

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem:

Since the late 20th century there has been a steady growth in cultural-territorial identity and mobilization based on it in different parts of the world. Such cultural-territorial movements have been described or conceptualized with reference to different terms such as ethnicity, tribalism, cultural-nationalism, internal colonialism, regionalism etc. The lack of unanimity among the scholars may be due to the nature of mobilization itself as well as due to divergent disciplinary background of scholars. However, among various factors, a great deal of primacy is assigned to economic reasons and the issue of cultural identity. Sometimes, the theme of elite manipulation of economic and cultural issues is emphasized and sometimes discussions on such cultural-territorial movements expose multiple dimensions of such mobilizations which are generally conceptualized as ethnic mobilizations. The above dimensions of cultural-territorial identity and mobilization included changing nature of cultural identity, structure of identity, political-economic foundations ranging from relative deprivation to internal colonialism of such movements, symbols and pattern of mobilization etc. Very often researchers also focus on integrative / disintegrative role of such movements.

Apart from the general experience, multi-racial and multi-linguistic country like India is also not immune from the problem of cultural-territorial identity and movements. In fact such identity related issues and mobilizations have been a part and parcel of Indian politics since the beginning of the 20th century. The demand for linguistic states after the independence also constituted a significant part of Indian politics. However, after the 1980s there has been a phenomenal growth in the number of occurrences of such movements and very often demands for political autonomy and secession are advanced as an integral part of the movement such as Sikhs in Punjab, tribes of North-Eastern region, Gorkhas in

Darjeeling etc. Attempts have been made to conceptualize cultural-territorial mobilization of a culturally self-defined community in India in various ways among which ethnicity, cultural-nationalism, regionalism, elite manipulation, incompatibility between modern values and primordial loyalties are considered significant. Sometimes the historical context and development of a typical cultural discourse have also been highlighted as factors contributing towards the emergence of such cultural-territorial movements.

The point which is often ignored is that cultural assertion as well as redistribution of resources, conflicts over cultural identity as well as over resources, are not free of power distribution. Assertion as well as promotion of a particular cultural identity needs the support of authority without which cultural protection is not conceivable. Similarly, redistribution of resources in modern times requires changes in the legal system, policies and decisions by the political authority. Hence it is impossible to separate culture and resource distribution from the concept of power and domination.

Another basic paradox underlying ethnic-cultural mobilization is that it intends to accommodate the old notion of community space and community rights with modern democratic values like equality and individual rights. Political parties and organizations which raise the issue of community rights actually also deny those same rights to other communities. Often such denials are legitimized in the name of territorial claim of indigenous people. Indigenesness is not substantiated with reference to history but is done with the aid of interpretations / reinterpretation of history by the majority or the powerful. It is also to be noted that the whole idea of individual rights guaranteed by the constitution or legal system is paid scant attention in the face of assertion of community rights. Such denials (rights) cannot be completed through the process of social or economic reconstruction; but they evolve through political mobilization, bargaining and finally decisions.

The substitution of individual rights by community rights is done through a particular type of political articulation and political mobilization. Therefore, political organizations play a critical role in moderating as well as aggravating

ethnic-cultural consciousness and demands.

Sikkim which was a tiny Himalayan kingdom tucked between China and India till its merger with the latter in 1975, is at present one of the smallest states of North East India. Sikkimese society consists of multiple cultural-racial groups like Nepalis, Lepchas, Bhutias etc. of which Nepalis constitute the majority. Apart from them, there exist some smaller groups like Sherpas, Tsongs (Limboos) etc., who are identified as Nepalis in Sikkim.

Sikkim, like other parts of India, has been invaded by attempts at cultural-territorial mobilization or popularly known as ethnic mobilization since the introduction of parliamentary democracy after the merger with India. Before the merger, the ruling Namgyal dynasty belonging to a minority Bhutia racial community was ruling over subjects belonging to different racial-cultural communities; and this helped the Bhutia community to acquire a predominant position though members of other communities also occupied important positions in the monarchical administration. Cultural-territorial mobilizations or ethnic mobilizations were not altogether unknown under the monarchical form of government in Sikkim. Incidents of Lepcha or Nepali, including the Tsongs (Limboos), protests against the Bhutia dominations did occur, but such mobilizations though had community orientation were not cultural or ethnic mobilizations in the modern sense; they were primarily directed against the state or its agents. Attempts at cultural-ethnic mobilization became discernible with the emergence of political parties during the second half of the 20th century. There were political parties like Sikkim National Party, formed in April, 1948, which articulated interests of a particular community. Such community interests, however, were never presented as the interest of any particular community. Rather such community interests were aggregated and presented as the general interests of Sikkim. Even when the general subjects of whom Nepalis constituted the majority, protested against the discriminatory and oppressive rule of the Bhutia king and elites, the protest movement was not known as the movement by Nepalis. Rather it was the grievances surfaced in the form of movement for introduction of democracy in Sikkim.

