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PERSPECTIVES OF CHANGING GEO-POLITICAL SETUP -- PAST AND PRESENT, SIKKIM, INDIA

SANDIPAN CHAKRABORTY AND SANGHAMITRA SARKAR

Associate Professor, Dept. of Geography, Presidency University, Kolkata, India
Ms. Sanghamitra Sarkar, RTA, NECD (EDNERU), IGNOU

Abstract:

A land of massive natural uniqueness, Sikkim portrays its distinctiveness in the process of its nation building process too. Ruled for a long time by the monarchs and their monarchies, the state was isolated for a very long time from the main landmass of India. The population change of the area, as it was constantly immigrated from the neighbouring countries had a great reflectance on the change of kingship in the past to its present political set up. Related to this phenomenon is the division of people in various castes and groups. Its history of modernity in every walks of life and politics is very recent. Hence the present paper is just an effort to highlight yet another piece of rarity of the land in terms of its past and present caste, geographic boundary shifting in the administrative arena as well as its reflectance on the societal structure.

KEYWORDS:

Temporal and spiritual powers; Geographical richness; Social transformation; Dynamic social change; Caste and political structure.

INTRODUCTION:

Sikkim, a heavenly kingdom at the heart of the Eastern Himalayas, has established itself as the most diverse biological hotspot and strategically one of the most important states of India. The political history of the state dates back many centuries and has a deep relation with the ethno-religious structure of the land. However most of the civilizational track record has remained unexplored. As per the treaty of India and Sikkim, which was signed in 1950, the Indian Government took over the administration of the Sikkim. However, the land became the 22nd state of Indian Union on 16th May, 1975. There after major changes came in the overall strategy of the administrative condition of the state. Scholars from world over and so of our land are of opinion that Sikkim was not politically consolidated and it was not a single political unit till 1642, when Phuntsho Namgyal was consecrated as the Chogyal of Sikkim, which means possessing both temporal and spiritual powers, by the three Lamas at Yoksom Norbugang, West Sikkim (Arha & Sigh, 2008: 1-2, 4; Subba, 2008: 1). Prior to this there were many self-governing Chieftains who belonged to the Lepcha, Tsongs (Limboos) and Mangar community, who ruled the territory of Greater Sikkim. But eventually most of these Chieftains, only other than the Mangar Chieftains accepted the supremacy of Namgyal Dynasty in 1642 when also the Tripartite Treaty of "Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum" was signed (Subba, 2008: 1). There has thus been evidence (many are not written one) of several groups of people belonging to various clans and sects who have migrated to this piece of land since ages and have successively ruled whole or part of the land. As a consequence there have been formations of various castes and sub-castes as upper and lower, since time immemorial. Yet they are still undergoing a process of modification as the Government has intervened to recognize the people of the land into various categories from time to time.

This has been done on the bases of various parameters including their place of dominance, their social status etc. This undoubtedly had a bearing on the division of lands into different administrative setups and its resultant political condition. At present “Sikkim Democratic Front led-government headed by Sri Pawan Kumar Chamling came to power at a very critical juncture in the history of modern Sikkim. This landlocked hill State needed a fountain head of democratic practices and a forward-looking leader to give a firm direction to the young State. Sikkimese people aspired for a leader of strong grass root connections to realize the participation-based development gains. Pawan Chamling exactly fitted the bill”, as stated by Mahendra P. Lama, Professor of South Asian Economies Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and Economic Adviser to the Chief Minister of Sikkim (Subba, 2008).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Human society has modified all piece of the world, where ever they have traversed and settled. All regions bear a direct imprint of the dominant group of people residing in that region. The present study area is one of the most typical examples of the landscape, which has witnessed an overall change from political set up to way of life i.e. the socio- economic condition of the inhabitants because of being ruled by different groups during different times in the political history. Although Sikkim is still a sacred land in terms of its culture and tradition, but the modernization process and migration of people from almost all corners of the Country and abroad has altered much of its socio- cultural sanctity. The problem of the study is thus circumscribing around 1) the search for tracking the chronology of the administrative boundary shifting state as well as the political rule under different groups of people. 2) As well as the condition of the socio-cultural mosaic under different communities.

