society during monarchy, it was the turn of the Nepalese in the post-merger period. The Lepchas never got the justice they deserved.

Talking about relationship between Lepcha and the government, and between Lepchas and the Tarjum he feels the relationship between Lepchas and Tarjum is better. Younger generation Lepchas have been greatly hurt by the new political set up. Even though they played a key role in bringing democracy, the continuous exploitation and deprivation of the Lepchas has led to a loss of faith in it. 'Lepchas vote just because of the fear that they might be out of voters' list and lose Sikkim subject status in case they don't'.

Historically speaking, the Bhutias got the patronage of the Chogyal in the form of land. In the long run the Nepali influx has alienated land from the hands of the Lepchas. He feels that laws may have been made and amended, but they have always benefited the stronger communities. The donation of land to the monastery paved the way for transfer of land controlled by the Lepchas to the hands of the Bhutias. Thus, he feels that in all periods of history the Lepchas have been suppressed.

Talking about the hurdles faced by the organisation, he observed that the political and bureaucratic circles were ruthless towards the organization at the beginning. The Lepchas were threatened that their leaders would be beheaded.

Karma Loday Lepcha, aged 37, was the General Secretary of the RMRT. He was a graduate in Arts and had a Law degree as well. The General Secretary feels that there are historical and political reasons behind the low representation of the Lepchas in the fields of government jobs and higher education. Even after the merger the spread of higher education among the Lepchas is not very encouraging, because they are being denied of adequate opportunity. The Bhutias and the Kazis who could avail of the opportunities of good education abroad are now dominating the state bureaucracy. The Lepcha students who have studied in a government schools cannot possibly compete with their Bhutia and Nepali counterparts who studied in good public schools.

About Amendment to Land Revenue No. 1 he feels that alienation of Lepcha land has been taking place at rapid pace. So the apprehension was ripe that the Lepchas might become landless 'Sukhumbasis' in their own ancestral land. Hence, he prefers land transaction within Lepchas only.

About the role of Lepcha political leaders, he says that although they have deep concern for community's cause, they can't come out openly in the fear of being branded as 'communal' and in the fear of losing vote of other communities.

While the historical and political factors have worked in keeping the Lepchas less enlightened, the situation seems to be changing gradually. The RMRT is encouraging the villagers to send their children to school and awakening them about the ill effects of alcoholism.

Commenting on the role of government in the post-merger era, he feels that the government of India wants their development but the development process comes via state government and administration, which are dominated by the stronger and healthy communities.

Chuksung Lepcha, a 32 years old science graduate, is the Joint Secretary of the RMRT. He is also working as an Assistant Education Officer of the Government of Sikkim. He has been playing a lead role in the formation of Block Level Tarjums. He says that branches of Tarjum were opened in villages/block level after proper scrutiny of the background of the members. The details of socio-economic background of individual family has been taken and recorded in a huge ledger separately maintained for each district and preserved at the head quarter.

Explaining the need of opening Tarjum in his village, he says the Bhutias and Lepchas have been living for decades in adjacent areas sharing the same source of water but when the Bhutia village could produce the Chief Secretary of Sikkim, Ministers and Session Judges, the Lepcha village has produced very few educated individuals. The village level Tarjum can look into this disparity and educate people to take initiative to bridge the gap.

Talking about land alienation, he cited one case of Kalu Lepcha, a widower of 60 years old, who is a servant in a Bhutia household. As he could not repay the debt, he gave his land and still serving in the Bhutia household. He says that 'they don't have grudge against stronger community, but simply want the stronger community to lend a helping hand to enable the Lepchas to walk as par with other communities'.

Asked whether he himself ever felt discriminated against as a Lepcha, he said that there was no such feelings when he was in school. But when he was exposed to outside world and had interacted with friends in college, he had realised about his Lepcha identity. He cited a case when he felt discriminated against being a Lepcha. After passing higher secondary he wanted to do engineering but his nomination for engineering stream was rejected. In his place a Bhutia student, although had lower

percentage of marks, was granted admission. He feels that since he could not do lobbying with the higher bureaucracy he was denied of the genuine opportunity.

He was of the opinion that Buddhism has been an imposed religion, which has affected their food-habits and dress code. The Lepcha monk also has to wear the Tibetan dress. He said, when he was a student, he was made to study Tibetan. It is a kind of religious imperialism. The conversion into Christianity has affected their language. Hence the religious invasion, either by Buddhism or Christianity, has hampered the development of the Lepchas. The elaborate rituals and materialistic culture of Buddhism has affected Lepchas economically.

