

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN SIKKIM'S DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

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The erstwhile Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim was a feudal monarchy having feudal economic system and exploitative politico-administrative structures. Socio-economic disparity among the three major communities of Sikkim-Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepalese was evident in the system of landlordism, lease system, system of forced labour and their social status in the agrarian society. Nepalese being the migrant population who settled in the last decades of 19th century were not only considered as outsiders by the aboriginals and minority Lepchas and Bhutias but were also denied rights and freedom by the *Chogyal* (ruler). Lepchas and Bhutias were either high ranking officials or rich land lords while the Nepalese were marginal workers, sharecroppers, cultivators and tea plantation labourers. This prompted few political organizations to demand for agrarian and economic reforms in Sikkim. As the economic reforms were being gradually initiated by the *Chogyal*, these anti-*Chogyal* political parties started making political demands for the establishment of a full-fledged democratic Government in Sikkim. Sikkim State Congress (SSC), the oldest political party of Sikkim provided a democratic platform for these political parties to further pursue this demand with the *Chogyal* and Government of India. There continued resistance and protests against the functioning of Government under *Chogyal's* regime made it convenient for the Indian Government to politically intervene. This ultimately resulted in not only the breakdown of feudal economy in Sikkim but also its transition from theocratic monarchy to liberal democracy. This clearly shows the co-relation between the economic reforms

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and political reforms in Sikkim. This paper seeks to point out the fact that changing political contexts in Sikkim have given rise to different demands of these political parties. It attempts to analyze the role of political parties in altering the political economy of Sikkim and facilitating its merger with India.

Key Words: Feudalism, Monarchy, Democracy, Political Parties, Economy, Elections.

1. Introduction

There are different meanings of the term 'Sikkim' for all twenty ethnic groups of Sikkim. The three major communities of Sikkim-Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas have drawn different connotations of the term 'Sikkim' based on their languages. In Limbu (one of the sub-groups of Nepalis) language Sikkim is known as '*Sukhyim*' meaning 'new house' while in Bhutia language it is known as '*Beyul Demojong*' meaning the 'hidden valley of rice' and in Lepcha language it is known as '*Nye-ma-el*' meaning 'heaven' (Rao, 1978:1)¹.

Sikkim is a small state in the Eastern Himalayan region of India having a total area of 2,814 square miles (Rao, 1978). It is noteworthy that the erstwhile Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim was comparatively big than what is today as it extended to the Chumbi Valley (lying between Sikkim and Bhutan) of Tibet and Darjeeling district of West Bengal (ibid)². Its boundary extended from Arun river to the Tagon *La* range in the east covering areas of Thang-La in Tibet, Naxalbari, Titalia, Timar *Chorten* (monastery) on the Timar river in Nepal (Sengupta, 1985: 45). As a result of war, annexation and invasions Sikkim lost most of its important territories to Nepal, Tibet and Britain.

Some works on Sikkim's political history suggest that the earliest rulers of Sikkim belonged to Lepcha community (Sengupta, 1985: 54). Pohartak Panu was the first Lepcha *Panu* (King) of Sikkim who ruled Sikkim around 1425 A.D for a period of twenty-five years (Sinha, 1975: 12). Their rule was followed by 333 years (from 1642 till 1975) rule of Namgyal

¹In this article, the terms 'Nepalis' and 'Nepalese' have been used in different contexts as the term 'Nepalis' applies to Sikkimese Nepalis while the term 'Nepalese' refers to Indian and Nepal Nepalese that have migrated to Sikkim.

²During the reign of *Chogyal* Chugpui Namgyal, China gave the region West of Tista to Nepal and Chumbi Valley to Tibet (Sengupta, 1985: 47). In 1835, the *Chogyal* Tsugphud Namgyal gifted Darjeeling to the British East India Company under a Deed of Grant and in return, received Rs. 3,000 per annum as compensation (ibid 4-5).

dynasty whose rulers belonged to Bhutia community (ibid). This article will specifically focus on the rule of Namgyal Dynasty considering that it witnessed the transition from monarchical to democracy.

