



“Regional Politics and the Religious Constituency of Sikkim-THE SANGHA ASSEMBLY SEAT”

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Abstract:

Religion has been the chaperon of Sikkimese society since centuries. The state of Sikkim once a tiny himalayan kingdom, sovereign and independent, stood as a Feudal Buddhist Monarchy. The merger of this tiny kingdom with the Indian Union in 1975 lost its identity as a sovereign nation and thereby became the 22nd state of the Indian Union. The State Assembly of Sikkim has 32 legislative constituencies and each seat for Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha. The 32-member state assembly of the tiny Himalayan state of Sikkim has a unique feature having a seat reservation on religious basis known as the “Sangha Assembly Seat”. After the merger of the kingdom, the Sangha seat still exhibits its inimitable survival and has been protected by Article 371F (k), representing a certain section of society who follow Buddhism. The paper will be focusing on how religion has been the major factor in shaping the socio-politico environment of the state, the historical background of the Sangha seat in Sikkim, regional politics in the state, and finally its impact on the state politics of Sikkim.

Keywords: *Sangha, Buddhism, Constituency, Chogyal, Lhadi-Medi, Dharma, SKM, SDF, Monastic.*

Introduction:

The dawn of Indian independence was declared following the royal assent given by the Queen on the Indian independence bill on 13th July, 1947, which finally came into effect on 15th August, 1947. The framers of the Indian Constitution wisely opted for a democratic setup giving people the right to consent over themselves. India often described as a land of diversity, is a multi-culture, multi-ethnicity, multi-language, multi-religion and what not. The Indian political landscape witnessed hegemonic nature of Indian National Congress in the beginning two decades. But slowly with the rise of regional parties in the political play, the hegemony of INC was challenged in many parts and notably in the southern part of the nation in late 1960s. India having a diverse religion, culture, language, ethnicity, and many more, regional sentiment arose as one of the strongest determinants of Indian politics.

Sikkim the ancient Indrakil, has not much a written history before the Namgyal Dynasty. The enthronement of the first Denzong Chogyal (the Dharma Raja of Sikkim) of the Namgyal

Dynasty is also not precise, as the date of enthronement does not match with the Gazetteer of Sikkim and the monastic history, as on one hand the Gazetteer of Sikkim mentions 1642, and on the other hand the monastic history mentions 1609. However, 1642 has been accepted in general. With the merger of the tiny himalayan

kingdom of Sikkim in the Indian Union on 16th of May 1975, as the 22nd state, the regional sentiments have been observed very strong in the states political landscape as no single national party have been successful in forming the government of its own so far. Contrary to the mainland India, regional parties carrying the regional aspirations and sentiments have been the history writers in Sikkim. The state politics has witnessed the hegemony of regional parties since its merger. The collective Sikkimese identity has been one of the driving factors behind the success of regional parties in Sikkim.

The tiny state of Sikkim with the population of 6.32 lakhs approximately, has only 32 assembly constituencies out of which 12 has been reserved to the Bhutia-Lepcha, 2 seats reserved to Scheduled Caste, 17 seats General and significantly 1 reserved to the Sangha community. Sikkim has a unique feature of having a seat reservation on religious basis which is known as the “Sangha Seat”. Notably, the Sangha assembly constituency does not have any geographical territory or margins that defines its exact territorial dominion. All those monks who are affiliated to any of the recognised monastery are the eligible voters of Sangha assembly constituency. As of 2024, there are approximately 3000 voters of the Sangha assembly constituency.

Despite being the smallest assembly constituency with least voters, the Sangha assembly has played a vital role in the states political landscape.

Methodology:

Sangha as an institution has a long history in Sikkim. Sangha is not just a mere institution; it has a long historical legacy passed through generations. Therefore, the present article is largely historical and exploratory in nature, as it seeks to explain the historical aspect of the Sangha institution, the political developments that took place in Sikkim in due time and parallelly the factors that led to survival of Sangha as a unique assembly constituency.

Analytical and descriptive method has also been applied to understand, analyse and describe the existence of Sangha institution despite many challenges. Further, both primary and secondary materials including Government reports, gazetteer, historical manuscripts, books, journals, pamphlets, brochures, newspapers and online sources have been analysed and used.