HYPOTHESIS:

The study seeks to find its way through some practical mechanism. In order to understand the area and its subsequent outcome at present, the work has involved a few tools and assumptions, which in turn has been able to throw light into the main concept of the write up. The key hypotheses are thus 1) human beings have altered the overall condition of the state. 2) Present political scenario is a reflectance of its past. Hence with this premise, the study approaches various elements of the region, including ethnography, geographical boundary, way of livelihood practices etc.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS OF INVESTIGATION:

Sikkim's strategic location and geographical richness and diversity have always drawn attention of people from everywhere. The area had been an ancient trade route between India and China and other nations of the world. The term 'Silk Road' used by German geographer Ferdinand Von Richthofen in 1877 deserves special mention. Besides trade people from the neighbouring land had often invaded and conquered parts of the landmass since early times. As a result there had been amalgamation of ideas, beliefs on one hand, and breakdown and annexation of landmass by the neighbours, a significant feature of geopolitics. Hence the causal relation between geographical area and political power is what the objectives of the arena of studying Sikkim's political power shifts and its social transformation involves. The study also implicates a multidisciplinary stance for it encompasses the studies of history, geography and ethnography of the landmass. Such a sensitive theme of geopolitical consideration is in existence in Sikkim from as early as 16th century as history of the land traces. Hence a little focus on this area can bring out the present geopolitical conditions of the landmass as well, which can not only represent the suitable state of affair for this magnificent land, but can also highlight the ways for achieving the goal.

With this central objective the methodology applied for conducting the study is primarily based on the collection of spatial information and temporal data from secondary sources. Writings and reports of eminent persons, different Govt. and Non-Govt. organizations as well as map studies played effective role to extend the horizon of the knowledge.

