

Ruth Karthak Lepcha: The Unsung Legend of Sikkim

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Abstract: *In the history of Sikkim, the name Ruth Karthak Lepcha stands as a testament of resilience, advocacy and relentless pursuit of justice. A product of her time and environment, Ruth Karthak Lepcha's upbringing and education infused in her a profound sense of duty towards her community, the Lepchas of Sikkim. Throughout her youth, Ruth had witnessed the plight of her people under the monarchical government marked by socio-economic and political disparities and resolved to become a catalyst for change. Adopting different strategies to work for the upliftment of her community, Ruth Karthak Lepcha made history by founding a political party in 1966, namely, the Sikkim Independent Front. This was a bold and unprecedented move that heralded a new era of political consciousness among the Lepcha people of Sikkim. For this action she faced formidable challenges posed by power structures, but she moved forward with courage to contest the 1967 elections, advocating fiercely for Lepcha rights and representation. Her activism was however suppressed by the authority and she was arrested under the Security Act and was finally expelled from her motherland. But her exile served to amplify her voice and her cause on the national stage, from where she continued to champion the rights of marginalised communities and challenge the authority of feudal monarchy.*

Keywords: Sikkemese, Lepcha, Panu, Boongthing, Chogyal, Theocratic

The struggles endured by many individuals in transforming their society and protecting the identity of their people have not received due recognition in history. This is mostly the case with lesser-known tribes whose histories have not been projected with authenticity. The elitist perception of writing history has sidelined much of such truths on the domination and subservience of the marginalised people, the loss of their identity and the sacrifices made by many for uplifting the socio-economic and political status of their communities. Such is the case of Ruth Karthak Lepcha, a legendary daughter of Sikkim whose

contributions to her society and people have not received much attention in academics. The consciousness of being marginalised manifested in her relentless activities to emancipate her people from subservience. She stood against the authority for safeguarding the rights of her community and infused awareness in them about their economic and political status and socio-cultural heritage. A growing sense of identity thus began to emerge among the Lepchas of Sikkim. It is in the light of the above that the present study endeavours to explore the activism and contribution of Ruth Karthak Lepcha and its profound impact on the Lepcha community. A major portion of the work is based on primary evidence collected through interview with the legend Ruth Karthak Lepcha. Ruth is now ninety years of age and resides in Singtam in east Sikkim. Historical evidences based on primary archival material have been supplemented by secondary sources.

Born in 1934 at Arithang in the eastern region of Sikkim, Ruth Karthak Lepcha dedicated her life to the cause of the Lepcha community of Sikkim in uplifting their socio-economic and political status. A senior nurse by profession in the government of Sikkim, Ruth had received her early education in Paljor Namgyal Girls' school at Gangtok and pursued nursing course at Seth Suklal Karnani Hospital in Calcutta. Her husband, Ahsan Halim, was an Indian Muslim and a Calcutta based businessman. After finishing her studies in nursing, Ruth came back to Sikkim in 1955, a time when there was a shift in the political situation of the country.¹ Sikkim had become a British protectorate in 1861 through the 'Treaty of Tumlong' signed between the ruler Tsugphud Namgyal and the Colonial Government of India. After India's independence, Sikkim became an Indian protectorate. This process was completed by the 'Treaty of 1950' between independent India and Sikkim. The formation of a democratic government in India and the changes brought about thereafter had also influenced Sikkim in generating feelings against the monarchical form of government. Under the leadership of a few educated and conscious members of the society, the peasantry sought for freedom from feudal bondage. Thus, in 1947, three political parties namely, Praja Sudharak, Praja Sammelan and Praja Mandal were born and in the same year these political parties merged to form the Sikkim State Congress which launched movement against feudalism and demanded for democratic political institutions in the country.²

