

THE SETTLEMENT OF NEPALESE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY OF SIKKIM

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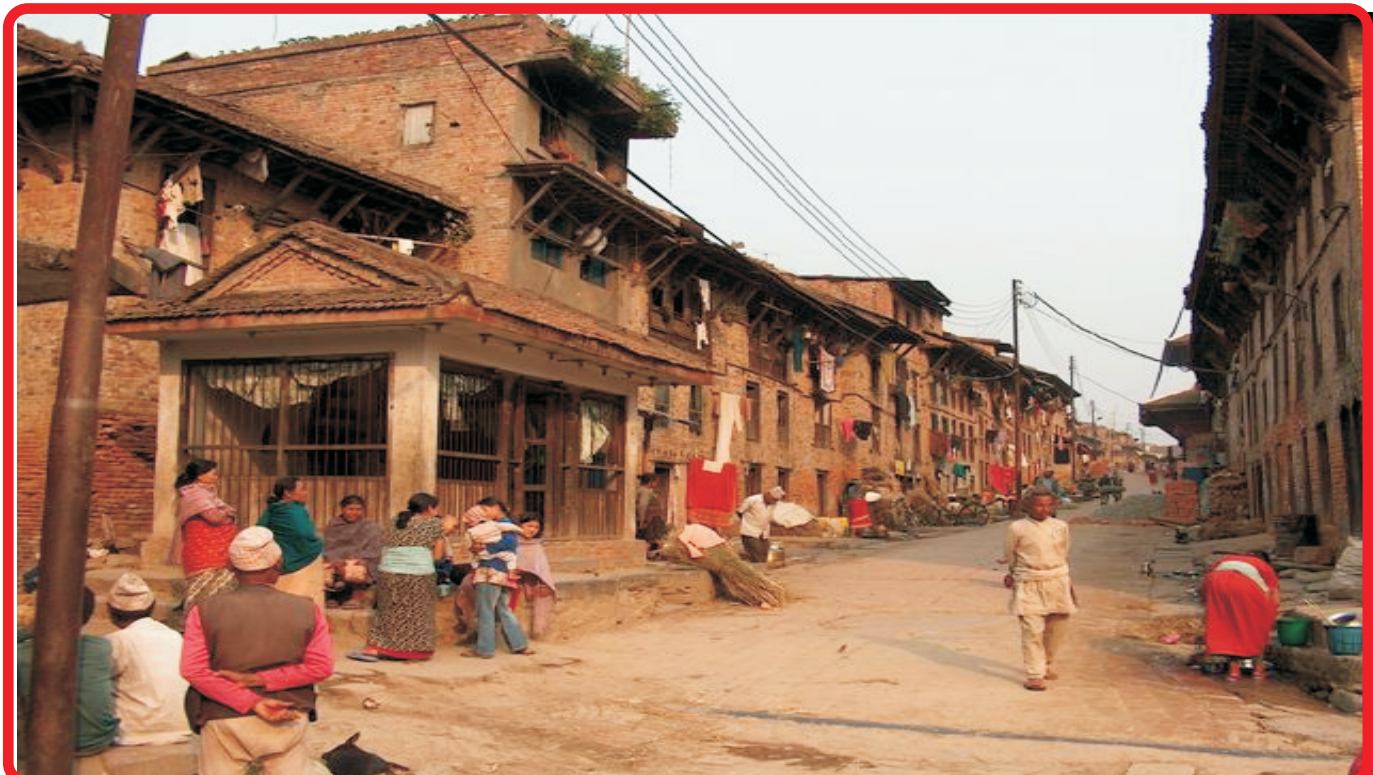
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Abstract:-

This paper is a survey of the settlement of Nepalese in Sikkim from 18th to 20th century and its impact on the economy of Sikkim. Prior to the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty the economy of Sikkim depended on agriculture and cattle rearing. The whole area was covered with dense forests and the requirements of the people were met by its produce in the form of fodder and fuels. The scanty population could move and settle anywhere along with their families and cattle. With the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty in 1642 a new kingdom of Sikkim came into being. They tried to give a uniform system of administration and the state was formed and the process of assimilation of different stocks and races viz. the Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Nepalese continued till the first half of the 20th century. This process resulted in a number of social and economic systems either by adaptation or copying the system that prevailed in Sikkim, Tibet and Nepal. In the late 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century Sikkim started having a close contact with the neighbouring country of Nepal by the way of Nepalese conquests of Sikkimese lands in the south-west and cross border movements. The Nepalese started settling down on the lands thus conquered. The other factors responsible for the settlement of Nepalese in Sikkim were the Anglo-Nepalese of 1814-16 and the Treaty of Titalia between the British and Sikkim in 1817. By this Treaty the British granted back the territories of Sikkim earlier conquered by Nepal and the Nepalese who had already settled in the conquered areas of Sikkim became the subject of Sikkim ruler. With the British occupation of Darjeeling Nepalese further started settling down there due to the British encouragement as they needed cheap labour for plantation works started by the British. The movement of these people into Sikkimese territories was further noticed. With their settlement they brought in many systems that prevailed among them which led to many changes in the economy of Sikkim.

