

CHAPTER - I

Introduction

Tiny Sikkim, the erstwhile Himalayan kingdom has undergone various stages of political development from the past through the British rule to the present day. Developments with regard to Sikkim has become a major aspect of study in the process of democratization, rapid socio-economic transformation and to bring the newly founded State of Sikkim joining the mainstream of Indian federal polity. The present study will be focusing from the rule of last Chogyal of Sikkim, politics of merger with the Indian Union and political developments in the State of Sikkim. Sikkim thus offers a fertile field for the study of socio-political and politico-economic aspects.

Sikkim started as a Himalayan kingdom, unable to survive as a separate political entity. Therefore, during British period it was a protectorate and since then one could trace the political transformation and changes which ultimately brought about socio-economic and political developments. The reign of the 11th Maharaja of Sikkim, Sir Tashi Namgyal marked such a development in Sikkim establishing a welfare state. Under the rule of last Chogyal namely Palden Thondup Namgyal, the State of Sikkim experienced tremendous crises. The first step at this stage was making Sikkim an associate state of India from protectorate status by the 36th Amendment Bill, 1974. Followed by this, the 38th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 1975 and on the approval of the act by the Union Parliament of India along with a popular referendum of the people of Sikkim, merged the State of Sikkim with the Indian Union doing away with the cherished feudal monarchy existed for more than three centuries. The overthrow of monarchy and establishment of democracy were caused by the revolutions of 1949, 1973 and the movement led by political parties of Sikkim between 1973 and 1975. The process of Sikkim becoming an associate state of India in 1974 and finally the 22nd state of the Indian Union in the year 1975 is a

unique political phenomenon and that was India's successful cross border democratic experience.

Development in Sikkim do not mean only on economic development but also socio-political developments, political awareness, political consciousness and active participation of the people from all the three ethnic communities viz., *Bhutias*, *Lepchas* and *Nepalese*, the other people from the grassroots and to reiterate the role played by political parties and leaders, in particular Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa.

Here it is also essential to point out that Sikkim was inspired by India's freedom struggle. The people of Sikkim assembled at Gangtok on the historic day of India's independence and demonstrated against the despotic rule founded on feudal landlordism. It was, therefore, an inherited political consciousness of the Sikkimese as a result of India's freedom in order to join the mainstream of Indian national life. Further, the international forces playing a crucial role over the sandwiched State of Sikkim situated in the midst of Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet and India (West Bengal) forced the people and leaders of Sikkim to join the Indian Union.

In fact, a number of works regarding 'Politics of Integration of Sikkim into Indian Union' are available but are little with regard to an in-depth analysis of socio-economic and political developments of pre-merger and post-merger Sikkim.

Sikkim is, no doubt, a small state but has within itself a cartload of contradictions. As pointed out earlier there are three main ethnic races namely, *Bhutias*, *Lepchas* and *Nepalese*. Besides we find Tibetans, people from other states of India including Marwaris – the business community who are a class by themselves. Therefore, an attempt will be made with regard to origin, cultural patterns, practices, habits of the three ethnic communities with a focus on 'migrants versus the natives' and the peculiarities of the social, economic, political and religious institutions along with strategic importance of Sikkim.

Politics in Sikkim was feudal, monarchical, theological but never democratic. The trend in post-merger Sikkim is different and it needs a careful analysis. Hence, location of power, changes in political institutions, Governmental organizations and administration, growing democratic trends, electoral politics and awareness and political consciousness of the people as a result of interplay of political forces and persons within and outside would become a part of the present study.

The study would also attempt to analyse the constitutional position of Sikkim with reference to Article 371 F of the Constitution of India, role of religion and the Sangha Constituency – first of its kind in secular India – a sole monopoly of Buddhism, gumpas and monasteries of Sikkim.

Finally, political processes, administration, pattern of government and governance, politics of defection, local sentiments, reservations, regionalism etc. will be studied in a systematic style. Further, the role of regional political parties, sons of the soil policy, centre-state relations and the type of federal merger envisaged for a new border State of Sikkim with analogous to federating process in promoting nation-building activity, would be a special focus of the whole study.