It was during this period of emerging political consciousness that Ruth Karthak took up the leadership to work for her community. Her inspiration and dedication to advocate for the Lepcha community was not derived from any external source but cultivated within her from a young age because of the influence of her father and grandfather. Her grandfather, Bag Singh Karthak, held a significant position as one of the general secretaries of the government of Sikkim. During his tenure, he was approached by many Lepcha people who expressed concerns about the loss of their land. Recognising the gravity of the issue, Bag Singh Karthak foresaw the potential decline of the Lepcha identity if

their grievances were left unaddressed. This early exposure to the grievances faced by the Lepcha community left a profound impact on Ruth Karthak and instilled in her a deep sense of empathy and responsibility towards her people. From that moment on, Ruth was driven by a strong commitment to raise awareness and advocate for the rights of the Lepcha people, carrying forward the legacy of her family's dedication to serve the community.³

An overview of the political and socio-economic system of the Lepchas of Sikkim before the establishment of the Namgyal rule and its gradual transition after 1642 leading to the erosion of their tribal set-up and identity will provide an understanding of the causes that generated discontentment among the Lepchas in their own homeland. However, a major lacuna for research on Sikkim is the absence of accounts of annals and antiquities.⁴ Therefore for information on the society, culture and economy of the Lepchas especially during the pre-Namgyal period, historians have to depend on the Lepcha oral tradition. As per their oral tradition, 'the Lepchas call themselves as Rong-pa, meaning ravine folk and claim to be the autochthones of Sikkim proper'.⁵ A system of monarchy in a rudimentary form existed and the king was titled as 'Panu'. The 'Panu' was selected on the basis of his expertise in religion, administration and military tactics. Therefore, the system was not hereditary. Other than the 'Panu', spiritual leader, namely 'Bongthing', had an important position and was respected in the society.⁶ The Lepchas were basically nature worshippers and believed in good and evil spirits. Any kind of disease, unwanted events, evil thoughts and deeds were attributed to the bad spirit called Mung, whereas good thoughts and fortune was ascribed to the good spirit, the Rum.⁷ Hunting and gathering was a part of their socio-economic life until they took to shifting cultivation.⁸

In 1642 Namgyal dynasty was established in Sikkim and Phuntsog Namgyal who belonged to the lineage of the earlier ruling house of Tibet was installed on the throne as its first ruler. He was bestowed with the title of Chogyal meaning 'Dharma Raja'. With this, the political entity of Sikkim transformed into a Buddhist theocratic monarchy. The Namgyal rulers endeavoured to fashion a centralised political authority which consisted of twelve Bhutia ministers (Kaleon or Kazi) and twelve Lepcha dzongpon or district officers (equivalent to the rank of a minister). With this administrative arrangement, a two tiered but bi-ethnic political class was created.⁹ Thus, the political system of the Lepchas was replaced by a theocratic monarchy which was hereditary in nature. With the establishment of a theocratic monarchy, monastic influence also penetrated deep into the Lepcha society marking its cultural transformation.¹⁰ Along with political and cultural domination, socio-economic system of the Lepchas changed from hunting and gathering to shifting cultivation. Gradually, the Lepchas adopted terrace cultivation which was taught to them by the Nepali settlers along with the use of plough, fork and spade. In a way they were forced to give up shifting cultivation when the Maharaja of Sikkim put curbs to forest

utilisation after the extension of British administration to Sikkim in 1889. Consequently, their economy suffered because they did not have access to free exploitation of the forest resources, which was a part of their socio-economic life, and also because they could not compete with the Nepalese in the practice of this new mode of production which the latter had mastered before their settlement in Sikkim. However, they still had extensive plots of land, parts of which they lost to the Nepalese and the Bhutias.¹¹ Coupled with the loss of political identity since the advent of the Namgyal rulers a slow erosion of their socio-economic fabric was thus noticeable. When British colonialism took control of the affairs of Sikkim, the Lepcha entity was pushed to isolation as H.H Risley¹² puts in 'The Gazetteer of Sikkim', 'as the hills were stripped of their timber by the European tea-planters and the pushing Nepalese agriculturalist, while the Forest Department setting its face against primitive method of cultivation, the tribe is on the way to being pushed out'.