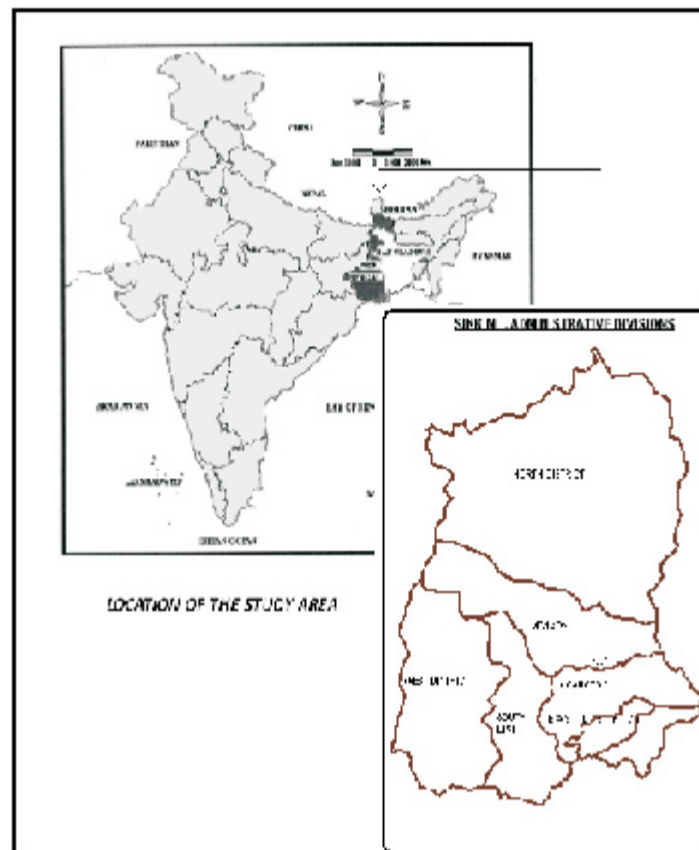


Fig. : 01 The Study Area

STUDY AREA AND GEOPOLITICAL SET UP: PAST AND PRESENT

Among the north-eastern states, Sikkim is a significant one and geographically it is located between 27° 04' 46" and 28° 07' 48" North latitude and 88° 00' 58" and 88° 55' 25" East longitude in the lap of the Eastern Himalayas, covering an area of about 7100sq.km. The state constitutes 0.22% of the total area of India. Almost half of Sikkim is the North district and is included in greater Himalayan zone, mostly an inaccessible area and remains snow capped almost all throughout the year, the Southern slope of the state is under South, East and West districts and lies in the lesser Himalayan zone. It is wedged between Nepal in the West and Bhutan in the East and China in the North and Northeast. Sikkim is naturally separated from Nepal by the Singalila Range in the West, from Tibet by the Chola Range in the Northeast and also from Bhutan in the Southeast; Rangit and Rangpo rivers form the borders with the Indian state of West Bengal in the South. In comparison to this present area, the earlier Sikkim Commonly known as the "Greater Sikkim" was essentially a much greater piece of land. The boundary of the country extended from Chumbi Valley of present Tibet (China), Harchu Valley and Amochu Valley of present Bhutan to the East of Arun River which is presently Nepal and the northern plains of West Bengal as far as Titalia and Purnea of Bihar. The name was derived from the Limboo word "Su-khim" which means happy place or home. The present shape and size of the land is a result of annexations of its territories by Bhutan, Nepal, and the British at different periods of time. This disintegration took place part by part in eight phases and ultimately the land lost its identity as the Himalayan Kingdom and finally merged into a constituent State of Indian Union in 1975. Despite its smallness even today the land has not lost its charm and beauty from the natural standpoint as well as in the socio-cultural dimension.

OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS:

Temporal change of geo-politics in Sikkim: Sikkim has witnessed a dynamic change in the sphere of it being ruled by various people belonging to different communities during different points of time. Whatever evidences are available it shows a successive rule by the lepchas, bhutias, etc. since a very early

time, till the recent years when there was the ultimate breakdown of the system of the rule by the kings and is now a part of democratic India. In connection to this fact there has been constant chaging of the boundary of the State and ultimately the present nano state has emerged. J.R. Subba has done an extensive work on the history and culture of Sikkim and has also given a chronological chart giving details about the various events in this Himalayan Kingdom. To quote from his work – following is a chronology of a few events in the geo-political history of Sikkim.

Reign of the lepchas :

- 7th-8th Century: Reign of Thekong Adek, the First Lepcha Panu in the present area of Sikkim.
- 9th-10th Century: Reign of Thup Athak, the second Lepcha Panu in the present area of sikkim.
- 13th Century: Reign of Thekong Tek, the Third Lepcha Panu in the present area of Sikkim.
- 1353-1410: Reign of Rujo Panu
- 1425-1454: Reign of Tarvey Panu
- 1481-1520: Reign of Tar-eng Panu
- 1520-1564: Reign of Tarjyi Panu
- 1564 – 1595: Reign of Tar-eak Panu
- 1595- 1642: Reign of Thekong Mun Solong Panu

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- 1564 – 1595: Reign of Tar-eak Panu
- 1595- 1642: Reign of Thekong Mun Solong Panu



Reign of the bhutia monarchs:

