

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF SIKKIM FROM 1642-1889

JEENA TAMANG

PH.D SCHOLAR

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, SIKKIM UNIVERSITY, SIKKIM, INDIA

## ABSTRACT

*Namgyal dynasty was founded Phuntsog Namgyal in 1642. The formation of this dynasty was not easy. The first king or Chogyal had to suppress the rebels of three tribes Lepcha, Limbu, and Mangar. After suppressing the revolt of tribes, the centralized administrative structure was established which was based on the pattern of the lamaistic theocracy of Tibet. Similar to Tibet, the Chogyal of Sikkim had both temporal and secular authority. Moreover, Tibetan influences were visible in social, political, religious, and cultural aspects of Namgyal dynasty and continued to exist till the end of the nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century in 1889, Sikkim came under the British influence. With this the Tibetan influences end in Sikkim. The traditional administrative structure was also changed and modified in modern line.*

**Keywords:** *Chogyal, Theocracy, Tibet, Nineteenth century, British*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Namgyal dynasty was the first and the last dynasty of Sikkim. This dynasty traced the descendants from Tibet and was founded by a monarch of Tibetan origin in 1642 with the help of three Tibetan Lamas. The first king or *Chogyal* of this dynasty was Phuntsog Namgyal and last was Palden Thondup Namgyal. The establishment of the Namgyal dynasty was not smooth at first. The tribes Lepcha, Limbu, and Mangar, residing in the country before 1642, refused to acknowledge Phuntsog Namgyal as their king. Thus, he had to fight continuously with the tribes. Finally he suppresses the revolt and concluded a treaty. After that a central administrative structure was organized based on Tibetan lamaistic patterns. In the central administrative structure, as the Dalai Lama of Tibet, the *Chogyal* was the spiritual and temporal head of the state [Sinha, 2008; 39]. Moreover, *Chogyal* looks up to Tibet for guidance and support. As a consequence of this, Sikkim had a very close connection with Tibet. Due to the closeness, Sikkim was greatly influenced by Tibet. However, once the British intervention started in Sikkim, the administrative structure of Namgyal's based on the Tibetan style collapsed and marked the end of Tibetan influences in Sikkim.

## 2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NAMGYAL DYNASTY

The initial year of Phuntsog's enthronement was not smooth. The *Chogyal* had to fight intermittently to subdue the frequently occurred rebellion of tribes. Most of the time, he had to employ forces to bring the tribes under his fold [Chhetri, 2012; 87]. Eventually, the tribes could not stand long against the excellent maneuver of Phuntsog, who had the support of three intelligent Tibetan Lamas. Thus by the end, Phuntsog gains victory despite tough resistance made by the tribes. Eventually, they accept Phuntsog as their king and surrender of their lands. Nonetheless, total peace to the newly established kingdom was possible only after the conclusion of the *Lhomentsongsum* Treaty signed in 1663 [Mullard, 2011; 140].

After all this, the first-ever central administrative structure was established based on the Tibetan model. The central government was supervised by the *Chogyal* and his main tasks were maintenance of law and order, protection of the country, and its subjects from the enemy, etc. At the central level, he was assisted by various officers, who looked after the administrative requirements of the country. At the district level, district officers *Dzongpon* were appointed to deal the districts affairs [Chhetri, 2012; 88]. Finally, at bottom there were commoners. The appointment of the

officers was based on the faithful services to the *Chogyal*. As Maharaja Thudop Namgyal and Maharani Yeshay Dolma explain, “those distinguished themselves by loyal and faithful services, saying that the post of Minister and Prime Ministers would be conferred on them. On the other hand, those who did not serve well would be classed amongst the common people and required to contribute services as were required by the Maharaja, and that thenceforth” [Namgyal & Dolma, 1908; 20].

### 3. THE TIBETAN INFLUENCE IN SIKKIM

Once the Namgyal dynasty was established, the Sikkimese political culture was patterned on the model of Tibetan lamaist ideology and administrative practice. Sikkim lies within Tibetan influence; therefore, Sikkimese culture was purely based on Tibetan fashion. Like the Tibetan king, the *Chogyal* of Sikkim was supposed to rule the subjects in accordance with the tenets of the '*Chhos' Dharma* [Sinha, 2008; 39]. As traditional Tibetan government, which was the formation of clerical and lay elements, the *Chogyal* of Sikkim was aided by an assembly of monks and laymen, called *Lhadhi-Mede* (the assembly of elders) composed dominantly by the Bhutia lamas [Gurung, 2011; 47]. Further, the social and religious system introduced in Sikkim was the adoption of the Tibetan religion-political theory of state and political power, as represented by *lugs gnyis* (a system based on the unification of the secular or political sphere with that of the religious or spiritual [Mullard, 2011; 23]. Similar, to Tibet the bravery of the soldiers in Sikkim earned titles. For instance, during *Chogyal* Tenzing Namgyal reign *Donyer* Chagdor son of Solpon Tsang Namgyal, had performed the most faithful and loyal services at crisis. Thus for his loyal and faithful services, he was rewarded with the post and title of *Dewan*; afterward, he was also called the aged Kazi Londepo [Namgyal & Dolma, 1908; 49].

The presence of Tibetan regent Jigme Pao indeed widened the Tibetan influence in the court of Namgyal [Kotturan, 1983: 38]. The matrimonial alliances with the aristocrats of Tibet and Sikkim further widened the closeness and almost every *Chogyal* had a Tibetan wife. The influence of Tibet in Namgyal's court was such that almost everything was taken from Tibet. Like religion, titles as such *Kalon* and *Dzongpon*, language, manners, and customs etc [Debnath, 2009; 22]. Besides this, the land economy of the Namgyal dynasty also seems to be influenced by Tibet. Thus right after Phuntsog Namgyal, Sikkim looked upon Tibet in almost every aspect from decision making to guidance. More over this practice continued to flourish in Sikkim till the end of the nineteenth century. However, under the British influences the administrative structures of Sikkim based on the model of Tibetan lamaist patterns also changed to suit the British interest in Sikkim.

