

Chapter – I

Introduction

The Problem of Study : An Outline

The present thesis, *Ethnicity, Class and Politics in Sikkim*, is about ethnic and class composition of the people of Sikkim and about the patterns of participation of different ethnic groups and emerging classes in Sikkim politics. In the thesis I have examined how the class and ethnic factors influence the political process in this tiny Indian State and how these identities of the Sikkimese are maintained and reproduced in the political and social life of the people. An effort has been made to assess the relative significance of these two factors in understanding the political processes in the State. We have also examined the interplay between the elements of civil society and polity and tried to see how the former help shape the political identities.

Broadly speaking, there are three identifiable ethnic groups in the State, the indigenous Lepchas and the Bhutias and Nepalese, who came and settled down in the State in different phases of history. These ethnic communities constitute three dominant and distinct cultural groups in the State. None of these ethnic groups now constitute a homogeneous class; each having internal class differentiation, though the intensity of such differentiation may vary from one group to another. With the merger of the State with India in 1975 a lot of development programmes have been introduced, which have widened the inner class differences within the groups and have prepared the ground for the emergence of some neo-classes. Though analytically, the terms 'ethnic groups' and 'class' are differentiated, in actuality they are overlapping categories. The research problem for this study stems from this conceptual position. How do the three leading ethnic groups formulate, cultivate and assert themselves in terms of social and political participation? How is the identity of each group formed and maintained? What is the outlook of each group towards the other groups and how does it shape its own approach towards state control, decision-making and planning? How does each group organize itself for a greater share of power? Another set of problem lies in the class heterogeneity of each of these groups. This relates the question, whether the whole ethnic group or only a fragment of it runs the show. This question is significant because it is possible that the ethnic movements do not always evolve naturally with an all-round spontaneous participation of the

members of the group. It may very well be the handiwork of a selected few of the group, who provide leadership and do everything in the name of the whole group, binding them with an 'ethnic-ideology'. Thus identification of the emerging classes and their role in the movement or their role in mobilizing respective ethnic groups, in the process of making into a political force, form one of the core areas of the present study. While the study proposes to unravel the contemporary scenario, a historical treatment of the problem would be absolutely necessary. Without an historical approach, we would not be able to comprehend properly the cultural background of ethnic group formation and its political participation.

The Problem in its Historical and Social Context

The early phase of Sikkim's history may be traced back to the 'blood treaty', signed between the Lepchas, who are considered to be the autochthons and the Bhutias, who overran this area in 17th Century. The treaty provided the basis for growth of multi-ethnic society, recognizing a Bhutia chieftain as the first Chogyal (spiritual and secular ruler) of Sikkim in 1642. With the consecration of the first ruler and propagation of new religion of Lamaist Buddhism, the Bhutias became influential and made a deep impression on the socio-economic life of the Lepchas. The communities in course of time developed close socio-cultural relationship, there were cases of inter-marriages and the acceptance of Lamaist Buddhism. However, the Lepchas and Bhutias have been able to retain their distinctive socio-cultural identities and maintained ethnic boundaries.

Inspite of large degree of assimilation, the inter-ethnic relationship between the Lepchas and the Bhutias was not always cordial. The history is abound with the cases of internal feuds. There have been instances of the Lepchas opposing the domination of the Bhutias in the affairs of the kingdom. The ruler and his group went so far as to accomplish the assassination of a Lepcha minister. The resulting panic and insecurity saw hundred of Lepchas migrating to the Illam area of eastern Nepal in 1826.

The next phase of Sikkim's history began with the Nepalese encroachment in the beginning of the eighteenth Century. Nepal invaded and occupied the western region of Sikkim in 1774-75. This led to substantial settlement of Nepalese on her territory. However, the ethnic scenario began to change rapidly, when the British

foothold in Sikkim strengthened, with the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890, which recognized Sikkim as a protectorate of British India. The British encouraged large numbers of Nepalese immigrants to construct roads and extend agriculture. As a consequence of the British policy the ethnic composition of the State changed; the Nepalese soon outnumbered the local population. A closer scrutiny of the population trend over the last hundred years indicates a tremendous multiplication of population figures, which has tilted in favour of Nepalese. Now, the Nepalese have emerged as the largest social group, comprising 75 percent of the total population.

The Chogyal's regime turned out to be a kind of centralized aristocracy. A new class of Bhutia landlords (Kazis) and the Nepali 'Thikadars' gained prominence. They together became the power behind the throne and dominated the socio-economic scene. This resulted in the large-scale discontentment among the masses, thus opening a new conflict between the ruling elite and the masses. The period was also marked by the ethnic and economic imbalances among three communities. While the Bhutias retained the dominant position, owning best of lands, controlling business and urban property, the Lepchas remained in utter poverty with hardly any political and economic foothold. Barring a few, the average Nepalese were in the lower stratum with a second class political status.¹

In the modern period, particularly with the end of British rule, Sikkim could not remain immune to the heat and dust of the great political events that were taking place in India. The democratic process that began in India following its independence in 1947 aroused the democratic aspirations of Sikkimese people that gave vent to the formation of Sikkim State Congress. The party, with representations from all three ethnic groups, had a definite programme to abolish landlordism and to form a democratic government. To counter this, the loyalist Bhutias formed The National Party to preserve the theocratic feudalism of Sikkim's ruling pattern.