Keywords:

Namgyal, chogyal, singpo, kalons, dzongpons, che-se, kang, jama, mana, murhi, pathi, bisa panja, raiti, adhia, kut, theki- bethi, chardam, dhuri-khazana, dooba, chepte paisa.



OBJECTIVE:

Sikkim is the land of three communities, viz. the Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Nepalese. The Lepchas were the original inhabitants, the Bhutias came from Tibet and the Nepalese were the later settlers. The rulers of Sikkim were the Bhutias and brought in new system of administration. The economic systems that prevailed in Tibet were introduced in Sikkim with certain modifications. However in the subsequent periods the Nepalese settlements led to new economic systems ranging from agriculture and taxation which fully dominated the old systems and changed its nomenclatures. The productivity increased due to the farming systems introduced by them. The implements introduced by them were durable and consumed less labour.

This paper aims to analyze:

The settlement of Nepalese in Sikkim.
The introduction of new system of cultivation and agricultural implements.
New systems of classification of lands and land revenue.

Research Design:**Secondary Sources**

Extensive review of literature was done to collect information in order to understand the impact of Nepalese settlement in Sikkim during the Namgyal period. For this many libraries in Gangtok, National Library Kolkata and North Bengal University Library has been consulted.

Primary Sources

In order to understand the problem reports of various British Missions have been thoroughly analyzed. Interviews with officials of Sikkim and academicians have also been conducted.

INTRODUCTION

Sikkim, a tiny state Himalayan state of North-East India, was ruled by the Namgyals from 1642 to 1975 before it merged with the Indian union. Prior to the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty the area was covered dense forests where the old inhabitants, the Lepchas and the Limboos led semi-nomadic lives. They moved from one place to another in search of virgin lands for their survival. With the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty the economy of the state depended as usual on agriculture, forests and its produce for their daily needs. They still practiced traditional method of farming and shifting cultivation. A few changes were noticed in the economy before the settlement of the Nepalese. The Namgyals introduced the collection of land revenue in kind. The revenue payment was like paying tributes to the state in the form of newly gathered crops, grains, fruits and forest produce and the amount was not fixed. People could settle down on any uninhabited land and it was not measured.

With the formation of the state, the ruler termed as chogyal became the head of the state. He became the sole proprietor of lands and the absolute owner of all subjects. The state was divided into twelve districts and distributed among the ministers and the governors respectively termed as kalons and dzongpons. They in turn divided their share among some cultivators, the singpo. These singpos were granted lands on certain conditions that cultivable lands would be created by clearing the forests and dividing the produce equally between a cultivator and the landlords (kalons and dzongpons) as che-se or asking the cultivator to pay certain amount in kind. However, a singpo could settle down on any unoccupied land and cultivate and no formality was needed for this purpose.

Till 1748 the system of paying tribute to the ruler and dividing the produce between the cultivator and the landlords continued. However, in 1748 during the reign of fifth Namgyal ruler, a Tibetan named Rabden Sharpa came to Sikkim and ruled in the name of the minor chogyal. He introduced new system of revenue on Tibetan lines called the kang. The rent on land whether paid by the tenant to the landlord or by a landlord to the government was based on kang. Kang was determined by the seeds required for a particular plot of land and the requirement of seed depended on the quality of land. In a particular area where the soil was good and fertile the seeds were sown more closely than the poor quality soil which produced less. Hence more seeds were needed to sow in fertile land than that of less fertile land and in such a case the kang was higher in the former and lesser in the latter. Thus the revenue paid by the cultivator and the landlord on the basis of kang were different from district to district. Besides land revenue the Bhutia and the Lepcha subjects of Sikkim chogyal paid other taxes for using forest produce, tax on animals and tax on salt trade.