It is pertinent to note that throughout the Namgyal period, the peasants groaned under feudal oppression. From the beginning of the Namgyal regime the Bhutia element predominated both feudal and lessee landlords. With passage of time Nepali element was also noticeable in the system of landlordism. During the initial period of the Namgyal regime there had been marital relationship between the Bhutias and Lepchas belonging to the upper strata of the society. The birth of later aristocracy in Sikkim was the result of this contact. The aristocrats among the Lepchas had their own entity, power and position which provided to the Lepcha common people a sense of security. But with time, the Lepcha aristocracy lost confidence because of Bhutia predominance and they gradually began to identify themselves with the Bhutia aristocrats known as Kazi. This created a gap between the Lepcha aristocrats and the Lepcha commoners. With the Lepcha Kazis gone to the Bhutia fold the Lepcha peasants lost their protective arm resulting to a sense of inferiority among them and worsening their conditions. Even while the government showed awareness for the need of protecting them, the exploitation of the Lepcha ryots by the rich Bhutia peasants and feudal lords continued unabated. The rich and privileged Bhutia Kazis taking full advantage of their powers confiscated the best lands of the common people through coercion and intimidation. There were instances of complaints from many Lepcha individuals about the loss of their lands.¹³ This caused alienation of the Lepcha landholdings to a great degree. Alienation of the Lepchas' landholdings was also the result of the government's 'Revenue Order No.1 of 1917. As per the provision of this order the purchase of Bhutia-Lepcha land by others is forbidden but Bhutias can purchase the land of the Lepchas and vice-versa.¹⁴ Land alienation has therefore remained a problem and an issue of worry among the Lepchas.¹⁵ Since its inception, the Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association has taken up the matter of land alienation with utmost concern.¹⁶

Thus, the oldest inhabitants of the land, the Lepchas were gradually stripped

off their rights over land and their religious culture was dominated. Although The Lepchas were converted to Buddhism, they were never accorded high position in the Lamastic order.¹⁷ Numerous monasteries were built at the expense of the government though the Lepchas were prohibited admission in some monasteries. Later, due to propagation of Christianity during the British hegemony over Sikkim the Lepchas' indigenous culture began to decline. Their settlement was confined to Dzongu which was geographically isolated and infertile. This was carried out by the government in the name of protection which proved detrimental to the community's political and economic advancement. Because of their isolated settlement, they lost contact with the outside world and were forced to live a life in indolence and ignorance.¹⁸ The Lepchas did not have access to modern education as its aim was to educate the royal princes and children of the elitist section. This was also aimed at by British colonialism which had transformed Sikkim into a protectorate since the middle of the 18th century.¹⁹

In the 'Administrative Reports'²⁰ of the Government of Sikkim between 1931-1936 it is laid down that, 'a portion of the country lying in the Teesta Valley north of Dikshu has not been thrown open to Nepali settlers and is specially reserved for the hereditary inhabitants of Sikkim such as Lepchas and Bhutias'. Upon its careful analysis it is understood that the 'Administrative Reports' of the government have bracketed the Bhutias and Lepchas within the same tribal category.²¹ Since its inception the Namgyal monarchy had been working towards conversion of the animist Lepchas into Buddhism and the later Tibetan settlers were bracketed together with the Lepchas as indigenous people. The underlying motive of the Government had been to place the Bhutia-Lepcha together as ethnic and tribal community of Sikkim and different from the Nepali settlers. However, the government's action of placing both the communities within one fold as noticed in the above 'Administrative Reports' has caused the Lepchas to suffer from a sense of losing their ethnic identity as the oldest inhabitants of Sikkim with a distinct socio-cultural background and different from the Bhutia community.

Ruth had come back to Sikkim with the intention to pursue her career as a nurse and serve the people. However, after seeing the poor condition of the Lepchas in Sikkim under the monarchical rule, she felt concerned and started advocating for their cause. She was deeply troubled to see their economic hardships, alienation of their lands and the gradual loss of their identity.²² The settlement of the Lepchas in infertile and geographically isolated Dzongu area in the name of protection²³ and denial of modern education and separate political representation had profound impact on their socio-economic and political conditions.²⁴ As mentioned in the foregoing discussion, political consciousness which was growing in Sikkim after 1947 resulted in the birth of political parties. With the pressing demand of the Sikkim State Congress for representations of different communities in the State Council, a method known