With the change in the pattern of Indo-Sikkimese relationship after 1947, ethnicity became a focal point of rapid political changes. The supremacy of the Bhutia-Lepcha combine was given weightage in the name of safeguarding minority communities. The intricate system of 'parity' equated the minority Bhutia-Lepcha combine with the majority Nepalese, for the distribution of seats in the State Council. Along with this, an intricate electoral system was introduced, which required a certain percentage of votes from the minority communities as obligatory. Apart from the election to State Council, the principle of parity adjustment was extended to the

appointment and award of scholarship to students.² All this gave birth to wide-range dissatisfaction among the Nepalese community. Thus, a race for access to political power, between the numerically minority Bhutia-Lepcha, who had a near complete political hegemony and the numerically dominant Nepalese, who were discriminated against in the socio-economic and political spheres. Such a guided social and political arrangement aroused the inner urge for freedom and democratic movements, which resulted into a general upheaval in 1973.

However, even after the establishment of the democratic set-up in the State and its subsequent merger with the India, the ethnic issues continued to dominate the political scene in Sikkim. The issue of reservation and distribution of seats along ethnic lines in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly had always been a matter of tension among three ethnic groups. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance 1979 replaced the earlier system of parity of communal representation and imposed a new formula of seat reservation. In the new arrangement the minority Bhutia-Lepcha communities have 12 seats reserved for them, with 1 more seat for Sangha and 2 for Scheduled Castes, while the remaining 17 seats are treated as general. While the Bhutia-Lepchas are afraid of being dominated by the Nepalese, the latter are apprehensive of losing control on State power. The apprehension of the Nepalese was so strong that it led to the split of the then Janata Party of Sikkim leading to formation of Sikkim Congress Revolutionary. Apart from the ethnic issues, the merger of Sikkim with India, became a focal political issue in 1979 election. The slogan of 'Sikkim for Sikkimese' and a promise for protecting the rights of the Sikkimese through 'son of the soil' policy credited the Sikkim Janata Parishad to win the election in 1979.

The population distribution in various regions of the state is such that the Lepchas are mostly concentrated in North Sikkim, the Bhutias are concentrated in North and North-East highlands, and the Nepalese have settled down mostly in the East-, South- and West Sikkim. Generally speaking, the Nepalese and the Bhutias constitute the educationally and economically better off segments of Sikkimese population.

The economy of Sikkim is primarily based on agriculture. The land-data shows that most of the favourable and fertile lands have gradually been taken over by the Bhutias and the Nepalese. The Marwaris and other traders from the plains mostly control the urban commercial establishments.

Since the merger of Sikkim with India in 1975, there have been large-scale developmental activities. The massive growth of economy, the modernization and expansion of administrative structure and social service have opened up new employment opportunities. Since access to occupations in other sectors depends upon the level of education of the job seekers, the Bhutias and the Nepalese who are educationally ahead of the Lepchas, appear to be enjoying the fruits of the developmental activities. Again, these are the two communities that are dominating the politics and higher level of state bureaucracy. Sengupta has pointed out that ‘ a network of commercial and small scale and medium scale industrial establishments have been developed in Sikkim, but the immediate tangible benefits of the massive development appeared to have accrued largely to the already affluent class.’³

Thus, the Nepalese and the Bhutias have very strong presence in the economic, social and political life of Sikkim. Since these two ethnic groups are strongly represented in the decision-making bodies, the average members of these two groups often receive patronage from the bureaucrats and politicians while the others, particularly the Lepchas, feel discriminated against. The feeling of unequal distribution of opportunities and benefits, the feeling of deprivations among the members of different ethnic groups, very often create a feeling of animosity among them. The feeling of deprivation is particularly strong among the weaker sections. The political parties in the state, in their effort to widen their sphere of control, often formulate strategies to provoke the ethnic sentiment. Once politicized, the ethnic issues take firm roots to strengthen the ethnic boundaries.

The early 1990s have witnessed the growing ethnic consciousness among the various Nepalese sub-cultural stocks, fragmented along caste and racial lines – the Aryan and the Mongoloids. The prejudice of the upper caste Nepalese against the Matwali community bursted out in the open when the Sikkim Sangram Parishad run government refused to implement the proposal of Mandal Commission for Other Backward Classes. However, the latent dissatisfaction of other backward classes found an outlet with the formation of Sikkim Democratic Front, when Mr. P.K. Chamling belonging to backward class category was ousted from the ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad ministry in 1992.

The growing ethnic consciousness among the different communities found expression in the formation of many caste and community organizations. The tribal organization like ‘Survival Sikkimese’ claims that Sikkim exists only for the Bhutias

and Lepchas and the rest are neo-colonizers. On the other hand, there is an organization called 'NE-BU-LA', which claims to represent all three Bhutias, Lepchas and the Nepalese communities, the main objectives being promotion of peace.

The inter-ethnic differences often came to the forefront in the recent past. A great inter-community resentment was noticed in May 1994, when the Parliament withheld the Finance Bill that proposed to exempt the Scheduled Tribes, which includes the Bhutias and the Lepchas, from payment of central income tax as the majority Nepalese too demanded similar exemption.

To arrest the inter-ethnic tension in the state, the state government has adopted some stopgap policies. Sikkim being a tiny state and the potential for expanding employment opportunities through industrial expansion and educational development being limited, the state government has been forced to be over-cautious in formulating legislation, in maintaining ethnic balance and providing various opportunities to the local Sikkimese only.