1642: Installation of the first Bhutia King of Namgyal Dynasty of Sikkim
 1642- 1670: Reign of the first Chogyal Phuntso Namgyal
 1642: Emergence of “ the Greater Sikkim” by integration of land resources of Lepchas, Limboos and Bhutias in the eastern Himalayas
 1643: Establishment of Palace (capital) at Tashi Tenka.
 1670-1700: Reign of the second Chogyal Tensung Namgyal
 1670's: Capital of Sikkim Shifted from Tashi Tenka to Rabdentse
 1700- 1716: Reign of the Third Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal
 1700- 1708: Bhutanese occupation of Sikkim except Limbuwan and Chumbi Valley for 8 years.
 1700: First phase of disintegration of “ the Greater Sikkim”; annexation of the areas of Kalimpong, Damsang, Darlincote, Jonksa, Sangbe upto Taigon Pass known as “ Man-Loong-Kha-Bzi” by Bhutan.
 1717-1733: Reign of the Fourth Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal
 1718: Bhutan's second invasion; permanent loss of “ Man-Loong-Kha-Bzi” area to Bhutan.
 1725-1733: second phase of disintegration of “the Greater Sikkim”; loss of Limbuwan area including Terai areas; as the Limboos threw allegiance with the chogyal and started ruling themselves.
 1733-1780: Reign of of the fifth Chogyal Namgyal Phuntsog
 1733-1737: Period of anarchy due to question of legitimacy of the young Chogyal
 1738-1741: rule of Tamding Gyalpo in Sikkim.
 1770(1772): Third invasion of Bhutan; Sikkim gained some ares at Rhenock.
 1773: Kazis were chosen for the first time in Sikkim.
 1774: First Gorkha Invasion.
 1774: Third phase of disintegration of “the Greater Sikkim”; loss of Limbuwan, Eastern hills and Terai areas of Sikkim.
 1780-1793: Reign of the Sixth Chogyal Tenzing Namgyal.
 1788: Second Gorkha invasion of Sikkim.
 1793-1864: Reign of the seventh Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal.
 1791: Annexation of Piahte-Gomg and Rerinchhen-Tse Jong of Tibet by Tibetans.
 1814: Capital of Sikkim shifted from Rabdentse, West Sikkim to Tumlong, North Sikkim.
 1816: Treaty of Titalia was signed between British India and the seventh Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal.
 1817-1947: Sikkim was under British Protectorate.
 1835: Fifth phase of disintegration of “the Greater Sikkim”; Darjeeling India was annexed by the British India.
 1857: The boundary of the present Sikkim and Nepal was demarcated by the treaty of Titalia.
 1861: Sixth phase of disintergration of “the Greater Sikkim”; all the land lying between Rammam in the North, Rangit and Teesta in the east and the Terai areas were annexed by the British India.
 1863- 1874: Reign of the Eighth Chogyal Sridkyong Namgyal.
 1874-1914: Reign of the Ninth Chogyal Thutub Namgyal.
 1880: Tibetan forces attacked the Nathula and Jalepla.
 1886: Tibetans occupied Lungthu.
 Entry of the British Power:
 1887-1888: Sikkim Capital was shifted from Tumlong to Gangtok.
 1889: J.C. White was appointed as Assistant Political Officer in Sikkim.
 1890: The seventh phase of disintergration of “ The Greater sikkim”; annexation of Chumbi Valley by China due to the British and China convention of 1890 signed at Calcutta
 1914: Reign of the Tenth Chogyal Sidkyong Tulku.
 1915-1963: Reign of the Eleventh Chogyal Sir Tashi Namgyal.
 1947: First meeting of the joint political party was held.
 1949: A democratic government formed under the chief Ministership of Tashi Tshering for the first time.
 1949: Sri J.S. Lall was appointed as Dewan of Sikkim.
 1950: Harish Dayal was appointed as administrator.

Reign of the monarchs under the Indian protectorate ship:

1950: Sikkim became protectorate of India through an agreement.
 1950- 1974: Sikkim was under Indian protectorate.
 1950: First Panchayat election was held.
 1953: First general council election was held for the first time in Sikkim for 18 councilors.