as 'Parity Formula' was worked out in 1951 by the representatives of the Sikkim Durbar, the Sikkim State Congress and the Sikkim National Party. The formula was accepted by the representatives of the tripartite conference and accordingly adopted as the governing principle for equal seat sharing. According to this formula the State Council was made a seventeen member legislative body in which six seats were reserved for the Bhutia-Lepcha community and six seats for the Nepali community and members in the remaining five seats were to be nominated by the Chogyal. In spite of acceptance of this method of representation, the Sikkim State Congress was unhappy with the settlement because of the fact that the Bhutia-Lepcha population which shared only twenty five percent of the total population of Sikkim was given equal representation with the seventy five percent of Nepali population. Besides, the Lepchas were not given separate representation and as had been practiced by the government, the community was again bracketed within the tribal 'Bhutia-Lepcha' fold.²⁵ The Lepchas were thus denied separate political representation which further added to their grievances. Ruth was constantly asserting the fact that the Lepchas were the autochthones of the land and must be given separate political representation so that their political and socio-economic rights are protected. She talked about how they were losing their land and becoming helots in their own land. She was more affected by the pathetic conditions of the Lepchas living in the rural areas.²⁶

Ruth conducted extensive advocacy and awareness campaigns to shed light on the challenges confronting the Lepcha community. Through public speeches, interviews, and media engagements, she highlighted on issues such as land rights, education, healthcare, and cultural preservation. These campaigns aimed to garner public support, mobilise resources, and pressurise policy makers to address the needs of the Lepcha people. Recognising the importance of legal recourse in challenging discriminatory laws and policies, Ruth used legal avenues to advocate for the protection of the rights of the Lepcha community.²⁷

Ruth organised cultural celebrations and events to showcase the rich heritage and traditions of the Lepcha community. These gatherings served as platforms for community building which was to foster a sense of pride about their traditional culture and unity among the Lepchas. By celebrating Lepcha culture, Ruth sought to preserve and promote the unique identity of her community. She had also understood the importance of building alliances and partnerships with like-minded individuals and organisations to strengthen her efforts to emancipate the Lepchas from socio-economic backwardness.²⁸ She was an active member of the 'Lepcha Association', an organisation for the protection of the rights of the Lepcha people.²⁹ It is to be noted that an 'Association' of the Lepcha people was functioning from Kalimpong which aimed at preserving the linguistic and cultural identity of the Lepcha community of the entire Himalayan region. Ruth collaborated with civil society groups and sympathetic policymakers to amplify the collective voice of the Lepcha community of

Sikkim. These alliances enabled Ruth to garner broader support for Lepcha rights and empowerment initiatives. Through these strategic approaches, Ruth Karthak Lepcha effectively ensured that the voices and perspectives of the Lepcha people were not only heard but also respected in decision-making processes.³⁰ In an interview in 1966 with 'Current' an Indian based newsweekly published from Bombay, she talked about the Lepcha population of Sikkim, their culture and the political situation of Sikkim as thus, 'The Karthaks, (her ancestors) were the priestly ruling class and some three hundred years ago, they were overthrow by the ancestors of the Chogyal'. She compared the Lepchas to the pre- Dravidians of South India, 'My people still live on monkeys, squirrel flesh, snakes, and cardamom fruits' she added 'we are the people of outdated habits. If we are not to absorb modern ways swiftly, we may well be on the way to extinction within a couple of hundred years from now.'³¹

In that same interview she also talked about her desire to contest the election and the lack of a proper judiciary system in Sikkim. This was stated by the interviewer of 'Current' newsweekly as thus, 'we particularly avoided asking her any political questions, even though she had told us that she was thinking of standing for the election to the local assembly in Sikkim, or whatever that body was called. But that she felt strongly about certain matters we gathered from her when she told us, our people (the Lepcha) are absolutely uneducated. There are no courts in Sikkim, no codified laws, no written constitution. We are governed by proclamation and decrees, under the understanding arrived at with the government of India in 1953.'³²