The Land Ceiling measures are yet to be implemented. With the preponderance of political power enjoyed by the landowning class of Kazis, who were mostly Bhutias, the state government did not favour any drastic change. In order to avoid future complications the state government has prohibited land alienation from the hands of Sikkimese Nepalese, Bhutias and Lepchas to the outsiders. The Land Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917, which is still in operation prohibits the alienation of Bhutia-Lepcha lands to the Nepalese and other communities. In 1989, when a High Court Judgement allowed Mr. L.D. Kazi – a Bhutia to 'gift' a piece of prime urban land to Mr. Khatiwada, a Nepali. This was a clear departure from the Royal Proclamation prohibiting such inter-community transfer. The judgement drew adverse reaction from the Bhutia-Lepcha communities who feared that it will open door for further alienation of their land in the guise of 'gifts.'⁴

The nomination of students for higher studies in various academic and technical courses in other states of India is done purely for those having Sikkim subject certificate. The state government has adopted the preferential policy for 'son of the soil' in matters of distribution of employment and other resources. In 1991, when the teachers from other parts of India, working in Sikkim on contract basis for many years, filed a case demanding regularization of their job, a large-scale discontentment among a section of Sikkimese youth was reported. They felt that the

people from the plains would gradually oust them from the positions of importance, since the former had greater control over the human resources.

The post-merger Sikkim has witnessed the emergence of Sikkimese identity, which is now a socio-political identity. It is the synthesis of ethnic, cultural, social and political interest of the earliest settlers, belonging to Lepcha-Bhutia and the Nepalese communities. The legal recognition of 'Sikkimese' has been aimed to protect interest of earliest settlers and to check the influx of people from other states. Without this guarantee to the share of the ethnic communities to the state's limited resources, the inter-ethnic relations in the state would have aggravated.

The present study attempts to explore areas of inter-ethnic tensions in the state, the roots of ethnic tension, the nature of ramification and the mode of politicization of the ethnic issues. The diverse heritage of the major communities and their cultural differences prepare the ground for ethnic group formation. The politicization of the ethnic issues, the political mobilization in ethnic lines, formulation of policies for distribution of resources and opportunities along ethnic lines consolidate the ethnic boundaries. Once the ethnic categories are legitimized by the state for the purpose of administration and distribution of resources, the ethnic consciousness is reproduced and consolidated. The internal class differences in each of the communities may add new dimensions to the relationship between ethnicity and politics. Hence, the problem 'Ethnicity, Class and Politics' in Sikkim.

Ethnicity

In recent years, ethnicity has emerged as an important analytical tool in the social sciences. Etymologically, the term 'ethnicity' draws its origin from the term 'ethnic' that relates to community of physical and mental traits, possessed by the members of a group as a product of their common heredity and cultural tradition.⁵ However, ethnic group which denotes racial, linguistic and cultural ties of people attains significance only when its members share a sense of identity. A sense of shared identity creates a potential ethnic constituency.⁶ Hence, ethnicity may be understood as a human product, which manifests when a group makes use of such primordial bases as culture, race, religion and territory to secure the interests of its members.⁷

Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity, which has been defined by DeVos as consisting of the 'subjective, symbolic or emblematic use' by a group of people of any aspect of culture 'in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups'.⁸ In addition to subjective self consciousness, ethnicity also involves a claim to status and recognition, either as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups. Ethnicity is to ethnic category, what class-consciousness is to class.⁹

Ethnicity, as a social phenomenon, has wide range of sociological dimensions. When the ethnic aspirations of a dominant group clashes with those of the minority, ethnic conflict may erupt. Hence, the role of state and politics assume importance in understanding ethnicity.¹⁰ The relationship between the state and ethnicity has been analyzed by Professor Oomen in his paper 'Nation, State and Ethnicity'. According to him, while state is a political entity ethnicity emerges through the interaction between different peoples; it is a product of conquest, colonization and immigration.¹¹ About the association between the ethnicity and state, Rajni Kothari writes, "when each ethnic community or caste or religious group interprets its insecurity as a result of the privileges of a competing group gained through 'favours' and 'patronage' from the state, the resulting conflict and violence does not aim at fighting another community but rather fighting the state, which is presumed to be dominated by or be preferential to the other community. The other community is perceived as a surrogate state."¹² Hence, ethnicity, which is a matter of ascription is politicized into ethnic factor, when an ethnic group is in conflict with the political elite over such issues as the use of limited resources or the allocation of benefits – issues that are particularly intense in developing Third World Countries.¹³

Ethnicity is often seen as a viable means of obtaining highly valued goods.¹⁴ A comparison between the emergence of ethnicity in Europe and in the Third World shows that prospects of social mobility and economic advancement by political means encourages ethnicity.¹⁵ Ethnic groups that use ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for alternation in their status, in their economic well-being, in their civil rights or in their educational opportunities are engaged in a form of interest group politics.¹⁶ Thus, ethnicity is guarded by various ethnic groups either to defend the privileges or to overcome obstruction towards development.¹⁷ On the other way, to sustain itself, the government often legitimizes ethnicity by channelizing development or distributing rewards along ethnic lines.¹⁸

The process of ethnic group formation invariably involves competition and conflict for political power, for economic benefits and for social status between competing elite groups.¹⁹ The cultural forms, values and practices become symbols and referents for the identification of members of the group to create a political identity.²⁰ In the process, the relatively disadvantaged aspirant elite may mobilize its ethnic group to create a new sense of identity among its members. Hence, ethnicity is a form of interaction between cultural groups, which utilize their ascriptive identities to achieve their desired ends, within common social contexts.