The Meaning of Sangha:

The Buddhist Tibetan prayer goes ‘*Sangye Chyodang Tshogyi Chognamla, Jangchub Bardu Dagni Kyabsuchi, Daaggi Jinsog Gyipey Sonam Kyi, Drolaa Penchir Sangye Drubpar Shyog*’, simply meaning ‘*May I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the supreme Sangha, until I attain enlightenment. By the merit I accumulate from practicing generosity and the other perfections, may I attain enlightenment in order to benefit all living beings.*’ In Buddhism, Sangha is considered as one of the three jewels, the other two being Buddha and Dharma. All these three jewels play a crucial support for the practitioners of Buddhism.

The term ‘Sangha’ originates from Sanskrit which refers to all the practitioners of Buddha’s teachings. Elaborately, it may be referred to the ordained monks, nuns, arhats, Bodhisattvas etc. It is the assembly of those who follow the Buddha’s path for the ultimate realization of the self and attain Nirvana, following the path of Dharma. Sangha as a community has been playing a vital part in preserving, practicing and propagating the Buddha dharma. The Sangha in general may be defined as the followers of Buddhas teachings who give up their worldly life and dedicate whole of their life seeking *nirvana* from this endless cycle of *samsara*. But, the definition of Sangha in Sikkim’s context is bit different. One can still have a family, society and materialistic life and be the member of Sangha. Monks have their family, they have a say in society, and even an electoral constituency to represent the Sangha community. This sole feature makes the Sangha community of Sikkim different from the rest.

The Buddhist Theocratic Kingdom of Sikkim:

Sikkim, the name derived from the Limboo word ‘*Su-Khim*’, meaning the ‘*new house*’, the Lepchas call it ‘*Ney-Mel-Renjong-Lang*, meaning the ‘*hidden-paradise*’, and the Bhutias call it ‘*Beyul-Demojong*’ meaning

the 'hidden valley of rice', the 22nd state of the Indian Union nestled between the international borders of Tibet-autonomous region of China in the North, the Republic of Nepal in the West, and the Kingdom of Bhutan in the East once had a sovereign identity landlocked from all the parts.

Sikkim is believed to be the most sacred land as it has been blessed by many great Buddhist saints and lamas (Buddhist spiritual teacher). The history of Buddhism in Sikkim can be traced with the visit of the great patron saint Guru Padmasambhava in the 8th century A.D. Guru Padmasambhava, the second Buddha widely known as *Guru Rinpoche* (precious guru), *Padma Jyungney* (lotus born), *Dui-Sum-Sangey* (Buddha of three whiles i.e., Buddha of the past, Buddha of the present and Buddha of the future) upon the invitation of the Tibetan king Trisong Detsen, travelled the Himalayan belt enroute Sikkim and Bhutan. With his entry in Sikkim, the land was blessed and thereby Buddhism was introduced. Before leaving, he left behind many sacred *Terma* (sacred texts and teaching) which were later revealed by *Tertons* (text revealers) and still many of them remain unrevealed and sacred. He also declared the land as the most sacred one and made a prophecy that the land will be an epicentre for Buddhism in future and the man coming from the east named Phuntsok would rule the land.

Later in the year 1642, the three holy lamas Lhatsun Namkha Jigme (Lhatsun Champo), Karthok Rikzin Kuntu Chenpo (Karthok Rikzin Champo), and Ngadak Sempa Rikzin (Ngadak Sempa Champo) arrived from the three different directions namely; north, south and west and met at the present day Yuksam. On this very day the first Denzong Chogyal (Dharma Raja of Sikkim) Phuntsok Namgyal was enthroned thereby proving the prophecy of Guru Rinpoche true. Under the Namgyal rule, Buddhism flourished and had a deep influence in the kingdom's socio-political landscape. In fact, the Chogyal himself was believed to be a reincarnation (rebirth) of the Bodhisattva. The Chogyal introduced the '*Lhadi-Medhi Government*' in which the government was formed equally by the common layman and the Buddhist monks. Lhadi simply represented the monks and Medi represented the common people. Mr. Sonam Wangdi in his work '*Governance and Electoral Politics: A Study of Sangha Seat in Sikkim*' describes

this system of governance as '*Spiritual Democracy*'. Simultaneously, there were nine ministers out of which four were chosen from common people and five from the Sangha community.

The concept of '*Phusum-ki-Pharma*' was also introduced by the Chogyal ensuring the involvement of every family in the Dharma. This was simply a compulsion of sending one son from each and every household to become a monk. If a family had got three or more sons, the second son was sent to the monastery compulsorily. If any family wanted to send all the sons to the monastery, then it was also well accepted.