Ruth was deeply troubled by the fact that the Lepcha people were losing their traditional rights over land. Therefore one of the primary objectives of her advocacy efforts was to constantly assert through her speeches that the Lepchas being the autochthones of Sikkim, their land rights should be reinstated. Recognising the need for a dedicated and centralised platform, Ruth founded in 1966 a political organisation namely the Sikkim Independent Front. This move proved successful in coordinating her advocacy efforts as it was able to mobilise support from the entire Lepcha community of the state. Through the Sikkim Independent Front, Ruth Karthak undertook various initiatives to uplift the Lepcha community by actively engaging in efforts to change laws and policies that marginalised the Lepcha people, advocating for their land rights and fair treatment under the law. She worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the plight of the Lepcha community, shedding light on issues such as poor living conditions, lack of access to education and healthcare, and cultural erosion. She constantly encouraged her people and advised them to 'speak up' and fight for their rights, encouraging them to overcome barriers and actively engage in education and business opportunities despite feeling 'backward' or lacking confidence. She emphasised on the importance of people's 'voice' and their participation in initiatives aimed at improving livelihoods, urging them to step out of their isolation and embrace empowerment. This advice to her community

continues till date. Because of her outspoken nature and her efforts to raise consciousness among the Lepcha community, she was looked upon by the Sikkim Durbar and the loyalists composed of the aristocrats with a sense of insecurity and as a challenge to their political positions and power. In spite of facing constant opposition from her political adversaries Ruth remained steadfast in her commitment to advocate for the rights and well-being of the Lepcha community.³³ Her fearless leadership and unwavering determination demonstrated that anyone, regardless of their background, could stand up for justice and make a positive impact on their community.

In her political activism, Ruth received constant support from enlightened Lepchas like Da Thendup Lepcha from Haathi Dunga Jill and Athang Rathay from Dzongu. In the campaign for election to the State Council in 1967 these men were able to mobilise huge support for her party.³⁴ Her party fielded six candidates comprising 5 Lepcha of 1 Nepali. But the nomination papers of the candidates were rejected without specific reason.³⁵

Immediately after the rejection of her nomination papers, Ruth Karthak supported by Athang Rathay and Da Thendup Lepcha urged the community to demonstrate solidarity and resistance by boycotting the election. Her message resonated, leading to a significant portion of the Lepcha population refraining from voting. Boycott of the election meant that the Lepchas were becoming conscious of their rights and had begun to assert it. It also highlighted the strength of the community's solidarity and determination to challenge the unjust system. Furthermore, the boycott served as a catalyst for increased awareness and mobilisation around issues of socio-economic development. It spurred dialogue and engagement within the community, fostering a sense of empowerment and ownership over their collective destiny. Through this action, Ruth Karthak Lepcha and her allies laid the groundwork for future advocacy efforts and initiatives aimed at addressing the socio-economic needs and aspirations of the Lepcha people.³⁶ However, her advocacy for the community was met with harsh consequences.

Ruth was not able to do anything about the rejection of her party's candidature as the authority had already planned to sabotage her political career. She was arrested in Singtam along with her husband under the Security Act on March 23, 1967. Under the provisions of sub-rule (i) of Rule 10 of the Sikkim Public Security Rules, 1962, Ruth's husband, Mr. Halim was deported. The order read, 'Mr. A Halim shall remove himself from Sikkim by midnight of 3rd January, 1968, and shall not thereafter return to Sikkim.'³⁷

The High Court of Sikkim along with the government maintained great secrecy about the charges filed against Ruth, nor was she tried under the Security Act. It was apparent that the Security Act was applied as a measure to put her behind bars and a time buying method by the administration to gather reasons to prosecute her. A baseless complain of sedition was filed against her by the Chief Secretary of Sikkim who alleged her of having said that, 'the present