Approaches to Ethnicity

The divergent perspectives and approaches to ethnicity may broadly be categorized into (a) primordialist, (b) cultural pluralist, (c) modernisation and development and (d) Marxist and neo-Marxist.

- (a) The primordialist approach focuses on culture as part of personality formation and development, which provides impetus for social and political mobilization. The primordialists tend to argue that 'attachments' derived from place of birth, kinship relationship, religion, language and social practices are 'natural' for every person. These provide a basis for an easy 'affinity' with other peoples from the same background,²¹ as these 'attachments' are 'rooted in the non-rational foundation of personality'. In other words, ethnic identities are not chosen, they are given i.e. they proceed from the cultural givens of the past. However, the primordialist sentiment fails to explain why inter-ethnic group relationship has been harmonious at one time but not at other times. It is also argued that the premise of primordial ties being 'particularistic' they are perceived as potential road blocks in the process of national cohesion.²²
- (b) Initially evolved by Furnival and modified subsequently by Smith and others, the cultural pluralists emphasize on the dominant-subordinate patterns of interaction among mutually incompatible ethnic groups. Such an interaction is characterized by domination, separation, instability and impregnated with conflict. However, this model does not take note of the intra-ethnic group cleavages and doesn't explain why inter-ethnic group conflict has often been led by the culturally similar segments of people.²³

(c) The development and communication theories have perceived ethnic affinities as residual phenomena and postulate that with the differentiation of the division of labour and extension of the capitalist market, ethnic attachments would be undermined. But, it is to be noted that whatever be the level of development of the state, ethnic conflicts is an ongoing process.²⁴

Another noteworthy approach of politicization of ethnicity has been that of 'Relative Deprivation'. The theory stresses on the importance of inequality in the distribution of available resources, social benefits and opportunities between distinct ethnic groups. It contends that nationalism arises in response to objective exploitation of an indigenous group by an alien group, or of one social class by another.²⁵ In other way, a feeling of frustration or relative deprivation precipitates nationalism. Ted Gur refers to relative deprivation as a gap between the expectations and perceived capabilities of a person vis-à-vis his economic situation, political power and social status in relation to others.²⁶ However, the concept provides an explanatory framework of conflict only partially.

(d) The Marxist- and neo-Marxist approaches view ethnic conflict as emerging: (a) at a general level in which, ethnicity is viewed as a device detracting from the 'consciousness of class interests' and manipulated by political leadership and vested interests; (b) in a situation, where there has been a 'cultural division of labour', when members of an ethnic group are placed in a subordinate position within a given state (internal colonialism) or in the global context (international division of labour).²⁷ However, the internal colonial model too has a limited implication.

Ethnicity may be defined in another way in terms of objective attributes, with reference to subjective feelings and in relation to behaviour.²⁸ The objectivists claim that cultural markers like race, language and descent are clearly connected with ethnic identity. However, more emphasis on ethnic groups as culture bearing units reflect a narrow view, which stresses social continuity rather than social adaptation.²⁹ While maintaining the cultural markers, the subjectivists stress on the self as well as group related feeling of identity distinctiveness and recognition by others. Here too, they failed to say how and when does a group arrives at subjective self-consciousness.³⁰

Behavioural definitions suggest that there are cultural differences but the critical distinctions reveal themselves only in interaction with other groups.³¹

All these various approaches and interpretations though serve only a partial understanding, provides a valuable insight for understanding ethnic conflict. Taking cues from the above discussion, the problem of ethnicity can be approached from three major angles. Firstly, it refers to primordialists interpretation of strengthening and preserving culture, which are natural and primordial 'given communities'. Secondly, it relates to instrumentalists perspective that emphasises the uses of cultural symbols of elites seeking instrumental advantage i.e. they are creations of interested leaders of elite group or of the political system in which they are included.³² Thirdly, it centres around the questions of control of state power. Thus, though racial, linguistic, religious or cultural factors prepare the ground for ethnic group formation, the whole process invariably revolves around politics.

Ethnicity in the Context of Present Study

Ethnicity in Sikkim has deep historical roots. The widespread use of ethnic factor for securing rights over resources, through political mobilization shows the new potential of ethnicity even in the new democratic set-up. In the present study, both the subjective and objective criteria of ethnicity have been given equal weightage. It attempts to view ethnicity from the instrumentalist perspective and assumes the process of ethnic identity formation in the dynamics of elite competition, in the context of broader social, political and economic realities. It is based on the assumption that a sense of relative deprivation and competition for limited resources and benefits precipitate ethnicity. It also assumes that ethnicity is not only 'given' but a social and political construction of elite, who uses the primordial attributes to gain political and economic advantage for their group.

Class

In stratified societies, people are often grouped together with those having similar economic standing, power and prestige. Hence, class is considered to be one of the most important factor in studying modern societies. Social classes as defined by Lenin are "large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation to the means of

production, by their role in the social organization of labour and consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.”³³

The exact state of social formation of the Sikkimese society is debatable. In the theocratic Sikkim, the elements of feudal social formation were strongly present and access to state power was hereditary. Broadly, the traditional political structure consisted three distinct segments: (a) the clergy consisting of monks drawn from high born Bhutias and Lepchas; (b) the nobles and aristocrats consisting mostly of Kazis and few Newars and (c) the commoners. The economy of the state has traditionally been agriculture based, but with no capitalist farming and the industrial sector was insignificant. The trade sector had a long history and was developed too. Besides, a section of population in the state had been in the service sector.