During the rule of *Namgyal* Dynasty, feudalism was the backbone of the political, administrative and socio-economic set up of Sikkim. Sikkim was caught in a constitutional dilemma between ‘theocratic monarchy and constitutional democracy’. ‘Theocratic monarchy’ was represented by the *Chogyal*, *Kazis* (landlords), clergy, pro-Palace bureaucrats and *Lamas* (monks) while the ‘constitutional democracy’ was represented by the anti-*Chogyal* political parties in Sikkim³. Considering *Chogyal’s* biasness towards the former as opposed to the latter he was faced with the challenge of resolving conflicts between theocracy and secularism, traditionalism and modernity and; religious and political elites in Sikkim (Sinha, 1975).

For administrative purpose, lands were divided into *illakhas* (*blocks*) and placed under the direct control of *illakhadars* (*block officer*). Fifteen *illakhas* were private estates of the ruling family, five estates belonged to the monasteries and five estates were reserved for other purposes. The system of rent collection for these *illakhas* were different:

- i) 91 leased out *illakas* whose land rent and household taxes were paid annually,
- ii) 11 *illakas* that were directly managed by the state and;
- iii) 7 monasteries estates whose household taxes were paid annually (Sengupta, 1985).

There was huge economic disparity among different communities in terms of the possession of private property, control over business and payment of revenues. Bhutias owned productive lands, urban property and exercised control over business while the Lepchas in spite of having rich cardamom growing lands in Dzongu, North Sikkim were very poor and Nepalese in spite of being the toilers of the land were considered as non-hereditary subjects who could not own land in Sikkim (Das, 1983:8).

The revenue system in Sikkim was not uniform as the Nepalese and those near the capital had to pay more revenue as compared to the Bhutias-Lepchas and those living in

³The institution of *Kazi* was first introduced in Nepal during the rule of King Bijoy Narain Rai (1584-1609). In Nepal, Generals were elevated to the position of *Kazis* irrespective of their caste and religion. This institution also existed in Tibet wherein, *Kazis* were administrators, regional rulers and agents of the Bhotia rulers.

the remote areas (Sengupta,1985: 6,21). The lessee system was also not uniform as Nepalese peasants had to pay 14 annas while the Bhutia peasants had to pay just 8 annas for the same land irrespective of the productivity of land (Chettri and Mukunda, 2002).

Jharlangi system was practiced by rich landlords for employing Nepalese peasants for other unpaid works. *Kalobhari* (black load) system was also practiced by rich landlords for employing these peasants as porters for trade purposes. This system is known as *Kalobhari* as the peasants had to carry arms and ammunitions in gunny bags bedaubed with tar to Tibet. When these peasants were employed for *Jharlangi* and *Kalobhari* they were not provided with any supplies and had to survive on their own, for this reason this process of self-sustenance came to be known as *Kuruwa*. Nepalese peasants had to please not only the *Zamindars* (landlords) but also *Mandals* (head of tehsil) or *Karwari* who collected rents for *Zamindars*. They had to provide them gifts packed in a box known as *Theki* and offer free labour (*Bethi*) to them (Chettri and Mukunda, 2002).

Kazis and *Lhade Mede* (body of high lamas) were the two strong pillars of *Chogyal's* feudal economic structure who practiced such systems in Sikkim. They were traditional elites who enjoyed high socio-economic status in the agrarian society of Sikkim. They served as non-associational interest groups who largely drew their authority from religion, ethnicity and race (Sinha, 1975). The institution of *Kazi* was the first organized body in Sikkim (ibid). *Kazis* were mostly Lepchas and known as '*yaplas*' (*respected noblemen*) or by the names of the estates they owned (ibid). They were regional lords, kinsmen of the ruler, royal adviser, warriors, traditional elites, aristocratic class, wealthy traders, bureaucrats, law-makers and judges. They held ministerial positions and maintained two residential positions: i) provincial estate where they were in charge ii) capital around the Palace of the King where they were traditional functionaries (Das,1983). They were also delineated administrative and judicial powers within their territorial jurisdiction and at times, some influential *Kazis* appeared to be more powerful than the *Chogyal*. They had the privilege of inter-marrying with the ruler's family and could pass on their title for the use of their future generation (Sinha, 1975). *Lhade Mede* on the other hand, had the prerogative right to decide all the religious functions that were to be performed for the welfare of

the Kingdom. They exercised magisterial control over few blocks, six monasteries having landed estates and other monasteries having landed property (Sengupta,1985).