1953: The Tsong Community requested the Chogyal for nomination of a councilor in the Ministry of Sikkim.
 1958: Indra Prasad Limboo (Swaden) of Bandukey was nominated for the first time in the council of Ministers in the second Council election of 1958 by Tashi Namgyal.
 1958: Survey of all lands was made.
 1960: Sikkim National Congress was formed in sikkim.
 1962: Border war with China.
 1963-1975: Reign of the Twelfth Chogyal Palden Thondup namgyal.
 1963: Namchi district was created
 1966: Sikkim Independent front and Sikkim Janata party was formed.
 1970: Foruth general election was held.
 1973: Fifth general election was held
 1973: Sri B.S. Das was appointed the chief Administrator of Sikkim.
 1973: The Tsong Community lost its lone seat in the council.
 1973: The Tsongs (Limboos) lost their separate identity and they were clubbed as one of the components of Nepali ethnic group.
 1974: Sikkim became the Associate State of India.
 1974: L.D. Kazi, the first and the last Chief Minister of Associate State of Sikkim.
 1975: The Eighth and final disintegration of "the Greater Sikkim"; Sikkim became 22nd Constituent state of india.
 Sikkim became a democratic state of india:
 1975: First Governor Bipin Bihari Lal of Sikkim was sworn.
 1975: Sikkim categorized under special category state of India.
 1979: First Democratic election was conducted in sikkim.
 1979: Sikkim assembly was constituted with one for sangha, 12 for Scheduled Tribe and 2 for Scheduled caste seats.
 1979: The Nepalese lost the entire seats reserved in the Legislative Assembly; Bhutia and Lepcha seats converted to Scheduled Tribe seats and also reduced to 12 No.s and one Sanghaseat. Limboo lost the lone seat in the assembly.
 1979-1984: N.B. Bhandari, the Chief Minister of Sikkim.
 1984: Sri B.B. Guroong, Chief Minister of Sikkim.
 1984-1994: N.B. Bhandari, the chief Minister of Sikkim 2nd and 3rd term.
 1984: President Rule imposed in Sikkim.
 1994: six month Chief ministership of S.M. Limboo.
 1994-1998: The Fifth Chief Minister of Sikkim Sri P.K. Chamling sworn.
 2002: Limboo and Tamang communities were included in the tribal list.
 2004-2011 (till date continuing): Sri P.K. Chamling Chief Minister sworn for the third time and the fourth time and is still continuing his office.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Socio-Cultural Transformation of Sikkim in the Perspective of Spatio-Temporal Dimension:
 Sikkim used to be a virgin piece of nature's gift till very recently, which not only included the physical aspects of environment like the gigantic and rugged mountains, flora and faunal assemblage, divine rivers and holy lakes, wide range of climatic variations, etc., but also was inhabited by aboriginals, that too only in certain pockets due to the extreme nature of the climate. Although there are almost no records of this ancient stage of human settlement, there are only legendary accounts for the same. However through the research of the scholars it has been revealed that the land was mainly inhabited by three groups of people Lho-Mon-Tsong-Tsum, who are identified as the Bhutias as Lho, Mon referred to the Lepchas and Tsongs were the Limboos. Hence it became very difficult to state as to who were the first originals of the land. Being a politically unconsolidated landmass, Sikkim was mainly ruled by Lepchas, Limboos and Mangars during the prehistoric time when the Greater Sikkim existed. With the entry of the Bhutias the land resources of Sikkim was integrated and there was the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty. The descendents of the Namgyals ruled over the landmass till they became mere puppets at the hands of the Britishers, when there was massive insurgencies, starting from the Gorkha war and signing of various treaties. Ultimately, it was during 1975 the Kazi (Prime Minister) of Sikkim approached the Indian Government to take over in a way to give Sikkim a status of an Indian state.

Evolution of Cast System in Sikkim: a Paradigm Shift.

Caste system is a very prominent aspect of Indian societal structure which divides people on the basis of some inherited social status. How it evolved and when it evolved is a debatable issue. Often there are divisions made on the basis of religion, as the simplest form of dividing people, in reality it is much complicated because of the division of people in various castes, sub-castes and other categories. Politics being a brainchild of man, it is nothing but the social relations involving power, it establishes relations between one to another group, hence caste and politics have a close relationship. According to M.N. Srinivas the role played by caste in politics is in close approximation to that of the pressure group. However it is at the same time believed that the modernizing factor can remove the severity to a great extent. Sikkim exhibits a strong base for such issues related to caste and political structure. The Lepcha, Bhutias and the Limboos inhabited the land from a long time. It was from the nineteenth century, the Nepalese started migrating to the land mass of Sikkim. In the mean time there was gradual breakdown of the land mass and several areas constantly went under the jurisdiction of the neighbouring countries and states. Soon the Lepchas, Bhutias and Limboos formed a single homogeneous entity, whereas the Nepalese emerged out as various castes, subcastes and tribes. The Anthropological Survey of India enumerated 25 tribes and communities in Sikkim. Today the Nepalese form the largest ethnic group in Sikkim. Each of the castes has different physical and cultural characteristics.