After the merger with India there have been some significant changes in all spheres of state economy. The democratic participation and large-scale developmental activities, is breeding inequality within an ethnic group. All sections of population are, class-wise, now much more fragmented. New classes of people with economic interests, with profit motive are new crystallizing to emerge as a pressure group, to influence state politics and get things done to suit their interest. With the spread of education, with the expansion of bureaucracy, with the increase of trade and industry, a neo-rich middle class has emerged from within the three major communities of Sikkim.

Most recent sociological work on the theory of class is based on a distinction between Marxian and Weberian approach. Class in Marxian sense is a group of people occupying similar position in the production relations with a sense of homogeneity and some commonness in purpose and who are politically organized in the process of struggle for power. On the other hand, Max Weber presented ‘a comprehensive alternative’³⁴ to the Marxist theory and argued stratification on the basis of occupation, prestige, consumption and the style of life in capitalist societies.

Apart from the property ownership, which is the basic criteria of class membership, Weber conceives of more than two opposed classes. His concept of ‘Class’ refers to any group of people that is found in the same ‘Class Situation’,³⁵ such as common life chances representing economic interests in terms of possession of goods and opportunities for income and under the conditions of commodity or labour

markets. Weber's definition of social class hence conceives of the centrality of occupations and occupational mobility.³⁶

Taking the footsteps of Weber, Mills also regarded occupation rather than property as the basis of class stratification.³⁷ Following the Weberian model, Lockwood also defines class in terms of three situations : Market situation 'consisting of source and size of income, degree of job security, and opportunity for upward occupational mobility', work situation, or 'the set of social relationships in which the individual is involved at work by virtue of his position in the division of labour', and status situation, or the position in the hierarchy of prestige.³⁸

The New Class

The concept of new class is of very recent origin. Djilas in his book 'The New Class' defines 'as those who have special privileges and economic preferences because of the administrative monopoly they hold'.³⁹ He calls them a class because they have 'control of the national income and national goods'.⁴⁰

Writing about the emergence of the new class, John Kenneth Galbraith in his book 'Affluent Society', writes that 'the leisure class has been replaced by another and much larger class to which work has none of the older connotation of pain, fatigue, or mental or physical discomfort and for the new class, pay is a prime index of prestige'.⁴¹ He further asserts that for the new class 'overwhelmingly the qualification is education' and included within it the college professors, school teachers, surgeons, most of those who pay income surtax rates and the politicians.⁴² Dahrendorf's concept of service class also gives a hint of new class. He included bureaucrats in the service class, whose main function is the administration of laws.⁴³ Hence in the post-industrial system, technical skill and education are the basis for access to position, power and authority and thereby to the new class.

The present study attempts to view the concept of class in the Weberian approach. However it is very difficult to determine the class position of the people in strict sense. Hence, the new class in Sikkim cannot be called as a class in pure sense, as it lacks class-consciousness. However, it influences the politics more like an interest group. Therefore, the present study does not study in detail the class character of Sikkimese population, rather it takes into account only the economic and occupational background of the people, who are taking off the leadership of the ethnic

movements in the state. An understanding of the class background of its population would enable us to have a clearer understanding of the nature and purpose of the ethnic movement of the state.

Conceptually, I strongly feel that ethnicity, class and politics are amongst the most important dimensions of man in modern days. These dimensions are highly inter-linked and they inseparably form part of man's consciousness. Though they remain side-by-side in human consciousness, it is only in occasions, depending on the objective conditions, that one amongst these three takes a prominent place. Thus the inter play of these three important factors forms the key questions to be pondered in the present study.

A Brief Review of Literature

Sikkim, despite being a tiny state, has drawn attention of the administrators, academicians and travellers. Hence, the existing published literatures on Sikkim are indeed numerous. The literatures basically are the studies on ethnography, political history, historical literature and some are travel notes on Sikkim. As it is irrelevant and impossible to cover all the publications, a brief review of some important works has been attempted in this section.

V.H. Coelho in *Sikkim and Bhutan* (1970), while portraying the evolution of administrative and political structure of Sikkim has pinpointed how the Sikkimese people have a strong sense of belongingness to their land, who are always ready to protect from any political misadventure from across the border. B.S.K. Grover's *Sikkim and India* (1974) is a portrayal of all the significant aspects of political and constitutional developments in Sikkim and its institutions, focusing on Sikkim's special relations with India in between 1947 to 1974. He regarded 1973 revolution as a major break from age-old feudalism to a constitutional framework.

L.B. Basnet's book *Sikkim – A Short Political History* (1974) is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the period antecedent to 1947. The second part deals with the interplay of political parties, the ruling house and the government of India on the political stage of Sikkim, in post 1947 period up to the end of May 1973. S.N. Shukla's book *Sikkim – The Story of Integration* (1976) is a text highlighting the political and constitutional development in Sikkim over the years. The book covers the early history, the popular upsurge, and the downfall of monarchy leading to the

merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union. Justifying the merger the author mentions that the role of Indian government has been hailed everywhere in the world.

Sikkim - The Story of Integration (1978) by P.R. Roa, highlights the struggle of the people of Sikkim and awakening of political consciousness for democratization of their administration and closer political association with India. He also highlights the international intrigue on making Sikkim as an associate state of India. The book entitled *The Himalaya as a Frontier* (1978) by Rahul Ram deals with the frontier countries of Bhutan, Tibet, Sikkim and Nepal. It deals with the relations maintained among these countries and with China and India. It also focuses on the role of religion in the history and politics of these countries. P.N. Chopra's book *Sikkim* (1979) gives a comprehensive view of Sikkim and its people. Describing the physical features of the state, the book relates to history and discusses the social, cultural and religious life of the people. A separate chapter on the monasteries of Sikkim has been added.