Chogyal adopted centralized system of administration to exercise control over all the political structures of the Kingdom which included the clergy, aristocracy and commoners. The whole Kingdom was divided into twelve districts (Lassu, Dallom, Yangthang, Gangtok, Rhenok, Barneak, Tashiding, Song, Libing, Maling, Simik and Pandom) and each district was administered by *Kalons*(ministers) and *Dzongpons* (governors). *Kalons* mostly belonged to influential Bhutia families while *Dzongpons* belonged to Lepcha community. *Dzongpons* enjoyed administrative and judicial powers within their territorial jurisdiction such as maintain law and order, collecting land rent from cultivators and punish perpetrators (Sinha 1975).

Tibetan regents from monasteries aided *Chogyal* in dealing with the administrative affairs of the Kingdom (Risley,1894:ii-iii). These regents were in turn aided by representatives of various communities. *Chogyal* also had an Executive Council comprising of *Kazis*, *lamas* and his nominated members (Sengupta,1985:124). The Executive Councilors were in charge of the transferred subjects such as education, public health, transport, bazaar, excise, forests, public works, food, animal husbandry, agriculture, publicity and press. *Chogyal* laid down their rules of business of the Executive Council and delineated their powers. He could veto any decision of the Executive Council and issue any order without consulting the Council. Executive Councilors had to keep the *Chogyal* informed on all the important matters through the Principal Administrative Officer. Executive Councilors were responsible to the *Chogyal* as they could be removed by him at his own discretion. (Bareh, 2001).

2. Research Methodology

This article is exploratory in the sense that it explains important political developments and factors that led to Sikkim's democratic transition. Considering that democratic political parties of Sikkim were one of the most important political factors it will conduct a micro-level study of the nature, membership, ideology, objectives, support base and electoral success of these parties. The electoral success of these parties has been replicated in the form of tables depicting the results of both Council and Assembly elections. Historical, analytical and case-study methods

have been used to study the specific case of Sikkim. It is primarily a qualitative study but certain quantitative data of election results have also been analyzed. Content and textual analysis of both primary and secondary materials such as Government reports, gazetteer, historical manuscripts, books, journal articles, pamphlets, brochures, newspaper and archival materials have been done.

3. Birth of Political Parties in Sikkim

British East India Company built its political relation with Sikkim for the first time by rescuing it from the invasion of Gorkha rulers during the reign of the seventh *Chogyal*, Tsugphud Namgyal (Sengupta, 1985: 3). Under British Government (28th March, 1861), Sikkim became its formal protectorate with *Chogyal* Sidkyong Namgyal signing the Tumlong Treaty (containing twenty-three articles) (Hiltz, 2003:69). This treaty curtailed the administrative and executive powers of the *Chogyal* by all means. (Das, 1983). A Political Officer, John Claude White was appointed by the British Government and he was delineated more administrative powers than the *Chogyal* (ibid). He served as a watch-dog of the British Government (ibid).

This was followed by one of the significant political developments and momentous changes in India which sent shockwaves into the small Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim. India with her new found freedom was grappling with her internal problems and at the same time, increasing her contacts abroad. Meanwhile, a certain section of people inspired by the lofty ideals of Indian Congress leaders, democratic aspirations of Indians and democratic institutional designs of India sought to free themselves from feudal bondage under the leadership of some enlightened members of peasantry (Sen, 1975).