Diffusion of Culture and Religion: A Variant

The religious practices, their way of life gradually changed due to this intermingling of various cultures. The earliest forms of religious practices were a form of nature worship, but with the advent of the Bhutias from Tibet Buddhism entered. Teyongsi Sirijunga Singthebe entered west sikkim and propagated Yumaism. Then came Hinduism with the Gorkha invasion.. The Britishers came and so came the Christian missionaries who spread Christianity. Hence today Sikkim observes various religious nad cultural festivals in all over the State among its people.

Linguistic Diversity : A Variant Of Cultural Resurgence

The second smallest state of India today, Sikkim displays a wide diversity in the linguistic set up too. The State Government of Sikkim has identified eleven languages as the State language so far. The ancient dialects were mainly very few, which were Lepcha and Limboo Dialects. With the migration of the Bhutias there was spread of Tibetan dialects. There was also emergence of Mangar scripts in the Mangar occupied areas. During 1734 to 1741 there was propagation of Sirijunga scripts by Teyongshi Sirijunga. But his assassination in 1741 by the Tsang Lamas the script was banned by the Sikkim administration. The invasion of the Gorkhas marked the entrance of Nepali language. This era brought a significant change in the socio-cultural gamut of the entire hill tribes. Slowly during the beginning of 19th century there was a transformation and acceptance of various languages not only among the inhabitants but also as a medium of instruction in schools. A shift from Nepali to Hindi to English was a major breakthrough. There were also introduction of other languages as Tamang, Khambu Rai, Newari, Sunuwar, Sherpa, Gurung language etc. Interestingly all these languages mainly belonged to the sub castes of the major castes of the landmass.

FINDINGS:

The present Sikkim became the 22nd State of Indian Union on 16th May 1975. From studies and evidences it is much clear that there had been an overall transformation in the geographical area dimension and its political scenario. A mighty Himalayan kingdom has now reduced to a tiny piece of land on one hand, on the other hand, once inhabited by only a small group of people has now become an abode of various castes and communities. The status they have achieved is mainly on the basis of political power, economic backwardness, or religious origin. For example the Bhutias are considered the elitist group by virtue of their long standing dominance on the land as they ruled the kingdom for over three centuries, even though they have been enlisted as scheduled tribe today. The political scene too has undergone immense change through this passage of time. Political ideas today believe in this maximum freedom of choice, expression and representation of people from various social strata. This is what the tenets of democracy aspire for. But in the existence of various people the democratic scenario too has become complex. In the words of Anamika Basnet "Every time people of Sikkim tried to establish their self-rule there was a covert design to suppress, and establishment of British and later Indian supremacy was more acceptable to the Feudal order than democratic rights of its citizens. The treaties and tripartite agreement are testimony of the

fact.” However the monarchs and their monarchy too were not long very much welcoming to the people. To quote her “the revolts were against the established despotism of the Monarchy and not against the person and his principles. The leader with whom the people of Sikkim had vested their complete faith betrayed them and the revolt was misdirected to avenge the King on a personal vendetta”. Hence due to the geographical position and its importance the insurgencies during various periods of time of the different groups of people against the ruling class have led to a platform for an overall transformation of the area. Sikkim Citizenship Regulation of 1961 put forth “in Sikkim where reverse inequality prevails in the population, to ensure that social structural attributes of the population are taken due care of and historical right and need rights are respected, the justice right of the entire indigenous population of Sikkim to be considered as Scheduled Tribe must receive due consideration”. Hence the fruits of real democracy are a matter of time for this state.

Thus it may be summed up that the geographical location and the common problems related to the ethnic strifes should be dealt with care and patience so as to sustain the integrity of the land. In the words of Pawan Kumar Chamling, the Chief Minister of Sikkim since 1994, “Our efforts should be directed towards not only reducing suspicion among the people but also providing a conducive environment for development of a civic and democratic polity.” Infiltration of people from across the borders of the state is yet another problem, which should be taken care of. The disintegration process that reduced Sikkim to its present size is nothing but the yet another greed of human kind.

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