The Sikkim Saga (1983) written by B.S Das, who was the chief administrator of Sikkim from 1973 to 1974, gives a firsthand report of political turmoil in Sikkim between 1973 and 1975, the year of merger. Justifying Sikkim's merger with India, the author maintains that Sikkim could never hope to have an independent status. *The Himalayan Gateway* (1983) by George Kotturan, narrates the history and culture of Sikkimese people. It also highlights the political, administrative and economic set-up of the post-merger Sikkim. Sunanda K. Datta Ray in the book *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim* (1984) has openly condemned the issue of merger and considers Sikkim's take over by India in the 'smash and grab' style. Describing the events leading to the 'annexation' of Sikkim on the basis of documentary evidences, interviews, eye-witnesses, anecdotes and unpublished letters, Datta Ray argues that India's action in Sikkim was motivated by the desire of annexing it.

Sikkim - Government and Politics (1984) by S.K. Jha and S.N. Mishra traces the absorbing story of how Sikkim rose from the status of a protectorate to a full-fledged constituent of the democratic India, with all the infra-structure of an Indian state, having its own legislature, executive and full-fledged judiciary. It also brings into light the political dimensions of ethnically complex state. *Aspect of Cultural History of Sikkim* (1984) by P.K. Bhattacharya is basically a study of Sikkim's coinage. His study is connected with the socio-economic and political history of small kingdom Sikkim and its relation with the British India. His information is generally

based on documents collected from the last Chogyal, important families of Sikkim and Darjeeling and National Archives of India, New Delhi.

State Government and Politics- Sikkim (1985) by N. Sengupta traces the political development that led to the merger of Sikkim in the perspective of its political history, and the cross-currents of ethnic, social and religious factors. It also studies the nature and changing trends of political dynamics, the political framework and governmental process. The author traces the system prevalent unto 1973 and the changes that came over since 1974, in order to facilitate a comparative study over time.

Strategic Sikkim (1985) by O.P Singh is the full length and detailed study about various aspects of the state particularly from the defense point of view. Although he portrays the system of administration, industries, means of communication, education and welfare of the people, the crux of the study is the strategic aspects like locational defense problems, defense potentialities and the defense awareness of the state.

Sikkim – A Himalayan Tragedy (1987) by Nari Rustomji contains a series of correspondence between the Chogyal, his family members and the author from 1943-1982. The book is more of a biography of the last Chogyal of Sikkim P.T. Namgyal, rather than a history of Sikkim. The author, being a close associate of Chogyal, also reveals that he never approved of India's annexation of Sikkim. *Inside Sikkim – Against the Tide* (1993) by Jigme N. Kazi, though is a journalist record of a heroic attempt to keep the freedom of press in any developing democracy, the struggle of the Sikkimese people to preserve the unique and distinct identity of Sikkim has been well-articulated in the book.

Among the few anthropo-sociological studies in Sikkim, *The Himalayan Village* (1938/1967) by Gorer and *Living with the Lepchas* by John Morris (1938) deserve special mention. These two most detailed and the richest ethnographic literature on the Lepchas were the result of their intensive fieldwork undertaken for three months in the Lepcha 'reserve' of Dzongu, North Sikkim in 1937. Chie Nakane based on her fieldwork in three hamlets of North Sikkim in late 50's did another piece of anthropological work. The lengthy article entitled, 'A Plural Society in Sikkim' (1966) published in Furer Haimendorf edited book, deals with the inter-relationship among the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese and explains relative backwardness of the Lepchas and Bhutias in terms of religious factor. Mention must be made of Halfdan Siiger's monumental work entitled *The Lepchas: Culture and Religion of A*

Himalayan Community (1967). The work is primarily based on the fieldwork done in a village called Tingvoong in North Sikkim. C. De Beavoir Stock's *Folklore and Customs of the Lap-chas of Sikkim* (1975) is a comprehensive study of Lepcha folklores of Sikkim. It also includes few songs in the native language.

A.C. Sinha's book *Politics of Sikkim* (1975), based on his doctoral thesis, is a sociological study on political elite of Sikkim. The book is divided into three parts: Part I deals with the historical evolution and explores the social forces leading to transition from monarchy to democracy. Part II analyses the socio-economic status, political affiliation and perception of elite in Sikkim. Part III evaluates the political development in the post-1947 period in terms of institutional accomplishment. Veena Bhasin's *Ecology, Culture and Change: Tribals of Sikkim Himalayas* (1989) is based on the two tribes of North Sikkim, the Lepchas and the Bhutias. The book shows how the eco-system and socio-cultural system are inter-connected.

Sikkim Since Independence (1991) by Amal Datta, which is based on his doctoral dissertation, offers an empirical analysis of the role of education in the emergence of new class. The author has taken education as an index to understand the process of modernisation in Sikkim since 1975.