NEPALESE SETTLEMENT IN SIKKIM

The Nepalese started settling in Sikkim in the last decade of the 18th century during the reign of sixth Namgyal ruler Tenzing Namgyal. During his reign the Gurkhas of Nepal started their raids and their

commanders viz. Purna Alley, Jahar Sen and Damodar Pandey occupied territories of west and south Sikkim. The Sikkim chogyal fled to Tibet and the palace, monasteries and the administration came into the hands of Nepalese commanders. In 1791-92 a negotiation took place between the Chinese, Tibetan and the Gurkhas of Nepal took place in Tibet where the Chinese representatives asked the Gurkhas to return the earlier portions back to Sikkim which they had occupied. At this Sikkim failed to send any representatives as the ruler of Sikkim was in exile. The Gurkha representatives told that Sikkim boundary was up to the river Teesta and the areas to the west of Teesta were of Nepal. The ruler of Sikkim being a helpless refugee in Tibet the Gurkhas took possession of major portion of Sikkim in the west. After these negotiations the Nepalese started penetrating into Sikkim. They pushed in Sikkim from west and a large number of Nepalese settled at Nagri and paid rents to Nepal for some years.

The Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-15 was responsible for the settlement of Nepalese in Sikkim. Nepal lost the war and it came to a conclusion by signing the Treaty of Sagauli in 1815. She had to cede the hilly tracts situated to the east of Mechi river and to the west of the Teesta formerly occupied by her to British. To reward Sikkim for the help she rendered to British during the war they concluded a separate treaty with Sikkim in 1817 at Titalia. By this treaty the tracts lying to the east of Mechi river and to the west of Teesta were ceded to Sikkim. The Nepalese who had earlier settled in these areas now became the natural subject of Sikkim.

Another factor responsible for the settlement of Nepalese in Sikkim was the British occupation of Darjeeling in 1835. Tsugphud Namgyal ceded Darjeeling to British for a sanatorium without any condition. The settlement of Nepalese population advanced rapidly due to plantation works undertaken by British tea planters. The British encouraged the Nepalese and the people from Sikkim and the plains to settle down in Darjeeling. A number of Nepalese populations further pushed into Sikkimese territory.

The reign of Thutob Namgyal witnessed the settlement of a large number of Nepalese in west Sikkim. Nepalese were granted settlement by his ministers who allowed them to settle at Kitam, Chakung, Reshi, Rammam, Namchi and Sadam. Some sections of ministers were against the settlement which led to a misunderstanding between pro-settlement and anti-settlement ministers. The matter was settled by Ashley Eden, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in 1878 that the Nepalese were allowed to settle in south Sikkim on uninhabited lands. However, it was Mr. J. C. White, the first British Political Officer of Sikkim, who encouraged the settlement of Nepalese in order to bring more lands under cultivation thereby raising the revenue of the state.

CHANGES IN ECONOMY

During the Namgyal period the economy of Sikkim depended on agriculture. Cultivation of land was made for consumption and payment of revenues in kind. Sikkim being a mountainous kingdom having diverse climate, it was difficult to cultivate crops equally in all parts. The northern part being covered with snow clad mountains and forests it was not fertile enough and was unfit for cultivation. The people living in lowlands of south and west Sikkim practiced agriculture on fertile tracts. The methods of cultivation consisted of clearance of forests by cutting down of trees and were set on fire when dried. The implements used by the Bhutias and the Lepchas before the coming of the Nepalese consisted of simple nature such as hoes and clubs made of oak. The Bhutias brought spades called jama into Sikkim from Tibet. The crops like buckwheat, barley, wheat, mustard, rice and maize were grown. Rice were sown however it was not irrigated.

With the entry of the Nepalese a change in the mode of cultivation took place and a large variety of crops were grown in Sikkim. The industrious and enterprising Nepalese cultivators taught the Bhutias and the Lepchas to terrace hills, and the use of bullock drawn plough and to till the lands with the help of furrows. Rice was cultivated in these terraced fields and irrigated which gave high yields. The implements used by the Nepalese were better when compared with the Bhutias and the Lepchas. The introduction of kodali spade used by them gave way to old method of farming in Sikkim. The Nepalese cultivated every available portion of land and kept their plough engaged as much as they could. Due to this the increase of yields became evident in Sikkim.

With the interaction with the Nepalese the system related to land revenue and taxation among them found way into Sikkim. The lands began to be classified according to the fertility and produce per seeds sown and taxes were calculated on the basis of mana, murhi and pathi (mana was the smallest unit of measurement of seed common among the Nepalese, twelve manas was equal to one pathi and twenty pathis made one murhi). Later some of the Nepalese belonging to the Newar community got the right to settle cultivators in south and west Sikkim where they introduced the bisa panja system of land revenue which literally meant five out of twenty. Thus the revenue came to be collected at the rate of one fourth of the produce. With them another system of payment of tax called dhuri-khazana or house tax entered Sikkim. A dhur was an imaginary measurement of ten long steps of an average man each on all four sides and the area was thought to be sufficient to build a house. Later a house was referred as dhuri by the Nepalese and it became a common term for a house in Sikkim. In the late 19th century the dhuri-khazana was to be paid both in cash and kind at the rate of 1 rupee or one murhi of rice.