Later, the advent of Britishers in the land, marked a significant impact in the administrative system of Sikkim. The Lhadi-Medi system of governance was extricated and a new system was introduced in which the kingdom was divided into 52 provinces under the control of the '*Kazis and Thikadars*' (landlords). This feudal system later became the chief reason for the revolt of the Sikkimese people against the Chogyal. The first ever revolt against the Feudal Monarchy was witnessed on 7th of December 1947 where the three political organisations namely; Sikkim Rajya Praja Mandal, Rajya Praja Sammelan, and Praja Sudharak Samaj gathered at the Polo ground (now Palzor Stadium) which led to the foundation of the first ever political party of Sikkim the Sikkim State Congress. The people mainly had placed three demands which were

a) Establishment of a popular form of government, b) formation of an interim government, and c) accession of Sikkim to the Indian Union. The Chogyal accepted the first two demands and as a result, in 1953, the first ever election for the Sikkim State Council was held which was based on the Parity Formula (seats were distributed on community basis i.e., 6 for the Bhutia- Lepcha and 6 for the Nepali).

In the 1958 elections the seats were increased from 12 to 14, and interestingly another two new seats were introduced namely; 1 General and 1 Sangha. With this the Sangha seat was again revived considering the significant role played by the religion in the kingdom.

The Sangha Assembly Constituency:

The sangha assembly seat is one of the most unique existences featuring the democratic arrangement of the nation. The Sangha assembly seat exists nowhere in other states of India, except in the state of Sikkim. Surprisingly, the sangha assembly constituency is very much different in existence than other electoral constituencies of the state. It is unmatched in several senses:

Firstly, the sangha assembly constituency is a physically non-existing constituency. It simply means that, unlike any other electoral constituencies that has a specific physical territory, the sangha assembly constituency does not have a physical boundary representing their specific geography. It has in particular to deal with the registered Buddhist monasteries and monks who are registered or affiliated to these monasteries.

Secondly, the sangha assembly constituency has its existence on a religious basis. Although the Indian Constitution provides for a secular nation, the state of Sikkim has an assembly reservation based on religion. Buddhism has been the guiding beam of Sikkimese society. Ever since the formation of Sikkim as a sovereign kingdom, Buddhism has helped shaping the socio- politico environ of the kingdom. With the merger of this tiny himalayan kingdom with the mainland India, all the old laws were protected by article 371F, of the Indian Constitution and thereby the sangha assembly constituency continue its existence till date.

Thirdly, a factional electoral system on the basis of universal adult franchise. This means that not all people are eligible to vote for the sangha assembly seat. Only those monks and nuns who are affiliated to any of the registered monasteries are eligible to vote or contest elections. As of now there are 111 recognised monasteries in Sikkim. The voting is done on the system of universal adult franchise, through a means of single transferable vote. Though the representative of the Sangha is voted by the monks and nuns, the election process is quite similar to that of the election process of any other assembly constituency.

Fourthly, though elected by a certain faction, works for the general public welfare after the election. Sangha MLA once elected, becomes the member of the state legislative assembly and sometimes even holds the cabinet portfolios. For example, the present Sangha MLA, Ven. Sonam Lama (affiliated to Simik Duduling Monastery) is serving as a cabinet minister since two terms. At first, when Sikkim Krantikari Morcha Party formed the government for the first time in 2019, he was the minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs Department (a special department relating to all religions), and now with the SKMs second victory in 2024 state assembly elections, he is now the minister of Public Health and Engineering Department.

The Sangha assembly seat is one of the most exceptional institutions that exists as a special feature in the state politics of Sikkim. It exists nowhere in the other states of the nation. The Indian constitution clearly defines India as a Secular nation, treating each and every religion equal but the Sangha assembly exists in Sikkim, irrespective of the concept of secularism. Sikkim was merged much later after the Indian independence in 1975, and was given a special privilege under article 371F thereby protecting all the old laws of Sikkim as it is. Although the Sangha assembly seat has been challenged from time to time for its constitutional validity, the court has announced it valid as it was granted on the historical basis and was protected under article 371F (k), and directed for its continuance.