Sikkim (1993) edited by K.S. Singh is the first ever ethnographic survey of Sikkim of all communities undertaken by Anthropological Survey of India under the 'People of India' project. The comprehensive work offers a bio-cultural and linguistic profile that covers the different aspects of Sikkim's life and culture of all 25 communities. Roshina Gowloog's *Lingthem Revisited* (1995) which is based on her doctoral work is a re-study of Lingthem, a Lepcha village in Dzongu, North Sikkim, that was earlier studied by two British anthropologists – Geoffrey Gorer and John Morris in early 1937. She uses these works as the benchmark to study social change. The book intensively covers the economy, social organization and religion and provides a comprehensive picture of continuity and change.

Among the edited books containing article on Sikkim, mention must be made of *The Himalaya: Aspects of Change* (1981) edited by J.S. Lall, *The Himalayas : Profiles of Modernisation and Adaptation* (1985) edited by S.K. Chaube, *Eastern Himalayas: Environment and Economy* (1986) by R.L. Sarkar and Mahendra P. Lama, *The Himalayan Heritage* (1987) edited by M.K. Raha and *Religion and Society in the Himalayas* (1991) edited by T.B. Subba and Karubaki Datta. These books contain a good number of articles touching various aspects of Sikkim. The book



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Sikkim (1994) edited by Mahendra P. Lama is a collection of articles on society, polity, economy and environment of Sikkim.

Apart from these, mention must be made up of the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of R.R. Dhamala on *A Study of Local Self Government and Democratic Decentralisation in Sikkim* (1985). The study outlines the evolution of Panchayati Raj System and attempts to identify the shortcomings of the system and recommend measures to streamline administration and elected bodies to suit the demands of the panchayati raj institution. Nilotpal Sharma's doctoral work 'Plainsman in the Hills' (1991) is a sociological study in Sikkim. It deals with the migrational history, the internal and occupational structure and socio-cultural matrix of plainsman in Sikkim. He has pointed out number of factors like primordial differences, administrative policies and rapid modernization responsible for low socio-cultural adaptation of plainsmen in Sikkim.

Among the numerous articles published in the edited books and various journals related to ethnicity and politics, the followings deserve special mention.

'Ethnic Dimension of Sikkimese Politics: The 1979 election' (1980) by Urmila Phadnis, published in *Asian Survey*, highlights the ethnic forces that have interplayed in various alignment pattern in the electoral and political scene during the first ever election, after merger in 1979. The author has also pointed out the significant implication of emerging elite and their ethnic antecedents in the process of readjusting power relations. A.C. Sinha's article 'Resource Distribution and Multiple Ethnic Identity in Sikkim' (1981) published in *Asian Highlands Societies*, attempts to understand the complex inter-ethnic relations in Sikkim, in the light of resource distribution vis-à-vis ethnic identity in the Sikkimese social milieu.

S.K. Chaube in his article 'Ethnicity and Politics in Sikkim' (1989) in *The Himalayan Heritage*, seeks to explore various ethnic and social forces that have affected the politics of Sikkim since India's independence. He has also pointed out that factions take upper hand over ethnic alignments in the new democratic set-up. T.B. Subba in his article 'Migration and Ethnic Relations in Darjeeling and Sikkim' (1988) published in *Social Science and Social Concern*, traces the migrational history of various communities and shows how it has given rise to the competition for or ethnic conflict over the dwindling resources in Darjeeling and Sikkim. 'Ethnicity and Politics in Sikkim' (1993-1994) by Karubaki Datta published in *The Himalayan Miscellany*, tries to explore the ethnic character of the state politics. It also highlights

how the demand for proportionate representation of the Nepalese in the State Assembly has dominated the political issues in Sikkim and how it has brought the Lepchas and the Bhutias together in their effort of survival.

Amal Datta's article 'Ethnicity and Resource Management in Sikkim' (1994) published in *Sikkim*, presents an analysis of how the particular ethnic affiliation vis-à-vis common origin has been important in determining the resource management in Sikkim. He has pointed out that ethnic identity has an important dimension in exploiting the privileges, managing the resources and acquiring the power in the state. The article by K.R. Chakravarti 'Government and Politics in Sikkim' (1994) published in the book *Sikkim*, highlights the constitutional status of the agreement of merger and discusses the nature of electoral politics in Sikkim from the Assembly Election of 1979 to the election of 1989. D.S. Bhattacharjee's article 'Society in Sikkim – The Changing Scenario' (1995) published in *North-East and the Indian States – Paradoxes of a Periphery*, highlights how alignment and re-alignments have taken the line of communal-casteist-racial axis in Sikkim, with the division of Nepalese community into the Aryans and the Mongoloids.

Karubaki Datta's 'Inter-Ethnic Relations in Sikkim in Historical Perspective' published in *Occasional paper (No.11)* of Centre for Himalayan Studies of North Bengal University tries to explore how the inter-ethnic relations among three dominant communities have evolved over a long period of time. It also attempts to identify the major phases and issues that have moulded the inter-ethnic relationships.

Apart from these, there are numerous articles covering various aspects of Sikkimese society, economy and polity, published in journals and edited books. However, I abstain from reviewing all these, as it would make the survey unnecessarily voluminous.

A brief review of literature on Sikkim makes it amply clear that no comprehensive and full length study has been undertaken so far on 'Ethnicity, Class and Politics' in Sikkim. The attempts made so far by the scholars cover only part dimension of the problem chosen for the present study. The uniqueness of the present study lies in its effort to explore the social, economic and political spaces of the state in order to come out with a comprehensive understanding of how the seeds of ethnicity are spread and how ethnicity is reproduced in social and political practices. The interplay of ethnicity and class factors in the sphere of power relations also constitutes one of the core areas of the study.