ruler of Sikkim is not its real ruler, the Chogyal is a Bhutia, and the real rulers of Sikkim were Lepchas. The present Chogyal, being a non Lepcha, has no right to rule over Sikkim. The Lepchas are being suppressed in Sikkim, and the Sikkim Durbar is intending to rehabilitate 5,000 Tibetan refugees in Sikkim and this move of the Sikkim Durbar is to harm the Lepchas.³⁸ With such baseless charges of sedition Ruth was imprisoned without trial for more than fifteen months under the Security Act.³⁹ Feeling hopeless about justice as she was continuously detained without trial, Ruth escaped from jail and reached the residence of the political officer, N.B. Menon pleading for justice, but Menon handed her back to the Sikkim authorities. She was put in jail again with an additional charge of attempting to run away from legal custody. Finally, by a judgement of the Chief Magistrate of Sikkim dated November 15, 1968, Ruth was sentenced to two years imprisonment. The judgement order read, 'From the evidence of these witnesses it is clear that the accused was attempting to induce the ideas that the Chogyal and his government was a partisan one favouring one community against another and was obviously asking them not to obey the Chogyal and his government. And she fully knew that her telling these (things) to the simple villagers like these witness, a sense of discontentment would be created in them and stir up opposition to the Chogyal and the government established by law in Sikkim and would incite them to insurrection and rebellion which is the object of sedition as contemplated in Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code as applied to Sikkim. Further, from the evidence of these witnesses it is clear that the criticism was not directed towards any individual officer of the governmental machinery but was directed towards the Chogyal and his government and as such towards the very foundation of the State.'⁴⁰ Thus, Ruth was imprisoned under the fabricated case of sedition without charge-sheet, bail and was denied defense legal counsel. During the period of imprisonment in Gangtok jail she endured deplorable conditions including inadequate sanitation and food. Despite all the challenges, she remained determined and refused to apologise to the government. During her trial she boldly questioned the validity of the case of sedition against her, highlighting the lack of proper legal procedure and prolonged detention without trial. She challenged the authorities, asserting, 'try security and then you try sedition' as she was arrested for Security Act and not for sedition.⁴¹ Ruth's stance in the court reflects her courage and resilience in the face of injustice.

Meanwhile, the Government was manoeuvring to stop Ruth from any future attempts to take part in the politics of the land. This was done by proving that she was not a 'Sikkim Subject holder' because of her marriage to an Indian man. The Sikkim Durbar issued a Proclamation on March 15, 1969 scrapping Sikkimese citizenship from women who were married to non-Sikkimese men.⁴² However, the Sikkim Subject Regulation of 1961 (as amended in 1962) does not have such provision that a Sikkimese woman would lose her subject hood if married to a non-Sikkimese.⁴³ By the above Proclamation Ruth was declared a

non-Sikkimese and was released from jail to be banished from Sikkim. Immediately after her release in March, 1969 she was ordered to quit Sikkim by an order issued by the Chief Secretary to the Government of Sikkim. The order banishing Ruth from Sikkim read thus, 'the Government of Sikkim does not see any reason to continue in custody of a Sikkim prisoner, Mrs. Ruth Karthak Halim, who is not a subject of Sikkim and who is now undergoing a sentence of imprisonment upon conviction by the Court of Sikkim in Criminal Case No.9 of 1968. It is necessary that Ruth Halim shall leave Sikkim, and the Government hereby orders that the said Mrs. Halim shall remove herself from Sikkim and shall not thereafter enter Sikkim'.⁴⁴

There were no voices of protest against the unjust Proclamation passed by the Durbar. The Sikkim National Congress which was championing the cause of democracy in the state remained quiet. It is to be noted here that the president of this party was Kazi Lhendup Dorji, a Lepcha man who was also a member of the 'Lepcha Association'.⁴⁵ His silence does speak of ousting an emerging Lepcha female opponent from the politics of the land. The silence maintained by the common people explicitly highlights on their cultivated habit of accepting subservience because of the fear of repression under the authoritative feudal patriarchy. The repression faced by Ruth is an example of the male dominated politics of Sikkim.

