

PREFACE

This dissertation is the product of my school days reminiscence of the political upheaval of the 1970s and nearly 13 years of study and observation about the changing political trends and happen-instances in the state of Sikkim. Despite being one of the youngest states of India, Sikkim has been able to mark its presence through sheer performance in variety of fields.

Sikkim had been a monarchical state before its merger with India in 1975. During the 333 years of monarchical rule Sikkim had been exposed to number of invasions and influences at the hands of neighbouring countries which are distinctly reflected in the composition and belief of the people, including the nature of political-administrative institution and governance that was so designed to suit the convenience of the state.

After the merger, a new political arrangement hitherto unknown in Sikkim was established. The principles of democracy, rule of law and the rights of the people, etc. were introduced as a basis of governance in a society which was predominantly traditional. Apparently, a contradiction emerged out of incompatibility between the modern and primordial values. Politics never takes place in vacuum. The contradiction became politically viable when political and non-political organizations used the issue for their respective political and socio-cultural advantages giving a space for ethnic politics.

Two important arguments run through the dissertation. The first argument is that any study of ethnic politics in Sikkim must involve historical perspective. The second argument emphasizes on the involvement of the entire political process, including state policies, for such a perspective facilitates inclusion of non-state political actors in the analysis.

The dissertation is grouped under seven chapters. Chapter I, which is the introductory section, deals with the problem, survey of literatures, research question and the methodology chosen for investigating into the problem. Chapter II is a brief depiction of the political history, evolution of political-administrative structure, economy and demographic profile of the State. Chapter III deals with the history of three major communities of Sikkim and their concerns. It is found that a fair treatment is needed at the hands of the so called historians and social scientists, particularly while dealing with those various groups / communities who are now pass by the name 'Nepalis'.

The role of State policies and political organizations in the generation and accentuation of ethnic consciousness and ethnic politics have been evaluated and explained in two separate chapters. Chapter IV narrates the issues of ethnic concerns in the pre-merger period while Chapter V focuses on the legal-political provisions and dynamics of politics in the post-merger Sikkim. Chapter VI discusses about various political and non-political organizations of Sikkim and their contribution, if any, in the proliferation or perpetuation of ethnicity oriented politics. The major political parties of Sikkim such as Sikkim Sangram Parishad and Sikkim Democratic Front, which otherwise focus on common issues and interests had also raised and defended demands of particular community from time to time for the electoral purposes. Thus, ethnic politics is not limited to ethnically based parties or organizations; but non-ethnic parties too are compelled to support ethnic demands for electoral gains.

Chapter VII is the concluding part of the dissertation and focuses on the dynamics and nature of ethnic politics in Sikkim. It also tries to suggest that more than elite manipulation or economic factors, the prevailing legal-political provisions which differentiate one section of population against the other together with manipulation of the same by the State or organizations have been the major contributing factor behind the accentuation of ethnic politics in Sikkim.

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