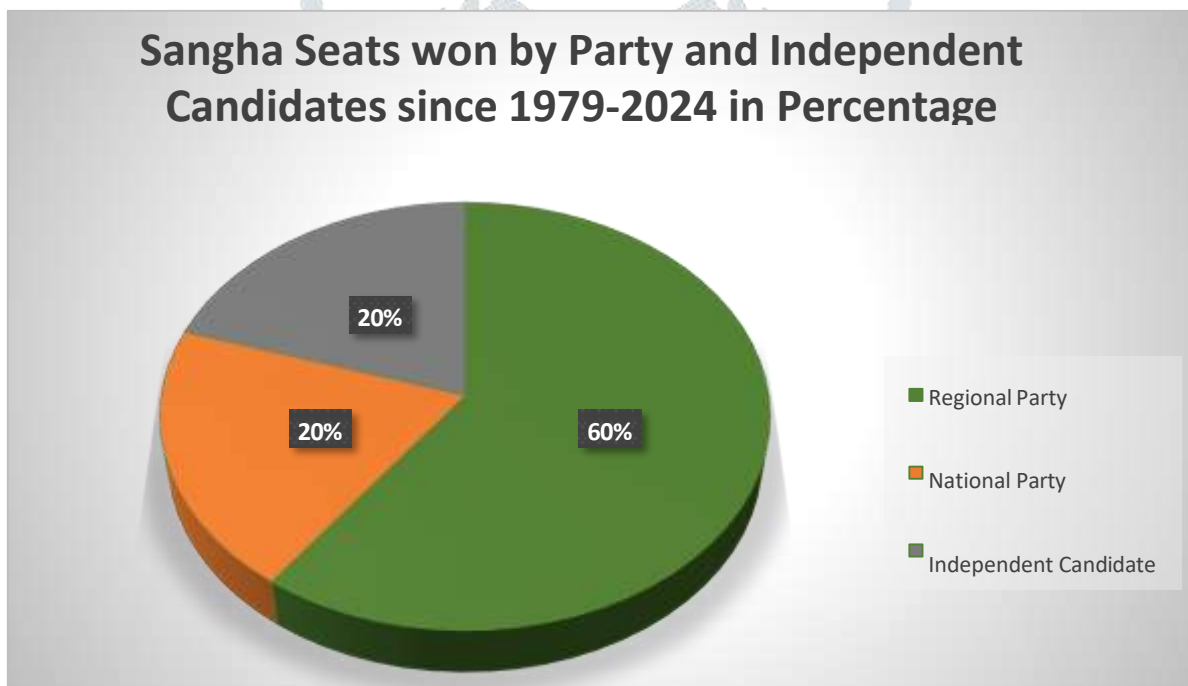
Sangha and the Regional Politics in the post-merger period:

Regional sentiment has always been the driving force behind the success of regional based parties in the state of Sikkim. Since its merger with the Indian Union, a unique political culture has been witnessed in the state of Sikkim as no single national party has been successful in forming the government. Many national parties have been trying to influence the state politics but have failed to gain popularity among the Sikkimese masses. The state politics has also witnessed the one-party dominance culture since the merger. The Lt. N.B. Bhandari led government ruled the state for almost 14 years after which his close associate Mr. Pawan Chamling formed a new party the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) and formed the government in 1994 and remained in position for 25 years. His 25 year long governance was followed by his close associate Mr. P.S. Tamang (Golay)

formed a new party Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) in 2019, and is heading his government for second term after his party's victory in 2024.

The Sangha seat was introduced in 1958 in the second Sikkim state council elections and was later continued further in 1979 by Bill No. 79, which dislodged the parity formula for the distribution of seats in the state assembly. This very bill now provided 12 seats for B-L, 1 for Sangha, 2 for Scheduled Caste, and remaining 17 as general seats. This bill erased the seat reservation for Nepali community, and also reduced the seat reservation of the B-L community from 15 to 12. Though the bill was opposed by the masses and was denounced it as '*black-bill*', it was passed by the union government.

Notably, the masses who were in favour of democracy and wanted to merge with the Indian Union, later developed a strong regional sentiment and no much magnetism towards national parties were seen. The regional dominance can be clearly seen in the state politics followed by a strong charismatic leadership. The state has witnessed 11 assembly elections since its merger with the Indian Union. In this perspective, the Sangha assembly constituency is also largely influenced by the regional politics of the area. If we look at the data, the entire electoral history of the sangha assembly seat is almost won by either regional party or an independent candidate. The national party candidate for the sangha seat won only for two times so far i.e., on 1994 state assembly election in which the candidate of Indian National Congress, Namkha Gyaltsen Lama won defeating the Sikkim Democratic Front Party candidate Palden Lama by 124 votes and later the 7th state assembly elections held on 2004 saw the victory of Indian National Congress candidate Tshering Lama against his close competitor Palden Lama an independent candidate by 88 votes.