Immediately after the order demanding Ruth to quit Sikkim was issued by the government, she left for Kalimpong, leaving behind her landed property and home. She stayed in Kalimpong for some time and then went to Calcutta to join her husband. The Government of India was not much of a help about the disposal of the property.⁴⁶ While Ruth was in Kalimpong she made a statement, 'I was afraid of some other kind of plot being hatched by the Sikkim bureaucrats who cannot suffer my presence in Sikkim among the masses, they hate me. I did not go to my home in Chisopaney. My house has been sealed by the police ever since I was put in jail. I had some money left in bank. The Sikkim police was shadowing me. Although I was advised to go and take my personal things at Chisopaney, I did not believe that I was free from the spidery nest of Sikkim Government. So, I ran for freedom. The release order which snatched away my birth right as a lawful citizen of Sikkim virtually rendered my status to that of a stateless person. I thought of only way to escape, and made my way for India immediately.'⁴⁷

Thus, the first woman of Sikkim who politically challenged the authority of Sikkim Durbar was marginalised socially and economically, stripped of her ancestral assets and forcibly exiled from her motherland Sikkim. She was seen as a threat to Sikkim Durbar for her outspoken views on the condition of the Lepcha people. Her decision to contest the election was a blow to the Durbar and the Sikkim National Party, which was composed of the elites and backed by the Durbar. The formation of a political party by Ruth was a direct challenge to the political authority of the monarch of Sikkim and the Sikkim National Party,

firstly, because no women in Sikkim had participated in politics of the land and formed political parties and secondly, Ruth had garnered huge support from the Lepcha community for the formation of her political party. Therefore, she was cut out of the political race even before it began. Thus, a woman standing against the powerful ruler was removed from the scene and the Lepcha people's voice was nipped at the bud. As mentioned earlier, Ruth's activism led to accusations from the Sikkim government, alleging her of spreading rumours against the Chogyal and favouring only the Bhutia community. This highlights the systemic subjugation and exclusion faced by the marginalised people who dared to speak against the monarchy.

While in exile, Ruth still hoped for relief and patiently waited for a comeback to serve her people.⁴⁸ During the period of exile between 1969-1977, she constantly corresponded with the government about the rights of marginalised communities and Sikkim government's move against her. This served to amplify her voice and her cause on the national stage. Finally, a High Court order issued in March, 1977, lifted the illegal externment order against her.⁴⁹ Immediately after the order was issued, Ruth decided for a comeback into politics. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1977 Ruth was nominated as a candidate from the Sikkim Janata Party. On April 11, 1977 she filed for nominations⁵⁰ but history repeated itself as Kazi Lendhup Dorji the then chief minister of Sikkim rejected her candidature.⁵¹ Thus, it is needless to say here that the electoral positions and contestation had always been a male prerogative in Sikkim as seen in the examples of 1967 and 1977 elections.

It is evident that Ruth's journey of advocacy for the Lepcha community was marked by significant challenges. Her arrest under forged case of sedition and her stance in the court was a reflection of her courage and resilience in the face of injustice. Ruth's marriage to an Indian brought her face-to-face with discriminatory laws enacted by the Sikkim Durbar. The 'Proclamation' stripping Sikkimese citizenship from women who married a non-Sikkimese directly impacted Ruth as she was the first victim of this unjust decree. Although Ruth tried to comeback into politics after the externment order was lifted in 1977 she was once again stopped without any concrete reason which speaks about the political discrimination faced by women in Sikkim.

From the foregoing discussion it may be summarised that Ruth Karthak, an enlightened Lepcha woman, inspired by her family's history of service, had an utmost desire to emancipate her community from socio-economic and political subjugation and worked through different platforms and strategies to raise awareness about the challenges faced by them. By starting the Sikkim Independent Front and fighting for land rights, Ruth addressed many social, economic and political problems. Her efforts, including calls for election boycotts and legal battles, showed her commitment to collective action against unfair system. In the face of adversities she remained strong and courageous, inspiring the Lepcha community to fight for their rights and improve their lives.

Her advocacy and awareness campaigns brought attention to issues like land rights, education, healthcare, and cultural preservation, gaining public support and pressurising policymakers to act. Ruth Karthak Lepcha's legacy encourages marginalised communities to 'speak up' and actively participate in shaping their futures. Her work has made a lasting impact on the Lepcha community, demonstrating the transformative power of advocacy and the importance of standing up against injustice. Her services will always be a milestone for the Lepcha community and an example for the future generations of marginalised people in Sikkim.

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