After the merger Parliamentary democracy and notions of equality, individual freedom, and modern legal system have come into existence. It was hoped that the cultural differences and ethnic politics would be gradually marginalized with slow permeation of notions of individual rights and equality. But, contrary to general expectations, cultural or ethnic consciousness and the political actions based on cultural or ethnic identity have become more frequent. New political parties and organizations have been formed with community oriented claims and demands, and are competing with each other for the ethnic space. A cursory look at the manifestoes of various political parties since 1977 generally reflect attempts at mobilization of ethnic categories by raising community oriented issues either in isolation (i.e. emphasizing a particular community interests) or in conglomerate form (i.e. common issues concerning more than one group). By raising community oriented issues political parties have facilitated the process of articulation or aggregation as well as legitimization of demands of various cultural categories.

Apparently, cultural and /or ethnic mobilizations process in Sikkim cannot be regarded as an expected development. As mentioned earlier that Sikkim does not have a long history of conflict among different communities though some communities were discriminated against. There are evidences showing cultural exchanges and inter-community marriages among the members of the three major communities in the past though it was not as common as in the present day. The Bhutias and Lepchas are Buddhists while Nepalis are predominantly Hindus (certain sections of the Nepalis, particularly Tamangs, Gurungs and Shakyas are Buddhists). But there is no history of religious conflict or a history of ethnic violence and social conflict among the groups apart from the resentment expressed sporadically against the rulers and their agents. In other words, history does not appear to be a strong basis for emergence of ethnic or cultural politics in Sikkim. Yet cultural-ethnic politics did not only emerge, it is sustained and proliferated further in Sikkim in recent past.

The growth in caste/community consciousness among different groups and sub-groups has led to mushrooming of several caste/community organizations.

with claims and demands of their own. The Lepcha organizations like Rangjyong Mutanchi Rong-Ong Shejum (Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association) demands for fifty percent reservation in the State Assembly, education and public employment, legal protection of their land, separate delimitation etc. The Bhutia dominated organizations like Survival Sikkimese and Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee emphasize for restoration of rights and privileges of the community which they enjoyed before the merger. On the other hand, the Nepali organization like Gorkha Apex Committee has demanded for equal treatment at par with the Lepchas and Bhutias, and extension of 'creamy layer' concept to exclude members of royal family and Kazis from the tribal list. Thus, when political mobilization takes place, appeals to these castes/communities naturally take place. As a result the community centered demands and grievances are also represented in the political arena.

An interesting 'spill-over effect' of such proliferation of cultural-racial-ethnic mobilization by major communities like Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas, is that certain smaller communities which were considered as sub-groups of larger communities have also started to assert their distinct language, culture and identity. For instance, the Tsongs (Limboos) are acknowledged as a Nepali tribe in adjacent Darjeeling district of West Bengal, but in Sikkim the Tsongs now claim to be a separate community with their own language and culture, distinct from the Nepali community. Contrarily, the Bhutias in recent times have demanded for exclusion of Sherpas from the Bhutia fold though the Sherpas for generations are acknowledged as Bhutias. All these developments are indicative of a sharp increase in community consciousness and enhanced emphasis on community identity in which redefinition of ethnic boundary of the community and community's name is also underway.

Thus, the matter of determination of ethnic boundary is still flexible and in a dyadic stage in Sikkim. The prevalence of different layers of identities and their political uses poses difficulty in carrying out an enquiry into identity categorization because what is a sub-category from one perspective is regarded as an ethnic category from another. This attempt at creating political-civil identity on

the basis of ethnic-cultural affiliation has been a major issue in Sikkimese politics, though the trend towards politicization of ethnicity is universal.