The above chart clearly shows the dominance of Regional Parties in the Sangha seat as well. If we see the past ten state assembly elections in Sikkim since the merger, the majority polls have been in favour of the regional parties. The national party, particularly the Indian National Congress, won the Sangha assembly seat for two times i.e., 1994 assembly elections and 2004 assembly elections. The regional parties have been quite successful in sweeping the Sangha assembly seat for maximum number of times. After the post-merger, the state has witnessed ten assembly elections out of which, the regional parties swept the Sangha assembly seat for six times. Infact, the present Sangha MLA, Ven. Sonam Lama is in office for the third consecutive term belonging to Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), which is a regional party. Apart, the independent candidate of Sangha assembly also won for two times i.e., 1979 state assembly elections and 1999 state assembly elections.

The 1979 state assembly elections witnessed the victory of an independent candidate Lhachen Ganchen

Rinpoche. In these elections, the Sangha legislative assembly constituency had a total number of 2114 electors. The two major candidates contesting for the Sangha assembly seat were Pema Lama representing the Sikkim Prajatantra Congress (SPC), and Lhachen Ganchen Rinpoche as an independent candidate. The independent candidate, Lhachen Ganchen Rinpoche won with a huge margin defeating the SPC candidate, Pema Lama by 688 votes (Election Commission of India, New Delhi, 1979, p.p. 1-47.). The result of 1979 assembly elections witnessed an unusual situation as the Sikkim Janata Parishad (SJP), a newly formed regional party led by Mr. Nar Bahadur Bhandari won 16 seats out of 32 assembly seats in this election. Since no party won with a clear majority, the SJP with the support of the independent Sangha MLA was able to form the government. This shows that the Sangha assembly seats has an equal status and importance as any other legislative assembly of Sikkim.

In the 1985 assembly elections, the total voters of the Sangha legislative assembly constituency were 2296. The total valid votes were 732 out of which the Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP again a new regional party formed by Mr. Bhandari after dislodging the old Sikkim Janata Parishad) candidate, Namkha Gyaltzen won by securing 383 votes. The main opposition to him was the Indian National Congress candidate, Lhachen Gomchen Rimpoche who lost by 34 votes. During this time, Mr. Bhandari arose as an undisputed champion in the electoral political arena of the state as his newly formed party was successful in winning 30 out of 32 seats (Election Commission of India, New Delhi, 1985, p.p. 1-45.).

In the 1989 assembly elections, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad continued its dominance in the state politics of Sikkim. The Sangha assembly constituency in total had 3216 voters out of which there were 1473 valid votes. Again, the SSP candidate, Nanjha Gyaltzen won by securing 806 votes against the independent candidate Bazing, who lost by 384 votes. This time, the SSP under the leadership of Mr. Bhandari made a landslide victory by winning all the 32 assembly constituencies of the state. Out of total valid votes, the SSP was able to secure 70.41% of votes and once again came back to power with an absolute majority (Statistical Report, Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election, 1989, Election Commission of India, New Delhi).

With the birth of a new regional party in the state, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), under the leadership of Pawan Kumar Chamling, a change in the political culture of the state was witnessed. The SSP who was dominating the political scene of the state for more than a decade, was now defeated by SDF. The newly formed SDF was able to secure 19 seats and the SSP was only able to secure 10 seats this time. The Indian National Congress was able to secure 2 seats and 1 seat was in favour of the independent candidate. The Sangha seat this time was in favour of the Indian National Congress. The Sangha assembly constituency this time had in total 3086 voters out of which the total valid votes were 1629. The Indian National Congress candidate, Namkha Gyaltzen Lama won by securing 767 votes against his opponent, the SDF candidate, Palden Lama by 124 votes (Statistical Report, Sikkim Legislative Assembly Election, 1994, Election Commission of India.).

