



SIDEKEONG TULKU AND THE SIKKIM AGROFORESTRY

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Abstract

Sikkim agroforestry policies are evolved from several phases. Century ahead, the forest trees were classified under the protected trees which preludes to the development of agroforestry activities in Sikkim Himalaya. This action conserved the endangered species in the forest and forest fringed villages. The paper highlighted on the action and impact of the past policies and the role of Sidekeong Tulku in the Sikkim agroforestry.

Keywords: Agroforestry, Bamboo and Pulp agreement, Protected trees, Sidekeong Tulkus, Sikkim Himalaya.

Sidekeong Tulkus was the first forest manager of Sikkim who had contributed to the Sikkim policies in several aspects. In this case, the matter pertaining to the forest trees, cultivation etc are discussed herein.

In the early 20th century, the Sikkim was preparing to enter into an agreement with the foreign agency for Bamboo and Pulp agreement and other. The role of Sidekeong Tulkus was significant which turned the historical development of Sikkim forest related policies.

As many issues were raised for the people by the people for the Sikkim agroforestry policies. Some of them were got their shapes as desired but some were not.

Policies and Sikkim Forests

Having said that the then Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, Sidekeong Tulkus, stated in his communication which reads as follow: *"..regarding the question of giving out contract the use of all the Malinga Bamboos and nettle fibres .. upper and lower forest of Sikkim, for the purpose of papers, I leave this question for you to decide, as I do not myself whether the State would gain by such contract. ..as I can see, I believe that if we give out the use of bamboos on contract, the raiyats would suffer much, as there are no other materials available in Sikkim for the purpose of roofing houses. The only material available for such purpose is bamboos from the upper forests.*

.....Reserve for fuel, fodder and grazing should be kept in the most cultivated tracts and I have accordingly reserved Gorucharans in the Elaka of most of the landholders". (Letter dated 6th October, 1911 issued from the Sikkim Durbar office, Gangtok to the Captain J.L.R Weir, officiating Political officer in Sikkim). This remarkable statement always portrayed Sidekeong Tulkus as one of the learned discipline in Sikkim kingdom in that era. The aforesaid case was related with the Bamboo Agreement of Sikkim, a proposal of Burns and Company (Kolkata based England Company), to the Sikkim Kingdom. That proposal was basically designed for the bamboos collection, as raw materials, for the paper manufacturing industries. It took several years for the reviews and executions (Refer to letter dated Gangtok, the 1st August, 1911; letter no 1031 I dated 14th July, 1911).

Sikkim implemented its forest policy since 20th century. The then Council of Sikkim, was the highest legislating body in Sikkim for the policies decision. The education and technical knowledge of Sidekeong Tulku were immense and his reconciliation reformed the newly emerging Sikkim with far sighted views. The policy, in regards to Sikkim forestry, was implemented in the year 1909, however, several issues in Forest Rules, 1909 existed which was further, amended on 28.05.2015. The amended Sikkim Forest Rules upto 1915, therefore, was a guiding principle for the Sikkim Forest Manager of the then Sikkim kingdom. This efficient and far-sighted policy encouraged the foreign investor in Sikkim. During the tenure of Sidekeong Tulku, the then proposal of the commercial uses of forest resources was given by England based company, Messrn. Burns and Co., to the Sikkim Himalayan Kingdom (Tulku, 1911a; Tulku, 1911b).

The matter related with the proposal of commercial collection of forest resources was thoroughly examined and studied by Sidekeong Tulku since 1913 onwards, in the reign of Thutob Namgyal. Nonetheless, resuming the office of king in the kingdom of Sikkim, Sidekeong Tulku, forwarded several queries and questions for the proposal too. He was one of the sincere and dedicated administrators in the state of Sikkim, in those periods, in the Sikkim History. In the many instances, he had reviewed the agreement and commented for the prospective development of Sikkim. Besides these, in the capacity of the Forest manager, the records of reporting to the then political officer always precluded that his mechanism of policy implementation was noteworthy. Unfortunately, he died in the year 1914, ruling Sikkim for the eight month. The records and notes on the ruler of Sikkim depicted that Sidekeong Tulku was the shortest tenured king of Sikkim (Tulku, 1911a; Tulku, 1911b).

Additionally, Sidekeong Tulku was also the first forest manger as per the circular no 685 dated 18th June, 1910. It defined the Forest officer, meaning the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim, landlord of the Elaka, forest Manger, Forester, forest guards and Chaparasis whether kept by the State or the landlords to look after the Forest (Refer to Section 15 of Circular No 685).