Another aspect of ethnic cultural politics in Sikkim is that community oriented demands or attempts at community oriented political mobilization is common but ethnic parties, however, are not electorally successful. Besides, ethnic organizations with very aggressive community oriented approach also have so far failed to capture popular imagination. For example, the Nepalis have so far not raised any serious demand for abolition of Bhutia-Lepcha reserved seats in the State Assembly except for reorganization on the basis of population. Similarly, aggressive Bhutia organizations like Survival Sikkimese or Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee also could not become electorally or politically very effective. Thus, ethnic politics is there because demands and issues are raised and even manipulated by non-ethnic parties, but aggressive ethnic mobilization is not effective.

The process of political development in Sikkim, therefore, presents a problem of understanding. Sikkimese society, conspicuous by the absence of a long history of ethnic or religious conflict, has increasingly become subject to assertive cultural or ethnic mobilization despite the introduction of parliamentary democracy and individual oriented legal system after its merger with India. Community and ethnic assertiveness of recent years is demonstrated by rediscovery of hitherto neglected ethnic names and boundaries. Political parties and organizations also are actively participating in this process, though these organizations defend individual rights and modern political institutions as well. Such attempts at combining traditional community identity and modern legal-political institutions themselves demand special attention.

Political parties in a democratic setup are expected to represent public interest rather than segmented or exclusive interest though due to ideological differences polarization of opinion is possible. From the structural-functional viewpoint, various social organizations or interest groups are expected to articulate interests and issues whereas political parties are involved in interest aggregation. But in case of India, or Sikkim, such clear divisions of spheres of

activities are non-existence. Thus, by articulating and aggregating demands and aspirations of a group of people, political parties and organizations mobilize people in support of the issue or demand, and generate consciousness regarding the demands. Thus, through political parties and organizations, aspirations and demands of cultural-linguistic groups are expressed and legitimized.

Similarly, it is generally acknowledged that norms of politics are not fixed. In an ethnically divided society or societies, political parties often rely on social bonds, community sentiments, and symbols in order to garner popular support. In this way the relationship between the political parties and social/ethnic organizations is established for mutual benefit - political parties use community or ethnic category as vote bank while ethnic groups use political parties to legitimize group interest and influence the decision making process.

The political institution like State may also precipitate formation of identities among various categories through equalizing policies like “affirmative actions” or “protective discriminations”. In fact, in a country like India certain equalizing policies seem inevitable and the State may do so, according to P. Brass, for variety of reasons such as: (1) the State may be controlled by a class or ethnic group or some combination of classes and / or ethnic groups, whose members the State chooses to favour; or (2) the dominant group may seek support among certain categories in the population and may adopt an ‘equalitarian’ policy for that purpose; or (3) the State may choose a particular equalitarian strategy for its own administrative convenience.¹ Both post-industrial and contemporary developing societies represent these features but mere formulation of equalizing policies may not precipitate organization or mobilization among all relevant categories. On the contrary, it is the selection of particular leadership, elites and organizations within the ethnic group by the government or state as instruments or channels of distribution of government patronage. The leadership or the elites often initiate policies, slogans, or particular patterns of mobilization which aggravate ethnic cleavages. According to Rothschild the selection criteria is based on the criteria of reliability and high level of political loyalty.² In such a case, not only the government / state tends to work or shape policies on the advice of such selected

leaders or elites, but, sometimes a particular leadership within a group may even gain control over an entire area of government policy and the institutions associated with it and use them as means for consolidating the leadership of their own community. The domination of a particular group / groups in state affairs may result in disproportionate distribution or sharing of state resources and causes resentment among others who have been denied benefits. Thus, due to its own political compulsions and composite elements, the state is unlikely to be an agency pursuing equality or distributive justice. Its policies may benefit some groups and communities but it may as well be a potential threat to others. It is this perceived threat or denial which strengthens community consciousness in both categories (the favoured group consider it a right and resist any policy diversifying benefits to others while the group which is denied mobilizes its own forces to win concession from the government) and ultimately manifest in the form of organizations articulating community interests.