The results of 1999 assembly elections now saw the rise of SDF as a strong regional party in the states political landscape. This time the SDF increased from 19 seats to 24 seats and the SSP came down from 10 seats to 7 seats. With this majority the SDF again came back to power for the second term. But surprisingly, the Sangha seat was in favour of the independent candidate. There were 3290 voters of the Sangha assembly in total. The independent candidate, Palden Lama won by securing 1309 votes against his close competitor, the Congress candidate, Namkha Gyaltzen lost by 939 votes (Election Commission of India, State Election, 1999 to the Legislative Assembly of SIKKIM, p. 5.).

The 2004 assembly elections witnessed total 2088 valid votes in Sangha legislative assembly constituency. The Indian National Congress won the Sangha assembly seat for second time. Tshering Lama, the INC candidate, won by securing 675 votes against the independent candidate Palden Lama who lost by 88 votes. The SDF came to power for the third time securing 31 seats out of 32 seats. Only the Sangha assembly seat was in favour of INC (Election Commission of India: State Election, 2004 to the Legislative Assembly of SIKKIM, p. 5.).

The peak of the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) was witnessed in the 2009 state assembly elections when the SDF was able to win all the 32 assembly seats making the state assembly oppositionless. The victory of the SDF after this election, made the party an unchallenged party in the state politics of Sikkim. The SDF supremo Pawan Chamling sworn in as the Chief Minister of Sikkim for the fourth time. The Sangha assembly constituency was also won by the SDF candidate, Phetook Tshering Bhutia securing 980 votes defeating the INC candidate Tshering Lama by 55 votes. The total voters of the Sangha assembly this time was 3058 out of which there were 1980 valid votes (Election Commission of India-State Election, 2009 to the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim, p. 5.).

The 2014 assembly elections which was scheduled on 12th of April, 2014 witnessed five political parties participated out of which, two national parties participated namely the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC), along with three regional parties namely, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), and All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), which was yet to become a national party then. The 2014 state assembly elections saw the rise of a new regional party, the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha as it won 10 seats out of 32. This time, the SDF which was till now dominating the entire political scene of the state went down from 32 to 22, indicating a steady downfall of the SDF party. The Sikkim Krantikari Morcha Party was formed by Mr. Prem Singh Tamang (Golay), who was a close associate of Mr. Chamling and even formerly a cabinet minister in Chamling's cabinet. Growing some dissatisfactions Mr. Golay disassociated himself from the SDF and formed a new party in the year 2013 and successfully contested in the 9th assembly elections of 2014. The Sangha assembly constituency had in total 2904 voters out of which, the total number valid votes were 2198. The SKM candidate Sonam Lama won by securing 1096 votes defeating the SDF candidate Palden Lachungpa by 125 votes (Source: Election Commission of India-State Election, 2014 to the Legislative Assembly of Sikkim.).

In the 2019 assembly elections, the participation of a large number of regional parties was witnessed as seven regional parties namely, Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), Hamro Sikkim Party (HSP), Sikkim Republican Party (SRP), Sikkim Rajya Manch Party (SRMP), Sikkim United Front (SUTFF), and Jai Maha Bharath Party (JMBP). The two national parties that contested in the 2019 assembly elections were Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Indian National Party (INP). This time, a new political history was created as the 25-year-old hegemonic government headed by Pawan Chamling was defeated by the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha Party (SKM). This time the SKM won 17 seats and the SDF was only able to secure 15 seats. Later after gaining majority in the assembly, the SKM Party headed by Mr. Golay formed the government. The Sangha legislative assembly constituency had in total 3293 voters out of which the total number of valid votes were 2376. Ven. Sonam Lama under the banner of SKM won the election for second term by securing 1488 votes against the SDF candidate Tshering Lama by 630 votes.

In the 2024 assembly elections, the SKM came with an overwhelming majority by winning 31 seats out of 32. The lone opposition MLA from Gangtok Shyari constituency Mr. Tenzing Lamtha (SDF) also shifted himself to the ruling SKM party and now the party was in full majority with all the 32 seats. The sangha assembly in total had 3993 registered voters this time out of which 3852 were male and 141 were female. The SKM candidate, Sonam Lama won the election and retained his seat for the third consecutive term. Sonam Lama got 1919 votes and defeated his close competitor, the BJP candidate Tseten Tashi Bhutia by 865 votes.