This culminated into the formation of three different political organizations having a common aim of abolishing landlordism and forced labour in Sikkim:

i) Praja Sudharak Samaj was formed at Gangtok under the leadership of Tashi Tshering, Sonam Tshering and Kezang Tenzing. It stood for abolition of landlordism, democratic reforms and establishing stronger ties of Sikkim with India.

ii) Praja Sammelan was formed at Temi Tarku under the leadership of Gobardhan Pradhan and Dhan Bahadur Tewari. It stood for Sikkim's merger with India and unifying Gorkhas from Sikkim and North Bengal;

iii) Praja Mandal was formed at Chakung under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa. It stood for the welfare of ryots and promotion of communal harmony among Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali communities of Sikkim (Bareh,2001: 92).

4. Sikkim State Congress (SSC)

On 7th December, 1947 these three organizations- Praja Sudharak, Samaj (SPSS), Rajya Praja Mandal (SRPM) and Rajya Praja Sammelan (SRPS) merged to form one unified political party, Sikkim State Congress (SSC) (Grover,1974:35). Tashi Tshering was elected as the party President, Raghubir Singh Basnet became the party Vice-President, Chandradas Rai became party General Secretary while Bhim Bahadur Rai and Dimik Singh Lepcha became party joint secretaries (Gurung,2011: 317). Prem Bahadur Basnet, Nagendra Singh Gurung, C.B Rai, Brihaspati Prasai, Sonam Tshering, Martam Topden, Dathup Tshering, Chuk Tshering, Chedup Lepcha and Ram Prasad became the members of party working committee (ibid).

Sikkim State Congress (SSC) sought to be the 'party of the masses' catering to the interest of all the communities in Sikkim (Sinha, 1975). However, due to its increasing popularity among the Nepali community it came to be viewed as a 'Nepali party' which supported the 'rule of *Dhotiwalas*' (plainsmen) (Gurung,2011: 322). Later on, it came to be viewed as a 'Newar party' (sub-group of Nepali community) having majority *ex-thikidars* (contractors) as its members (ibid).

Sikkim State Congress (SSC) was formed as the Sikkimese counterpart of Indian National Congress (INC) but its primary objective was not political in nature unlike the Indian National Congress (INC). Its primary objective was to eradicate communalism and socio-economic disparity among different communities in Sikkim (Sinha,1975:24). Failure of the *Chogyal* to address the socio-economic problems faced by Nepalese community compelled Sikkim State

Congress (SSC) to demand for a democratic set up in Sikkim. The party's Constitution outlined some of the objectives that are as follows:

- i) Ensure well-being and advancement of the people of Sikkim;
- ii) Achieve political, economic and social development of Sikkim under the protection of *Bharat*;
- iii) Establish a democratic and fully responsible Government in Sikkim by peaceful, non-violent and constitutional means;
- iv) Make *Chogyal* the Constitutional head of Sikkim;
- v) Establish a Government based on the principle of equality of rights and;
- vi) Abolish all religious, caste, colour and sex based discriminations (Coelho, 1971: 47).

In order to fulfill these objectives it sent five-member party delegation to meet the *Chogyal*. These delegates submitted a memorandum to the *Chogyal* consisting of three major demands that are as follows:

- i) Immediate abolition of landlordism;
- ii) Formation of an interim government as a precursor to a full-fledged democratic government and;
- iii) Sikkim's complete integration with India (Sinha, 1975:24).

Along with it a copy of an article 'A Few Facts about Sikkim State' written by party President, Tashi Tshering was enclosed. *Chogyal* assured the delegates of Sikkim State Congress (SSC) of fulfilling the first two demands and he outrightly rejected the third demand. He decided to appoint three nominees of Sikkim State Congress (SSC) as his Secretaries until elected representatives to the State Council were appointed (Basnet, 1974:58).

In November, 1948 two representatives of Sikkim State Congress (SSC), Tashi Tshering and Chandradas Rai submitted their party memorandum to then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (Gurung, 2011:318). In 1949, the party launched 'No Tax' and 'No Rent' campaigns, non-cooperation movements, Satyagraha movements and nonviolent agitations in Sikkim (Sharma, 2005:137). Such continued pressure and resistance of Sikkim State Congress (SSC) compelled the *Chogyal* to issue an official notification on 20th, August 1949 for abolishing landlordism in Sikkim. The system of forced labour and house tax were also abolished in Sikkim (Basnet, 1974: 92). Thereafter, *Tehsils*(blocks) were established and Revenue Officers were

appointed to administer them (Bareh,2001:66). Monastic estates were also made self-sufficient but the Government continued to grant subsidies to these monasteries (Coelho,1971:45).