### 4. ADVENT OF THE BRITISH IN SIKKIM

The initial connection between Sikkim and British India starts during the reign of *Chogyal* Tsugphud Namgyal. Unlike his father and forefather, *Chogyal* Tsugphud Namgyal was not favored with help and support from Tibet. Especially, when Sikkim had territorial integrity with Gurkhas (Nepal) who continued to occupied Sikkimese territory [Kotturan, 1983; 43]. Eventually, it made Sikkim to seek the help of the British to derive out the Gurkhas from Sikkim [Namgyal & Dolma, 1908; 55]. Consequently, Sikkim was involved in the diplomacy of British and was considered British ally in the Anglo-Nepalese war 1814-1816. With this, Sikkim, for the first time, came under the influence of the British [Bhattacharya, 1992; 66]. The War came to be an end with the Treaty at Segauli in 1816. Again a new treaty was signed between the British and Sikkim at Titalia in 1817. This Treaty granted Sikkim protection against the Gorkha invasion, but it also marked the beginning of the end of Sikkim's independence and initiated the British penetration [Bhattacharya, 1992; 66-67]. Once again, the Treaty of Tumlong was signed in 1861. The Treaty had twenty-three articles, and it spelled out a more elaborate relationship between Sikkim and British India. It made Sikkim a *de facto* protectorate of the British [Shukla, 1976; 26]. However, it was the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890 which determined the border between Tibet and Sikkim and expressly acknowledged the British supremacy in Sikkim. So far as the status of Sikkim was concerned, its external affairs and internal administration came directly under the authority of the British Government of India [Sengupta, 1985; 6].

### 5. THE FIRST POLITICAL OFFICER IN SIKKIM

Under the British's influences, the processes of changes have taken place on its relation with Tibet and its traditional socio-political existences. As said before, with the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty, Sikkim had maintained close and cordial relationship with Tibet. But, under the British, the relationship between Tibet and Sikkim deteriorated and it was started with the appointment of Political Officer. One year before the signing of the

Convention, in 1889, the British Government appointed John Claude White as the first Political Officer to checkmate the Tibetan influence in Sikkim [Sinha, 2008: 60]. After white's appointment, he retains all the powers of the *Chogyal*. Consequently, he would advise and assist the *Chogyal* in administration. He would act as the final authority for the matters that were referred to him by the landlords. He had the sanctioning authority of the state budget on behalf of India's government and, as such, exerted a great influence on the economic matters of the state. In fact, the remaining powers in the hand of the *Chogyal* were the only nominal as the British frequently over-ruled the royal decision and, on occasions, even imprisoned the *Chogyal* [Debnath, 2009; 24]. Meanwhile, White created the Advisory Council. The creation of the Advisory Council was an initial step to end the Tibetan influences from Sikkimese court. In short, the Advisory Council was formed after replacing the traditional Council which was appointed by the *Chogyal* [Sinha, 1975; 20]. In Council, the Political Officer acted as the president, and Council members acted as his advisory body. It was through this Council the Political Officer administered the state affairs [Chhetri, 2012; 100-101].

## 6. CONCLUSION

The political background of the Namgyal dynasty was based on the Tibetan style. Thus Tibetan influences were deeply rooted Sikkim. As Dalai Lama, *Chogyal* was both spiritual and temporal head and ruled the country as per the tenets of *Dharma*. However, the traditional administrative structure of Namgyal's discontinued with the arrival of the British. By the end of the nineteenth century, Sikkim came under the direct influence of the British. Under the British, the Political Officer was appointment in Sikkim. Eventually, he took control over the administration of the state. Meanwhile, the Political Officer's measures marked the end of the Tibetan influences in Sikkim. Indeed, with the creation of the Advisory Council the Political Officer left no stone unturned to de-Tibetanise the administrative structures of Sikkim and transformed it into modern line to suit their interest.

## 7. REFERENCES

- [1]. Bhattacharya, Aparna. (1992). *The Prayer-Wheel & Sceptre: Sikkim*. Calcutta: Nachiketa Publication Ltd.
- [2]. Chhetri, Durga P. (2012). *Decentralized Governance and Development in India*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- [3]. Debnath, Jagadish Chandra. (2009). *Economic History and Development of Sikkim*. Delhi: Abhijeet Publication.
- [4]. Gurung, Suresh Kumar. (2011). *Sikkim Ethnicity and Political Dynamic: A Triadic Perspective*. New Delhi: Kunal Book.
- [5]. Kotturan, George. (1983). *The Himalayan Gateway: History and Culture of Sikkim*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.
- [6]. Mullard, Saul. (2011). *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History*. BOSTON: BRILL.
- [7]. Namgyal, Maharaja Sir Thutob and Maharani Yeshey Dolma. (1908). *History of Sikkim*. Translated by kazi Dousandup. Sikkim: Unpublished typed ms., Preserved at the Namgyal Institution of Tibetology.
- [8]. Sengupta, N. (1985). *State: Government and Politics Sikkim*. New Delhi: Sterling Publisher.
- [9]. Shukla, Satyendra R. (1976). *Sikkim the Story of Integration*. New Delhi, S. Chand & Co (Pvt) Ltd.
- [10]. Sinha, A. C. (2008). *Sikkim Feudal and Democracy*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing.
- [11]. Sinha, Awadhesh, Coomar. (1975). *Politics of Sikkim: A Sociological Study*. Delhi: Thomson Press (India) Limited.