

Sikkim

State (pop., 2008 est.: 594,000), northeastern India.

The modern history of Sikkim begins from 1642 A.D. with the coronation of Phuntsog Namgyal as the first Chogyal or king of Sikkim in a tranquil pine covered hill in Yuksom Norbugang in West Sikkim. The Namgyals were scions of the Mi-nyak House in Kham in Eastern Tibet. It is said that there were three brothers, chiefs of Kham Mi-nyak. A letter dropped from heaven directed the middle brother to go south towards Sikkim where his descendents were fated to rule. It was in Sakya that his eldest son single-handedly raised the pillars of the Sakya monastery and earned himself the sobriquet of 'Khye Bumsa' (the strength of a lakh of men)

Khye Bumsa also earned himself the hand of the daughter of the Sakya hierarch and settled in Chumbi Valley, which remained, for a long time, the epicenter of the later kingdom of Sikkim.

Long troubled by the fact that he and his wife were issueless, Khye Bumsa sought the blessings of the Lepcha chieftain Thekongtek who was reputed to be able to grant the boon of progeny. Khye Bumsa's wife subsequently bore him three sons. Later Khye Bumsa and Thekong Tek swore the historic pact of eternal friendship at Kabi Longtsok in North Sikkim.

Khye Bumsa's third son Mipon Rab succeeded his father. He, in turn, was succeeded by his fourth son Guru Tashi who moved to Gangtok. Meanwhile Thekongtek passed away and the Lepchas who started fragmenting into small tribes turned to Guru Tashi for leadership and protection.

The Sikkim Coronation book describes Guru Tashi as the 'first ruler of Sikkim who paved way for a regular monarchy'.

Five generations later, it was Phuntsog Namgyal who was consecrated as the first Denjong Gyalpo or the king of Sikkim by the three great Lamas who came from the North, West and South to Yuksom Norbugang in West Sikkim in 1642 A.D. The event, predicted as it was by Guru Rinpoche, was the 'Nalgor Chezhi' or the meeting of the four yogic brothers or the four saints or four sages. It was preordained that three saints of great repute from different parts of Tibet make their way to Bayul Demajong (Sikkim) to discharge their responsibility of upholding and propogating the essence of Dharma in the hidden land of Demajong. Thus it was that Lhatsun Namkha Jigme, Kathog Kuntu Zangpo and Gnadak Sempa Phuntsog Rigzin made their way to Sikkim separately, and through impenetrable routes.

This historical congregation of the three holy Lamas is called Yuksom, which in Lepcha means the 'Three Superior Ones'.

Lhatsun Chenpo impressed on the other two that they were all Lamas and needed a layman to rule the kingdom righteously. He further pointed out that, 'In the prophecy of Guru Rinpoche, it is written that four noble brothers shall meet in Demajong and arrange for its government. We were three of those who came from the North, West and South'. As for the East, he quoted the oracular guide book Rinchen Lingpa which mentioned, 'One of my four avatars will be like a lion, the king among beasts, who will protect the kingdom by his bravery and powers'. The book also mentioned that, 'One named Phuntsog from the direction of Gang will appear'.

So Lhatsun Chenpo deputed a hermit called Togden Kalzang Thondup and a layman called Passang to lead a party to Gangtok in invite the person bearing the name of Phuntsog to come to Yuksom Norbugang. After several adventures, the party came to Gangtok where they met Phuntsog milking his cows. Phuntsog invited them in and bade them partake of fresh cow's milk and told them his name was Phuntsog. He saw the invitation of the three Lamas as a most fortuitous event and lost no time in setting out for Yuksom Norbugang with his entire retinue of followers, officers and household establishment. The coronation took place in the Chu-ta or water horse year in 1642A.D. Thus Phuntsog Namgyal was installed on the throne of Sikkim with the title of 'Chogyal' or king who rules with righteousness, with both spiritual and temporal powers. While the three Lamas spread Buddhism in Sikkim, Phuntsog Namgyal started consolidating his kingdom.

Twelve generations of Chogyals ruled over Sikkim for over 300 years. This tiny Himalayan kingdom however witnessed tumultuous change in 1972-73. In 1975 the institution of the Chogyal was abolished and on May 16th, 1975 Sikkim was formally inducted as the 22nd state of India.

FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT SIKKIM

Location	Approx 27 deg. North 88 deg. East
Area	7,096 sq.kms (0.22% of area of India)
State Population (As per 2001 Census)	540,493 (Male 288,217; Female 252,276).05% of the total population of India
Sex ratio (2001 Census)	986 females/1000 males
Density of population	76 per sq. miles
Capital	Gangtok
District, Areas & District Capitals	East District (954 sq. km) -Gangtok West District (1166 sq. km) -Gyalshing South District - Namchi North District (4226 sq.km) - Mangan
No. of Sub-Divisions	9 (Gangtok, Pakyong, Rongli, Namchi, Soreng, Gyalshing, Rabongla, Mangan, Chungthang)
Climate	Tropical, Temperate and Alpine
No. of Zilla Panchayat ward	100
No. of Gram Panchyat	166 units
No. of Revenue Blocks	454

Other Important towns	Jorethang, Singtam, Rangpo, Pakyong Rhenock, Meli, Chungthang and Soreng
Languages Spoken	Nepali, Bhutia, Lepcha, Limboo, Magar, Rai, Gurung, Sherpa, Tamang, Newari, Sunuwar (Mukhia).
Main occupations	Farmers, Cardamom Growers, Government Contractors and Government Employees.
Per Capita Income	Rs. 29,808/- (2005-06, at current prices)
Domestic product	Rs. 1717 crores (2005-06, at current prices)
Religions	Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity
Urban Population	11.1%
% below poverty line	19.2 (in 2005-06)
Birth rate	19.2 (in 2005-06 per 1000)
Death Rate:	4.5 (in 2005-06 per 1000)
Infant Mortality rate	32 (in 2005-06 per 1000)
State Day (the day Sikkim Became a part of India)	16th May
State Animal	Red Panda (<i>Ailurus fulgens</i>)
State Bird	Blood Pheasant (<i>Ithaginis cruentus</i>)
State Flower	Nobile Orchid (<i>Dendrobium nobile</i>)
State Tree	Rhododendron (<i>Rhododendron niveum</i>)
No. of Assembly seats	32
No. of Lok Sabha seats	1
No. of Rajya Sabha	1
No. of Police Stations	82 (2005-06)
Crime Statistics (1997)	Murders: 15 Robbery: 9 Theft: 115 Burglary: 56 Rape: 7; Kidnapping: 9
No. of Doordarsan TV	1 at Gangtok

High power Transmitters	1, MV & SW at Gangtok
No. of All India Radio Stations	
No. of Schools and Educational Institutions in the State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Primary 503 ▶ Middle (Junior) Schools 146 Secondary Schools 93 Senior Sec. Schools 41 Public Schools 4 Degree College 3 Engineering College 1 Medical College 1 B.Ed College 1 Law College 1 Sheda 1 Monastic Schools 70 Sanskrit parshala 12 Madrassa 7 Teachers Training Inst. 1 Industrial Training Inst. 1
Percentage of literacy	82 % (2005-06)
No. of hospitals	6, including Sir Thutob Namgyal Memorial & Manipal Referral Hospitals
No. of Primary Health Centre	24



His Excellency Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh, Governor of Sikkim



Pawan Chamling, Chief Minister of Sikkim, India

Council of Ministers

Mr. Pawan Chamling, Chief Minister Home Department, Finance Revenue and Expenditure Department, Development Planning, Economic Reforms and North East Council Affairs Department and departments not specially allotted to any other Minister.

Mr. Ran Bahadur Subba Roads and Bridges and Labour Department

Mr. Thenlay Tshering Bhutia Water Security and Public Health Engineering and Transport Departments

Mr. Dawa Norbu Takarpa Health Care, Human Services and Family Welfare, Animal Husbandry, Livestock, Fisheries and Veterinary Services and Parliamentary Affairs Department.

Mr. Narendra Kumar Pradhan Human Resource Development, Sports and Youth Affairs and Information Technology Department.

Mr. Dil Bahadur Thapa (Mangar) Urban Development and Housing, Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department.