Chogyal also initiated reforms in politico-administrative structures by inducting three representatives of Sikkim State Congress (SSC) namely, Tashi Tshering, Sonam Tshering and Raghbir Singh Basnet as Secretaries to the Government. Later, Tashi Tshering was replaced by Dimik Singh Lepcha by the party. However, Sonam Tshering and Dimik Singh Lepcha acted against the wishes of the party because of which they were asked to resign from their posts by the party high command. Situation further worsened when these two nominees refused to resign from their posts (Gurung,2011:318).

In May, 1949 *Chogyal* installed a five-member popular interim government in Sikkim having three nominees of Sikkim State Congress (SSC) namely, Tashi Tshering, Raghbir Singh Basnet, Chandradas Rai and two nominees of Sikkim National Party (SNP) namely Kazi Dorji Dadul, Rashmi Prasad Alley (Gurung,2011). There were disagreements between the ministry and *Chogyal* with regard to delineation of powers as a result of which the ministry dissolved after 29 days (Rao,1978:12). In order to resolve this political crisis, the Government of India appointed John S. Lall from the Indian Administrative Cadre as the *Dewan* or Quasi-Chief Minister of Sikkim (Sinha, 1975:26)⁴.

In 1953, *Chogyal* issued a Royal Proclamation to form a new representative body, Sikkim State Council. In the newly formed State Council, he reserved seven seats for Bhutia-Lepcha (BL) and Nepalis respectively, one seat for *Sangha* (*monk body*) and six seats to be nominated by him (Sen,1975:355). A system of diarchy was established in Sikkim wherein, powers were divided between *Chogyal* and the State Council (Kazi,2009:29).

He also formed an Executive Council as a component of the State Council consisting of *Dewan* as an ex-officio President of the Council, five members to be nominated by him and twelve elected members with six seats reserved for Bhutia-Lepchas (BLs) and six seats for Nepalis. Members of the Executive Council were responsible to the *Chogyal* as they could hold their

⁴Later the post of *Dewan* was designated as Principal Administrative Officer and in 1966, it was renamed as *Sidlon* (Tibetan word meaning Prime Minister).

office at the pleasure of *Chogyal*. They usually retired from office during the first session of new State Council in every three years (Coelho, 1971:43).

The mode of election prescribed under the Royal Proclamation of 1953 was complicated and discriminatory as candidates belonging to the majority Nepali community were to be directly elected while candidates belonging to the Bhutia-Lepcha (BL) community were to be elected in both primary and final elections. As a result of such complicated and discriminatory mode of election the Sikkim State Congress (SSC) could not form the Government in spite of winning all the 6 Nepali seats in 1953 Council election (Gurung,2011: 319).

TABLE 1: Result of 1953 Council Election

POLITICAL PARTY	NO. OF SEATS CONTESTED	NO. OF SEATS WON
Sikkim State Congress	6	6
Sikkim National Party	12	6
Sikkim Rajya Praja Sammelan	5	0
Sikkim Scheduled Caste League	2	0

Source: Sengupta,1985: 73

Sikkim State Congress (SSC) suffered from internal factionalism after its defeat in the 1953 Council election. Its new party President, Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa (appointed after the demise of Tashi Tshering) resigned from the party due to his differences with the party Councilor, Kashi Raj Pradhan. He formed Swatantra Dal party under the leadership of Namgay Tshering while Kashi Raj Pradhan was appointed as the new President of Sikkim State Congress (SSC) (Bareh,2001:101).