In the 19th century the ministers and the governors of Sikkim allowed a number of Nepalese to settle down on the lands under their jurisdiction. Even the common Bhutia and the Lepcha cultivators who

had large tracts of lands granted these to Nepalese cultivators. From now onwards these cultivators came to be commonly known as the raitis. These raitis cultivated the lands of the landlords and those of common Bhutias and the Lepchas under Nepalese condition of adhia and kut. Adhia was same as che-se, i.e., distributing the produce equally between the landlord and the cultivator however, kut was an amount of produce to be paid to the landlord

which was pre-fixed before the settlement. The kutdars or the payers of kut had to work in the fields of the landlords and during the the festivals they were required to present gifts to the landlords and to the ruler in the form of milk and its products, meat, eggs, fruits and grains. This system came to be known as theki-bethi which was common among all the cultivators. Later with the coming of the British administration the bisa- panja system was abolished and the settled Nepalese starting acquiring new lands by paying the chardam to the landlords. The settlement under this system was that a settler had to pay to the respective landlord of the area a nominal sum of 4 paisa, four pathis of rice, four pathis of millet and butter. The chardam system of granting lands to new cultivators attracted a number of Nepalese cultivators in the late 19th century.

Another contribution of the Nepalese in Sikkim was the beginning of mining and coinage. Sikkim had some mineral deposits however, it remained unexplored till 1860s. The people of Sikkim mostly Buddhists, had a belief that the attempts to make use of the treasure below the earth are visited on those living above the surface by sickness of men and cattle, and by failure of crops. Thus the search for metals was in every way discouraged.

In 1860s Luchmidas Pradhan, a Newar trader of Nepalese community, got the permission from the officers of Sikkim chogyal, viz. Phodong Lama and Khangsa Dewan to explore the copper mines of Sikkim on payment of Rs. 700 annually to them. This amount was to be paid annually and the profits were to be enjoyed by Luchmidas and his descendants. He was granted full powers to settle new cultivators, settle cases and impose fines within the area granted to him. In 1883 Thutob Namgyal, the ruler of Sikkim, granted permission to explore copper mining in south Sikkim on payment of Rs. 200 per year. This was done so that earlier the officers had granted this right without the permission of the ruler. This was the beginning of mining in Sikkim.

The method of working mines and extraction of metal from the ore undertaken by the Nepalese miners was very rude. Almost every mine was abandoned long before the vein of ore had been exhausted. Some thousand mounds were extracted and exported to Nepal by

Luchmidas Pradhan. Not only this, Luchmidas Pradhan was also granted permission to mint copper coins for Sikkimese ruler with consultation with the British Government in 1883. In that year he minted copper coins called chepte paisa and dooba paisa and the permission was granted for five years. These copper coins also began to be c10.0

irculated in Nepal and Tibet. However, in 1884 the Nepal Government disallowed the circulation of Sikkimese copper and copper coins. This was mainly due to rudeness and the copper coins were found to be of lesser weight than that of Nepal. The other reason to disallow the export of copper in Nepal was that a number of Nepalese belonging to Kami and Magar community were employed in Sikkim to work in mines. This led to the emigration of a large number of these people from Nepal to Sikkim. To prevent further emigration Nepal put a ban on the import of Sikkim copper, besides restricting the entry of Sikkimese coins. This led to natural death of copper mining in Sikkim. Later during the British administration the mining business was granted to Messers. Burn and Company, a Calcutta based company of London.

CONCLUSION

The settlement of Nepalese in Sikkim brought some changes in the economy and the nature of land revenue systems. The economic systems that existed in Nepal entered Sikkim. They introduced new methods of cultivation by way of terracing of the fields and the use of bullock drawn plough. Lands began to be classified into three different categories on the basis of fertility and as per the seeds sown. The Nepalese measurement replaced the earlier systems. The system of settling the cultivators under the arrangements of adhia and kut was a new system in Sikkim. Their settlement had a great impact on the economic system of Sikkim due to cultivation in large numbers by terracing the fields and due to the use of new technology. The beginning of mining and minting of copper coins was a new idea and a source of income to the kingdom of Sikkim.

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