Mr. Sonam Gyatso Lepcha Energy and Power and Cultural Affairs and Heritage Departments.

Mr. Chandra Bahadur Karki Rural Management and Development and Cooperation Departments.

Mr. Dawcho Lepcha Food Security and Agriculture Development and Horticulture & Cash Crops Development and Irrigation and Flood Control Departments.

Mr. Bhim Prasad Dhungel Tourism, Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management, Mines, Minerals and Geology and Science and Technology Departments.

Mrs. Tilu Gurung Buildings and Housing Department.

12) Ms. Neeru Sewa Commerce and Industries, Information and Public Relations, Printing and Stationary and Excise Departments.

In the eastern Himalayas, Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world, forms part of its western border with Nepal. It is also bordered by the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, Bhutan, and West Bengal state and has an area of 2,740 sq mi (7,096 sq km); the capital, Gangtok, is the state's largest settlement. As an independent country, it fought prolonged wars in the 18th and 19th centuries with Bhutan and Nepal. It first came under British influence in 1817, though it remained a semiautonomous princely state between British India and Tibet. It became an Indian protectorate in 1950 and, in 1975, a state of India. It is one of India's smallest states. It exports agricultural products and is one of the world's main producers of cardamom. Its mineral resources include copper, lead, zinc, coal, and iron ore.

It is located in the northeastern part of the country, in the eastern Himalayas. It is one of the smallest states in India. Sikkim is bordered by the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north and northeast, by Bhutan to the southeast, by the Indian state of West Bengal to the south, and by Nepal to the west. The capital is Gangtok, in the southeastern part of the state.

Long a sovereign political entity, Sikkim became a protectorate of India in 1950 and an Indian state in 1975. Its small size notwithstanding, Sikkim is of great political and strategic importance for India because of its location along several international boundaries. Area 2,740 square miles (7,096 square km). Pop. (2008 est.) 594,000.

Land

Sikkim is a basin surrounded on three sides by precipitous mountain walls. There is little lowland, and the variation in relief is extreme. Within a stretch of roughly 50 miles (80 km), the land rises from an elevation of about 750 feet (225 metres) in the Tista River valley to nearly 28,200 feet (8,600 metres) at Kanchenjunga, India's highest peak and the world's third highest mountain. The Singalila Range separates Sikkim from Nepal in the west, while the Dongkya Range forms the border with the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the east. Several passes across this range afford easy access to the Chumbi valley in Tibet and, beyond the valley, to the Tibetan capital of Lhasa.

Some two-thirds of Sikkim consists of perpetually snow-covered mountains, dominated by the Kanchenjunga massif. The residents of Sikkim have traditionally viewed the mountain as both a god and the abode of gods. The legendary Abominable Snowman, or yeti, called Nee-gued in Sikkim, is believed to roam its slopes. Other major peaks—all above 23,000 feet (7,000 metres)—include Tent, Kabru, and Pauhunri.

The Sikkim basin is drained by the Tista River and its tributaries, such as the Rangit, Lhonak, Talung, and Lachung, which have cut deep valleys into the mountains. Originating in the northeast from a glacier near the Tibetan border, the Tista River descends steeply, dropping about 15,700 feet (4,800 metres) to Rangpo (Rongphu), on the border with West Bengal, where it has cut a gorge through the Darjiling Ridge (7,000–8,000 feet [2,100–2,400 metres]) before emerging onto the Indo-Gangetic Plain.

Climate

Sikkim exhibits a variety of climatic types, from almost tropical conditions in the south to severe mountain climates in the north. In Gangtok, temperatures in January (the coldest month) drop into the low 30s F (about 0 °C); in August (the warmest month), temperatures may reach the low 80s F (about 28 °C). Depending on elevation and exposure, annual precipitation varies from 50 to 200 inches (1,270 to 5,080 mm), most occurring during the months of the southwest monsoon (May through October). The heavy rains and snows often trigger destructive landslides and avalanches.