Two councilors of Sikkim State Congress (SSC) Kashi Raj Pradhan and Nahkul Pradhan (nephew of Kashi Raj Pradhan) were found guilty of election malpractice and were imposed 6 years ban from contesting election by the Election Tribunal. Furthermore, *Chogyal's* high handedness in the appointment of Executive Councilors and cut throat competition among Sikkim State Congress (SSC) members for party leadership led to the resignation of all its founding members for instance, Chandradas Rai who won the 1960 State Council bye-election as an independent candidate was denied the post of Executive Councilor by the *Chogyal* while

Nahkul Pradhan who also won the 1960 State Council bye-election as Sikkim State Congress (SSC) candidate was appointed as Executive Councilor as *Chogyal* shared good rapport with Nahkul Pradhan's uncle Kashi Raj Pradhan (Bareh, 2001). Three kinds of leadership emerged within the Sikkim State Congress (SSC):

- a) traditional demagogues who did not take effective step to establish liberal democracy in Sikkim;
- b) rank opportunists who easily switched over to rival Sikkim National Party (SNP) for winning the patronage of the *Chogyal* and;
- c) small section of politically insignificant, agitated and radical youths having no set political agendas and later on went on to form Sikkim Janata Party (SJP) (Sinha, 1975: 146).

In 1972, Sikkim State Congress (SSC) merged with Sikkim Janata Party (SJP) to form Sikkim Janata Congress (SJC) under the leadership of K.C Pradhan (ex-General Secretary of Sikkim Janata Party) (Sinha, 1975:60). Sikkim Janata Congress (SJC) then merged with Sikkim National Congress (SNC) to form Sikkim Congress having Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa as the President and K.C Pradhan as the Vice-President (ibid). Sikkim Congress (SC) then emphasized on establishing a full-fledged democracy in Sikkim, establishing rule of law, economically developing Sikkim, establishing efficient and fair administration, protecting the rights of the minorities and backward classes and; ensuring social justice to all the communities of Sikkim (Kazi, 2009)

5. Sikkim National Party (SNP)

On 30th April, 1948 a rival party of Sikkim State Congress (SSC) known as Sikkim National Party (SNP) was formed by individuals belonging to Bhutia-Lepcha (BL) community having the support of *Chogyal* (Gurung, 2011: 321). Sonam Tshering (former Sikkim State Congress nominee to the *Chogyal's* Government) was appointed as the President of the party as by then he had already resigned from Sikkim State Congress (SSC) (ibid). There were also other members of Sikkim National Party (SNP) who had defected from Sikkim State Congress (SSC) and few of them even possessed dual membership of both the parties (Sengupta, 1985: 153). Majority of its members were *Kazis* and 'neo-rich Bhutias' (promoted from the lower ranks) having the support of *Chogyal* as a result of which it came to be viewed as a 'Party of the Palace', 'nationalist party', status quo party, communal conservative party and loyalist party (Sinha, 1975).

It did not have any concrete ideology as its primary concern was to only oppose Sikkim State Congress (SSC). It did not adopt any formal Charter or Constitution that could specify its objectives (Coelho,1971: 47). It was only in its party resolutions that its political objectives were outlined as follows:

- i) Maintain status quo in Sikkim;
- ii) Strengthen monarchy in Sikkim and;
- iii) Separation of Sikkim from India (Sengupta, 1985).

It sought to preserve the time honoured institution of landlordism in Sikkim (Bareh, 2001: 94). It also emphasized on upholding the distinct identity and unique culture of Sikkim for which it emphasized on the need to conclude a special treaty with India that would accord Sikkim a protectorate status (Lama: 1994: 36-37,97). It rejected Sikkim's accession to India on the following grounds:

- i) Historically, socially, culturally and linguistically Sikkim had closer affinities with Bhutan and Tibet;
- ii) Geographically and ethnically Sikkim was not a part of India. Moreover, its political relation with India was imposed on her;
- iii) *Lamaist* Buddhism which is followed in Sikkim is different from Buddhism which is followed in other parts India.
- iv) Policy of the party is to maintain the indigenous character of Sikkim and preserve its integrity (Bareh,2001).