Objectives of the Study

The present study is designed to look into the patterns of participation of the different ethnic groups and emergent class in Sikkim politics. The basic queries of research may broadly be outlined as follows:

1. To examine if the various socio-economic and political factors that led to the abolition of monarchy and subsequent merger of Sikkim with India had any ethnic undertones
2. To examine the nature of inter-ethnic relationship both at the socio-cultural, economic and political levels and both at the macro and micro situations and to trace out the areas of conflict between three dominant communities of Sikkim in the past as well as at present. The study aims to look into the process of reproduction and cultivation of ethnic boundaries or ethnic consciousness in the everyday life interaction and social participation of the members of the ethnic communities.
3. To identify the role of the state and the political parties in the ethnic mobilization and to assess the pattern of participation of different ethnic groups in the Sikkim politics. The present study aims to explore the role of the institutions and organizations in defining the politics in ethnic terms.
4. To examine the nature of ethnic dimension of resource distribution and to find out if the sense of relative deprivation in terms of developmental activities in the post-merger Sikkim has led to ethnic group formation.
5. To assess the socio-economic background of neo-class and their perceptions of the major ethnic issues and to see their participation in the state politics. It would be one of the major objectives of the present study to explore how with the introduction of new areas of development, new class forces are emerging and whether these forces are assuming new identities in social, economic and cultural terms. It would also be interesting to examine whether these neo-classes are playing their autonomous part in the politics of the state or whether they are subsumed within the broad ethnic categories.

Methodology

The present study has given me an opportunity to use historical materials and data both from primary and secondary sources. There was also enough scope for using qualitative- as well as quantitative data, both for micro and macro level information. As the present study focuses on the State of Sikkim as a whole, the first part of data collection was done through consulting the historical documents and the already available studies. The historical approach helped me in accumulating data on the process of ethnic group formation in the state. The collection of macro level statistical information on demographic profile, the occupational patterns, literacy rates and educational achievements, linguistic composition, the developmental profile, the representation of three communities in the bureaucracy, politics and employment, patterns of community-wise ownership of land-holdings and industries was possible through consultation of Census reports, government office records, reports, documents, published materials and the manuscripts.

The field survey involved two stages. The first phase was devoted to conduct a study at micro level. For my village level study, I had chosen two villages – Lingmoo and Yangang in South Sikkim, situated at a distance of 12 kilometers. While the Nepalese and the Lepchas were studied in Lingmoo, the detailed study on Bhutias was done in Yangang, where this community is predominant. At first, a house to house survey with socio-economic schedule was conducted to cover the social, economic, demographic and educational factors. After that, the heads of the households and other prominent members were interviewed to elicit details on marriage, kinship network, genealogical relations and nature of ethnic boundary maintenance. Besides these, observation of their day-to-day activities and informal conversation were held to study their mutual interactions. Hence, the village level study helped me a lot to comprehend the nature of inter-community relationships, comparative socio-economic status, their social organization, and educational achievement at micro level.

With the background information from the official sources, regarding the representation of three ethnic groups in the state bureaucracy and various government employment, the second phase of fieldwork was undertaken to elicit information on the neo-class, which included officials, both gazetted and non-gazetted. Care was taken to give due representation to officers from all three ethnic communities and

those from Sikkim only. The collection of the firsthand information, covering the socio-economic background, their attitudes towards other communities and their perceptions on major ethnic issues and politics in Sikkim was administered through a detailed questionnaire, addressed to the officers individually. The questionnaire was structured in such a way as to elicit detail information required. Besides, informal interviews, collection of case studies and the opinion of respondents were also undertaken.

The interviews were mostly conducted at the respondent's residence and few were conducted in public offices. In few cases, the questionnaires were sent to the respondents through the officers, who helped me to identify them. Although, the informants were generally responsive and cordial, I had to face several cases of denial and encounter from some section of bureaucrats. In the beginning, it was indeed a tough job for me to bring the respondents into confidence, especially, regarding their perceptions about other communities and politics. On top of that, my identity as a local Nepali proved to be a barrier in few cases, when the officers from other communities were not at ease to express their opinion openly. However, being a local also proved to be a blessing, as the initial hesitations of the respondents subsided gradually, when they were convinced about my research problem. Hence, the refusal of few officers to cooperate and exclusion of non-Sikkimese officers from the interview, have resulted in sample being small. It may be pointed out that only a few female respondents were included.

Apart from that, in view of the low representation of the Lepchas in all sectors of economy and polity, detailed interviews of important office-bearers of 'Renjong Mutanchi Rong Tarjum' (Sikkim Lepcha Association) and Lepcha leaders were also undertaken, in order to know their views on their overall backwardness. Besides, detailed investigative reports on significant cases of inter-ethnic tensions linked with the politics were also prepared.

Limitations

The present study, although focuses on the State of Sikkim as a whole, seeks to limit itself to only three predominant communities of Sikkim viz., the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese. The plainsmen's community, which also constitutes a significant part of the total population of the state and is represented in various sectors of

economy has been kept outside the scope of the study. Although an effort has been made to know the ethnic dimension of all forms of resource distribution, the unavailability of community-wise break up of information and reluctance on the part of some officials to cooperate made me rely heavily on the limited data available. I feel that the village level study of the three communities should have been done in greater depth in order to have sufficient information about the processes of ethnic boundary maintenance and the process of reproduction of ethnic consciousness in the social and cultural spheres. This is one area I would look forward to take up in my future studies.

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