Plant and animal life

More than two-fifths of Sikkim is forested. Sal (a type of hardwood), pandanus, palms, bamboos, ferns, and orchids are common in the subtropical forests found below about 5,000 feet (1,500 metres). In the temperate forests (5,000 to 13,000 feet [1,500 to 4,000 metres]), oak, laurel, maple, chestnut, magnolia, alder, birch, rhododendron, fir, hemlock, and spruce predominate. Alpine tundra replaces forest at the higher elevations.

Sikkim has a rich and varied animal life, including black bears, brown bears, red pandas, numerous species of deer, blue sheep, gorals (small goatlike mammals), and Tibetan antelope. Tigers, leopards, and lesser cats are also found. Birdlife includes pheasants, partridges, quail, eagles, barbets, Himalayan cuckoos, Tibetan black crows, and minivets. Sikkim has several national parks and a number of wildlife sanctuaries, which provide a protected environment for the state's diverse flora and fauna. The Kanchenjunga National Park (established in 1977), near the peak from which it draws its name, is among the largest of India's high-elevation conservation areas.

Population composition

Roughly three-fourths of Sikkim's residents are Nepalese in origin; most speak a Nepali (Gorkhali) dialect and are Hindu in religion and culture. About one-fifth of the population consists of Scheduled Tribes (an official category embracing indigenous peoples who fall outside the predominant Indian social hierarchy). The most prominent of these tribal groups are the Bhutia, the Lepcha, and the Limbu; they all speak Tibeto-Burman languages and practice Mahayana Buddhism as well as the indigenous Bon religion. There is a notable Christian minority in Sikkim, as well as a tiny community of Muslims. A small fraction of Sikkim's people belong to the Scheduled Castes (an official term designating those peoples who traditionally have occupied a low position within the Indian caste system).

Settlement patterns

The great majority of Sikkim's population is rural, living in scattered hamlets and villages. Gangtok is Sikkim's largest settlement. Other notable towns include Singtam, Rangpo, Jorethang, Naya Bazar, Mangan, Gyalshing, and Namchi.

Agriculture

Sikkim's economy is based predominantly on agriculture, with the sector engaging more than half of the working population. Corn (maize), rice, buckwheat, wheat, and barley are produced in terraced fields along the valley flanks. Beans, ginger, potatoes, vegetables, fruits, and tea also are grown. Sikkim is one of the world's principal producers of cardamom. Many of Sikkim's farmers also raise livestock, including cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, and poultry. Cattle and buffalo are limited mainly to the subtropical humid belt, while yaks and sheep are herded in the higher elevations in the north.

Resources and power

Copper, lead, and zinc are mined in Sikkim. The state also has deposits of other minerals, including coal, graphite, and limestone. Only a fraction of Sikkim's mineral resources are commercially exploited.

The hydroelectric potential of Sikkim's Tista River system is considerable. There are a few large hydroelectric stations and many smaller plants that provide energy to Gangtok, Rangpo, Singtam, and Mangan. Rural electrification has remained a government priority.

Manufacturing

Until the early 1970s, Sikkim had only cottage industries—producing handwoven textiles, carpets, and blankets—as well as traditional handicrafts, such as embroidery, scroll paintings, and wood carving. Since that time, several small-scale industries have developed. These produce, most notably, processed foods (including liquor), watches and watch jewels, and small electronics parts.

Transportation

Roads, though not extensive, are the primary mode of travel. Ropeways, which are similar to ski lifts, also have been provided at many points. The capital of Gangtok is nearly 75 miles (120 km) from the nearest airport, at Baghdogra, and 70 miles (110 km) from the railhead at Shiliguri, both in West Bengal.

Constitutional framework

The constitution of Sikkim provides for a governor—appointed by the president of India—as the head of state. The governor is aided by the state Council of Ministers, which is led by a chief minister. The Legislative Assembly (Vidhan Sabha) is a unicameral elected body, with a portion of the seats allocated to the combined Lepcha and Bhutia populations. One Lepcha-Bhutia seat is reserved for the nominee of the lamas (Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders); some seats also are reserved for representatives of the Scheduled Castes. The final court in the judiciary system is the High Court at Gangtok, from which appeals may be made to the Supreme Court of India. Lower courts include district courts, which handle both criminal and civil cases, and sessions courts, which generally handle civil cases; judicial magistrates rule on criminal offenses.