Year	Constituency Name	Winner	Party	Votes	Runner Up	Party	Votes
1979	Sangha	Lhachen G. Rimpuchhi	IND	733	Pema Lama	SPC	45
1985	Sangha	Namkha Gyaltsen	SSP	383	Lhachen G. Rimpuchhi	INC	349
1989	Sangha	Namkha Gyaltsen	SSP	806	Bazing	IND	422

1994	Sangha	Namkha Gyaltsen Lama	INC	767	Palden Lama	SDF	643
1999	Sangha	Palden Lama	IND	1309	Namkha Gyaltsen Lama	INC	370
2004	Sangha	Tshering Lama	INC	675	Palden Lama	IND	587
2009	Sangha	Phetook Tsh. Bhutia	SDF	980	Tshering Lama	INC	925
2014	Sangha	Sonam Lama	SKM	1096	Palden Lachungpa	SDF	971
2019	Sangha	Sonam Lama	SKM	1488	Tshering Lama	SDF	858
2024	Sangha	Sonam Lama	SKM	1919	Tseten Tashi Bhutia	BJP	1054

Source: <https://www.elections.in/sikkim/assembly-constituencies/sangha.html>

The Sangha assembly constituency has equally been in priority like any other constituency assembly of the state. Just like other MLAs, the Sangha MLA can be a member of the cabinet and can have any portfolio in the state cabinet. Like for instance the present Sangha MLA is a

cabinet member and heads Ecclesiastical Department, Public Health Engineering Department, and Water Resources Department. When the SDF was in power after the 2014 assembly elections, the current Sangha MLA proved to be a tough opposition in the state assembly along with the other SKM MLA Mr. Kunga Nima Lepcha.

Conclusion:

Sikkim, once a land visited by the great patronage saint Guru Padmasambhava has always been in the path of Buddha Dharma. Buddhism since the early known history of the land has been a guiding lamp of the people. During the reign of the Namgyal dynasty, the Sangha played a vital role in the day-to-day administration. Precisely, with the introduction of Lhadi-Medi government right from the reign of the first Chogyal, this religious institution shows its existence in the holy land of Sikkim. The Lhadi-Medi government was gave equal representation to the common layman as well as the Sangha. They together assisted the Chogyal in the administration of the land. Buddhism have always been associated with the day-to-day life of the people. The monks or the lamas with their vast knowledge of Sikkim's rites, culture, tradition, history, law and people, they have always been influencing in shaping the political culture, attitudes and beliefs of the common people.

The Sangh assembly seat was introduced in the year 1958 by the 11th Chogyal of Sikkim considering the historical role played by the religion in shaping the socio-politico aspect of Sikkim. In the post-independence period, the Sangha institute continued its existence in the electoral politics of Sikkim. The Sangha seat continue to provide representation to a certain section of society to safeguard the age-old tradition existing in the state of Sikkim. Though challenged by many for its constitutional validity the seat still prevails in a firm stand. There is a generally accepted concept that the Sangha assembly only deals with the monastic institutions, and only works for the monks in particular, but the presence of the Sangha seat has made a serious impact on the state politics. In the case of 1979 assembly elections, the Sangha seat played a key role in forming the Nar Bahadur Bhandari led Sikkim Parishad government. Apart from the ecclesiastical department, the Sangha MLA like any other SLA members is concerned for the welfare of the Sikkimese people in general. The Sangha representative in the assembly proceedings has the right to raise questions if he/she is not satisfied with any kind of bills, he in true sense has the right to raise the issues for the welfare of the people.

The present Sangha representative, Sonam Lama belongs to the present ruling party i.e., SKM Party. In 2014 election, SKM lost to the ruling SDF Party and the Sangha MLA belonging to the opposition party had a significant role in the assembly proceedings raising issues of the public, thereby standing as a strong opposition to the ruling party. With his tireless effort along with the other party leaders, was able to bring

successfully their government. Therefore, the Sangha representation is not only to preserve the rich cultural history, practice and age-old tradition, but simultaneously to shape the politics of the state in a constructive manner.

However, the participation of women in the electoral politics of Sangha assembly constituency is still an untouched area as in the entire history of sangha elections, not a single female candidate contested for the sangha assembly seat. According to the Government of India, statistical reports of 2024, there were 141 female voters registered for the sangha assembly but not a single female contestant was witnessed. One reason for the less participation of women in the Sangha electoral politics may be less inclusion of women in religious affairs. Whatever the reason may be, but woman's participation in the Sangha electoral politics is still an area of study.

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