Referring to the section 9 of Sikkim Forests rules regulating Grazing whereby it stated, “the cutting of sapling and lopping of branches of trees is prohibited without permit or permission either of the Maharaj Kumar or of the landlord”. Such embodiment policies and reformative rules had encouraged the Sikkim forests resulting reduction of the random felling and lopping of trees at the ecological niche. The other aspect was that the raiyats and other stakeholders had to abide by the rules otherwise the penalty would be imposed.

In another instance of letter no 767 j dated 13.10.1913, issued to Political Officer in Sikkim, from His Highness the Maharaja of Sikkim, the Maharaja explicitly expressed, “2. With regard to the amendment proposed to rule 3 clause (d) I beg to state that I see no reason to disagree where Messrn Burn and Company are concerned, buy I fear that if we include all these 54 species in the forest rules as “reserved” then we may be depriving the Kazis and Thikadars to protest strongly, as soon as this rule is brought into force, as it is sure to interfere a great deal with their rights as landlords and this may produce undesirable results”. This statement of Maharaja clearly hinted that the Maharaja was aware of the fact of raiyats and other of Sikkim.

Whatsoever, all development navigated to amend the Forest Rules, 1909. Eventually, the enacted Rules for Sikkim forests (1909) was amended with the consent of the then Maharaja of Sikkim, Tashi Namgyal vide letter no No 24-A dated 24/5/1915 publishing notification 562/I dated 28/5/1915. Thereafter, the amended version had seventy one local tree species as the protected species however, no scientific names were incorporated. But amended notification empowered the Maharaja of Sikkim and authorized officer on the behalf for the forest permission to acquire.

The execution of amended Rules for Sikkim Forest (1915) brilliantly took a control over the forest resources by the administrator. Nevertheless, the public raised voice which was evident in letter dated Gangtok, the 28th June, 1915, for instance,

“2. When all the 71 kinds of trees those are procurable have been reserved, we humbly beg to enquire as to what kind of trees should be utilized for building, outhouses, cowshed, ploughing implants, agriculturist's tools, firewood and fodder, and fibre etc for the use for Kazis, Thikakars and raiyats. The above requirements to the raiyats and others are well aware to your honour”.

These statements were the unified voices of Sikkim in those days.

Raiyats had to abide by the rules of Sikkim Forests (amended upto 1915) and was laud and clear with the letter No 609 I dated 10th June, 1915 (Hodges, 1915). The rules contained in the notification no 562 I of the 1st June, 1915 applied to the reserved forests and the Khas Jungles. Khas Jungles, the concept of Sikkim Forests, for the Community forest for the public was demarked according to needs and requirements, which was established on 29.3.03 vide Notification no 1. It was in effect from 1 April 1905 by circulating notice to all landlords in Sikkim, given that rules must enforce in their elakas. The Rule 1 and 2 of the Khas Mahal forests were as follows:

1. That the bamboos, large or small, situated near or within the cultivation of their raiyats or wherever they may be, must not be cut down for cultivation but must be reserved for grass and house materials.
2. That the cultivation of the slopes of any Jhora, slippery and rocky places must be discontinued. Collecting of dry firewood from these places without any cutting instrument is not objectionable.

Given stringent rules 1 and 2 of Khas Mahal of Sikkim Forests were enough to bind the raiyats, kazi and Thikadars of Sikkim and helped to protect the Sikkim forestry from the further not opening for the cultivation as such. Furthermore there were rules to regulate the sale of forest produce as notified on 15.5.14 by Forest Department stating rule 1(i) and (ii) defining the “Forest Officer” to the Maharaja of Sikkim and “Forest produce” to everything that can be found in the forests, whether above or below the surface of the ground. These implied that the rules had mentioned competent authority for the selling of forest produce. One of the noteworthy points is that the cultivation was stopped along the banks of and at the top of Jhoras where landslips take place. (Sikkim Council, Minutes on dated 30.4.2009).

These shown that the forests of Sikkim were completely under the administrative control of Council and their acts, rules and regulations incidental thereto.

Additionally, in the year 13th September, 1948, the notification 5093/ F issued from the then Forest Department, further refrain the landlords, Managers of Elakhas, Panchayat Secretaries and bustiwalas for not to open new land for the cultivation purpose (Sikkim Forest Department 1903;1914;1936; 1937;1948). Such evidents had cascading effect on the social pattern of Sikkim and influenced the socio-economic paradigm.

Above references and evidences entrusted that the Sikkim forest policies, even before 1911, were then indispensable entities for the socio-economy, cultivation of land and other domestic purposes of Sikkim at large. Rigorous studies and examinations on the several spheres finally vouched that Sidekeong Tulku had played a pivotal role and given a new dimension to Sikkim Agro-Forestry.

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