The state is divided into a handful of districts. Within each district, local headmen serve as liaisons between the people and the district administration. *Panchayats* (village councils) administer the villages and implement welfare programs.

Health

Sikkim has several hospitals and, in each district, at least one community health centre. Rural regions are served by primary health centres and subcentres. The state participates in national programs to control tuberculosis, blindness, and other diseases. Diarrheal diseases (including cholera), respiratory infections of various sorts, hepatitis, and family-planning issues remain among Sikkim's principal health concerns.

Education

Primary and secondary education in Sikkim is offered free of charge through hundreds of government schools. However, there also are many private schools operating within the state. Higher education is available at a number of institutions, including the Sikkim Manipal University of Health, Medical and Technological Sciences (1995) in Gangtok, as well as smaller colleges offering degrees in law, engineering, teaching, religious studies, and other fields.

Cultural life

Sikkim's cultural life, though showing strong Tibetan influences, retains a character derived from the various tribes of Sikkim and their pre-Buddhist customs. The most important festival of the year is the two-day Phanglhapsol festival in August or September, in which masked dancers perform in honour of Kanchenjunga, the presiding deity. The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (1958), in Gangtok, has one of the largest collections of Tibetan books in the world. Many monasteries are repositories of wall paintings, *thang-kas* (religious paintings mounted on brocade), bronze images, and other artworks.

History

Little is known of Sikkim's history prior to the 17th century. The state's name is derived from the Limbu words *su him*, meaning "new house." The Lepcha were early inhabitants of the region, apparently assimilating the Naong, Chang, Mon, and other tribes. The Bhutia began entering the area from Tibet in the 14th century. When the kingdom of Sikkim was established in 1642, Phuntsog Namgyal, the first

chogyal (temporal and spiritual king), came from the Bhutia community. The Namgyal dynasty ruled Sikkim until 1975.

Sikkim fought a series of territorial wars with both Bhutan and Nepal beginning in the mid-18th century, and Nepal subsequently came to occupy parts of western Sikkim and the submontane Tarai region to the south. It was during this period that the largest migration of Nepalese to Sikkim began. In 1816 these territories were restored to Sikkim by the British in return for its support during the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814–16), but by 1817 Sikkim had become a de facto protectorate of Britain.

The British East India Company obtained the city of Darjiling from Sikkim in 1835. Incidents between the British and Sikkim led to the annexation in 1849 of the submontane regions and the subsequent military defeat of Sikkim, culminating in the Anglo-Sikkimese Treaty of 1861. The treaty established Sikkim as a princely state under British paramountcy (though leaving the issue of sovereignty undefined), and the British were given rights of free trade and of road making through Sikkim to Tibet. In 1890 an agreement was concluded between the British and the Tibetans that defined the border between Sikkim and Tibet. Tibet also acknowledged the special relationship of British India with the kingdom of Sikkim. A British political officer was subsequently appointed to assist the *chogyal* in the administration of Sikkim's domestic and foreign affairs, in effect becoming the virtual ruler of the state.

After India attained independence in 1947, political parties began to be formed in Sikkim for the first time. Among their aims were the abolition of feudalism, the establishment of popularly elected government, and accession of Sikkim to India—all demands resisted by the *chogyal* and his supporters. The *chogyal* was unable to hold his ground, however. The bulwark of the feudal system was dismantled in 1949, with the abolition of noncultivating rent-collecting landowners. In 1950 the Indo-Sikkimese Treaty made Sikkim an Indian protectorate, with India assuming responsibility for the external relations, defense, and strategic communications of Sikkim. The terms of the treaty also included increased popular participation in government, and five general elections based on adult suffrage were held between 1952 and 1974. In the last of these elections, two rival parties merged to form the Sikkim Congress, which swept the polls. The party subsequently launched a campaign to obtain greater political liberties and rights, and the *chogyal* attempted to suppress the movement. When the situation got out of control, the *chogyal* asked the government of India to take over the administration. India prepared a constitution for Sikkim that was approved by its national assembly in 1974. In a special referendum held in 1975, more than 97 percent of the electorate voted for the merger of Sikkim with India. Sikkim became the 22nd state of India on May 15, 1975.