In 1969, Sikkim National Party (SNP) suffered a split with one faction being led by Netuk Tshering (popularly known as Netuk Lama) and the other faction being led by Martam Topden. Despite of that both the factions of the party equally enjoyed the patronage of *Chogyal*. However, *Chogyal* did fear political repercussions of such split because of which he established a youth wing of Sikkim National Party (SNP) known as the Youth Pioneers under the leadership of his niece Sodenla. He also formed People's Democratic Party (PDP) under the leadership of his brother-in-law, Sonam Gyatso (Das, 1983).

In 1970 Council election, Sikkim National Party (SNP) won 7 seats out of which 4 seats belonged to Netuk Tshering faction. Netuk Tshering was then elected as the leader of the party

and Martam Topden retired from party leadership (Gurung, 2011: 324-325). Sikkim National Party (SNP) could win 1970 Council election despite of the split because Netuk Tshering faction included Nepali community in the party not only as party members but also as key office bearers for example there were Nepali Councilors from the North, Nepali General Secretary (Man Bahadur Basnet) and Nepali Vice-President (Harka Bahadur Basnet) (Rao,1978:38). Another reason for the electoral victory was that Sikkim National Party (SNP) made use of ethnic symbols having religious significance for Bhutia-Lepchas in its political activities (Gurung, 2011). *Chogyal* also did his part by revising the party manifesto which laid emphasis on special rights of the Bhutia-Lepcha (BLs) and compared Sikkim's status with that of Nepal and Bhutan (Rao,1978:38).

TABLE 2: Result of 1970 Council Election

POLITICAL PARTY	NO. OF SEATS WON
Sikkim National Party	7 (B.L)
Sikkim National Congress	5 (including General seat)
Sikkim State Congress	4
<i>Sangha</i> (monk body)	1
General (<i>Tsong</i>)-Independent	1
Total	18

Source: Sengupta,1985

*Note: *Tsong*s are the indigenous groups of Limbus and Magars who settled in the Tsang-po Valley of Tibet which was then a part of Sikkim and now is a part of Limbuwana district in Nepal (Phadnis, 1980: 1240)

In 1973 Council election, Sikkim National Party (SNP) once again proved to be an all-inclusive political party by securing eleven seats including the entire Bhutia-Lepchas (BLs) seats, two general seats, one *Tsong* seat and one Scheduled Caste seat (Sengupta,1985:25,91). However, opposition political parties like Sikkim National Congress (SNC) and Sikkim Janata Congress (SJC) alleged Sikkim National Party (SNP) of rigging the election in its favour. These political parties staged huge public demonstrations in Sikkim. Their supporters burnt government offices, destroyed government records, demolished properties of the pro-*Chogyal* political

leaders and; looted arms and ammunitions of the defense forces (Das, 1983: 13). Parallel people's administration (*Janata Raj*) were being run in South-west and Eastern parts of Sikkim (Sinha, 1975: 34). At the same time, there were counter-demonstrations being staged by the supporters of the *Chogyal* especially in north and east districts of Sikkim (Das, 1983: 14). Sikkim National Congress (SNC) and Sikkim Janata Congress (SJC) refused to join Executive Council and rather formed Joint Action Committee (J.A.C) under the chairmanship of Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa (Kazi, 2009).

TABLE 3: Result of 1973 Council Elections

POLITICAL PARTY	NO. OF ELECTED CANDIDATES
Sikkim National Party	9
Sikkim National Congress	5
Sikkim Janata Congress	2
Independent (SC)	1
<i>Sangha</i>	1

Source: Sengupta, 1985

Such political crisis in Sikkim compelled the *Chogyal* to request the Government of India for administrative intervention. Thereafter, Government of India handed over the charge of Sikkim's administration to the Chief Administrative Officer, B.S Das (Sen, 1975). On May 8th, 1973 leaders of Joint Action Committee (J.A.C) representing the people of Sikkim, Government of India and *Chogyal* signed the Tripartite Agreement as the basis for future constitution of Sikkim and Indo-Sikkim Treaty. Some of the important provisions of the Tripartite Agreement of 1973 can be outlined as follows:

- i) Establish a fully responsible government having a more democratic constitution;
- ii) Guarantee a written constitution incorporating fundamental rights;
- iii) Establish an independent judiciary;
- iv) Election should be based on adult suffrage;
- v) Equitable representation should be ensured to all sections of the population;
- vi) Voting should be based on the principle of one-man-one-vote⁵;