Explaining their low representation in bureaucracy, jobs and education, he feels (i) poverty (ii) Bhutia domination (iv) conversion of Lepchas into Bhutias are the obvious reasons. He explains that during Chogyal's regime when a Lepcha achieved higher status and became Kazi, he was identified as a Bhutia.

The young RMRT leader is spearheading the task of encouraging the members of his community to prepare themselves to avail of the benefits and advantages being provided by the government and to be self reliant so that the Lepchas can live with their heads on alongside the members of other communities.

Mr. Sonam Lepcha, aged 38, a B.A., B.Ed., an active member of Mutachi Rom Al Shejum (Zongu), a cultural club, is presently working as an Assistant Director of Education, under the Government of Sikkim. The aim of the organisation is to raise, elevate and propagate the aspects of Lepcha culture and work for social, educational and economic development of the Lepchas of Dzongu area. Sonam observes that the dominant Nepali language has affected the growth of Lepcha language badly. The young generation feels embarrassed in wearing their traditional dress. Hence the organization aims to revive the dying aspects of Lepcha culture. He further observes with dissatisfaction that after embracing Buddhism Lepchas in general have to follow the Bhutia rituals. No Lepcha monk can stick to their own dress code. Again, although the 'Sangha' seat is meant for Buddhist Lamas, no 'Lepcha Lama' has so far represented the Sangha seat.

Nima Lepcha, aged 45 years, studied upto higher secondary, is the President of NEBULA (Nepali Bhutia Lepcha Organisation) and the convenor of SIBLAC (Sikkimese Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee). Explaining the reasons for low

representation of Lepchas in bureaucracy and higher education, he cites the historical fact that the Lepchas had been subjects of the Bhutia kings for 333 years. He also feels that alcoholism and ignorance are other causes of backwardness.

In post-merger era as well the Lepchas, he feels, are not getting what they deserve. Even the Nepalese and Bhutias have never looked upon the Lepchas with brotherly concern but in turn have taken advantage of their relative ignorance and simplicity.

He lauds the pro-poor policy of present government but aggrieved at his community's claim for the Rajya Sabha Member Of Parliament being ignored by the ruling party. There has been the precedence that if the Member Of Parliament for the Lok Sabha is from numerically dominant Nepali community the Rajya Sabha Member Of Parliament should be from the minority Bhutia-Lepcha communities. The Lepcha representative Soloman Sharing served two terms as a Rajya Sabha Member Of Parliament and then Koma Topden, a Bhutia, served another two terms. This time it was the turn of a Lepcha candidate. By nominating a Bhutia candidate, the ruling party has deviated from the established practice. He feels that the Lepchas are being ignored since they do not have any lobby in the Mintokgang (Chief-Minister's residence). He further feels that the central government has done great injustice by clubbing the Lepchas and Bhutias together as Scheduled Tribes. It is like putting a tiger and a goat in the same cage where the tiger uses the goat whenever requires.

Summary

A brief study of the educated new class helps us grasp how class, ethnicity and polity are shaping in Sikkim. It is this intellectual class, which also constitutes most of the middle class that dictates and reflects the thought process or the collective consciousness on major social, economic and political issues concerning the state. A study of the thought process of the new class would suggest that an educated, modernized, secular neo-class free of primordial ties and parochialism is nowhere in sight. A progressive intellectual class ready to spearhead the class-line mobilization is absent as well. With the emergence of this new class what one can, at the most notice, is the emergence of an urban middle class with a living standard and way of life significantly different from its rural counterpart. This class, sharply divided along ethnic line, has greater exposure to the outside world and is distinctly conscious about self-interest and the interest of the community. This advanced section of each

community is ready to usurp the opportunities for development and to make their community fellows aware of their rights and privileges. The Lepchas, the most deprived of the three communities, show signs of ethnic mobilization and the new class of the community is spearheading this mobilization process. In this small state the political setup that we see in the name of democratic polity is tuned in such a way that ethnic differences and ethnic consciousness draw impetus for reproducing themselves. Most of the members of the neo-class who have been interviewed tend to explain issues, in some way or the other, in the light of ethnic consciousness.