⁵Under one-man-one-vote system of political representation the contesting candidate had to be from his own community and in order to be elected the candidate had to acquire maximum votes from the entire electorate of Sikkim.

vii) Establish 32 member State Legislative Assembly whose members are to be elected in every four years on the basis of adult franchise and under the supervision of Election Commission of India. Its composition would be such that no single group would enjoy a dominant position.

viii) Election Commissioner should be appointed by the Government of Sikkim

ix) Chief Executive should be nominated by Government of India and appointed by *Chogyal*. He/she will have final say over the appointment of ministers and distribution of their portfolios. If any dispute arises between him and the *Chogyal* then the matter shall be referred to New Delhi through Political Officer (Sen, 1975; Sidhu, 2018).

In 1974, for the first time Assembly elections were conducted in Sikkim under the supervision of Election Commission of India. Sikkim Congress (SC) under the leadership of Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa swept the Assembly polls by capturing 29 out of 32 Assembly seats (Rao, 1978). Three of its candidates including its President Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa were elected unopposed (Sengupta, 1985:95). Sikkim National Party (SNP) could not win this election due to its alleged involvement in rigging 1973 Council election while Sikkim Congress (SC) could secure maximum seats in this election by initiating the movement against the *Chogyal* for supporting Sikkim National Party (SNP). Soon after this Assembly election, the only representative of Sikkim National Party (SNP) also joined the Sikkim Congress (SC) (ibid 166).

TABLE 4: Result of 1974 Assembly Election

POLITICAL PARTY	NO.OF SEATS CONTESTED	NO.OF ELECTED CANDIDATES	NO. OF VOTES WON
Sikkim Congress	32	31	26,767
Sikkim National Party	5	1	1,040
Independents	-	0	7,189

Source: Sengupta, 1985.

On 28th June, 1974 Sikkim Legislative Assembly having majority of MLAs from Sikkim Congress (SC) unanimously passed the Government of Sikkim Bill in order to establish a full responsible government in Sikkim and strengthen Sikkim's relation with India (Sen, 1975:357-

358). In the same year, both the Houses of Indian Parliament also passed the Government of Sikkim Bill thereby, making it a Constitutional (Thirty-fifth Amendment) Act (ibid).

Sikkim Legislative Assembly passed another resolution to make Sikkim an associate state of India. Parliament also passed the said resolution thereby, making it a Constitutional (Thirty-sixth Amendment) Act. By this Act, Government of India was given the responsibility for Sikkim's defense, territorial integrity, external relations, socio-economic development, good administration, communal harmony and representation of the people of Sikkim in the political institutions of India (Sengupta,1985).

On 10th April 1975, Sikkim Legislative Assembly called for an emergency session and unanimously passed a resolution to abolish the institution of *Chogyal* and make Sikkim a constituent unit of India having a democratic and fully responsible government. It also resolved that the resolution for Sikkim's merger with India should be submitted to the people of Sikkim for their approval. Accordingly, on 14th April 1975 the referendum was passed with 59,637 votes (97 per cent) in favour and 1,496 votes against the resolution. Parliament approved the Bill containing these resolutions thereby, making it Constitutional (Thirty-eight Amendment) Act. On May 16th, 1975 Sikkim became the 22nd state of the Indian Union (Ray,1978).

6. Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussions that the democratic aspirations of Sikkim State Congress (SSC) stood in direct contrast with nationalistic aspirations of Sikkim National Party (SNP). These political parties followed the tactic of community based mobilization by speaking for the cause of one particular community while excluding the other communities for example, Sikkim State Congress (SSC) by emphasizing on abolition of feudal system in Sikkim largely protected the interests of Nepalese who were basically tillers of the land. The election patterns in Sikkim also reflected the ethnic divide and communalism in Sikkim considering that Sikkim State Congress (SSC) continuously won all the Nepali seats while the Sikkim National Party (SNP) won the Bhutia-Lepcha (BL) seats.

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