Thus ethnic-politics in general and growth of ethnicity-oriented political mobilization in Sikkim in particular, throw up a number of interrelated theoretical problems which create uncertainties in the process of understanding. In this connection, the basic problem that a student of political science confronts is related to the behaviour of the state and other democratic political organizations which are expected to promote democratic structure and values in lieu of traditional community orientation. But, in Sikkim, the government and political organizations are doing the contrary, though cultural-territorial mobilization intends to limit the scope of democratic, legal-constitutional rights of individual. Then there is the paradox of growth of cultural-territorial mobilization though electorally aggressive cultural mobilization has not been very beneficial in Sikkim. Besides, the question of assertion of identity by smaller communities also needs to be addressed.

AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The concept of ethnicity and political movements based on ethnic cultural elements have received, in recent years, so much attention that a large number of

publications are available on the theme of ethnic-movements and related areas. These movements, being universally present in all continents, have contributed to an unprecedented surge in the field of scholarly publications all over the world. At home, the plurality of Indian social system has been proved extremely fertile for such movements to grow and proliferate, so are the publications focusing on such issues. Nevertheless, a systematic work particularly focusing on the area under study is almost non-existent. Under the circumstances the present work finds itself onerously relying, particularly for conceptual purposes, on the theoretical works on cultural-territorial movements and mobilization in India and abroad. As such the literature used for this purpose has been grouped under the following three broad categories:

- a) General theoretical formulation on different aspects of cultural (ethnic) political mobilization;
- b) Writings on cultural-territorial movements in India, particularly those publications which deal with the issue of linkages between State, politics and ethnic mobilization; and
- c) Various publications on different aspects of Sikkim's politics, history and development process along with writings on ethno-cultural composition of and conflicts in Sikkim.

Ever since the appearance of the term 'Ethnicity' in English language in 1950, it remains a subject of diverse interpretations, and defy universally acknowledged definition of the concept. An early meaning of the term refers to either a racial or cultural group or even a minority in an 'exotic' cultural form. There is also a reference of inclusion of 'others' i.e. different from one's own group, and 'migrant people' within the ambit of the term. Glazer and Moynihan (1975)³ consider any group of distinct culture and origin, including the majority, as an ethnic group. While studying the question of cultural-racial identity and mobilization process in the USA, they view ethnicity as a distinct category of social process, social differentiation, articulation and social mobilization. From this viewpoint cultural-racial identity or ethnic identity may be looked upon as a universal social phenomenon like the 'class'. G.De.Vos and L.R. Ross (1975)⁴

also subscribe to this viewpoint. Similarly, Clifford Geertz (1971)⁵ observes that the primordial ties continue to influence public action notwithstanding the establishment of a modern secular state. This is so because competing loyalties within a modern state i.e., class, party, business, union, professional loyalties etc., are considered feeble in comparison to primordial loyalties. Today, ethnicity is conceived as a social phenomenon embracing anything and everything of individual belonging to a particular cultural community, whether minority or majority, host or immigrant. Therefore, all cultural-linguistic movements which emphasize common history, territory and aspirations may be considered as ethnic movements.

One of the most comprehensive accounts of ethnicity and ethnic political mobilization is represented by the effort of J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith (1996)⁶. Hutchinson and Smith offer a workable definition, analytical framework and different manifestations of ethnic politics along with valuable excerpts from the books of various authors. They, in their work, have attempted to classify researches on ethnic movements into two categories: instrumentalist argument and primordialist viewpoint or simply primordialism. Hutchinson and Smith's classification helps one to deal with the vast literature on the theme of ethnic political mobilization.

Primordialism, as various researchers suggest, however, is not something which is fixed; it is rather changing, revising, negotiating as per the circumstances, demands and interests. Jack Eller and Reed Coughlan (1993)⁷ argue that primordialism is a bankrupt concept so far as analysis and description of ethnicity is concerned. They continue, if primordialism is widened, as most writers do, to refer emotion, it would only mean unnecessary and unfortunate burden in ethnic analysis because 'emotion' cannot be primordial but, at best, it is sociogenesis. The counterpoint is that Eller and Coughlan have failed to understand that 'attachments' or 'ties' to objects necessarily postulates belief (here emotion or affect) about those objects followed by cognizance in order to become objects of attachments.⁸ Another recent but radical primordial argument is found in P. Van Dan Berghe (1995)⁹ who believes that social groups are bonded

together due to mechanisms of 'Neotism' (of favour) and 'Inclusive fitness' (fit for inclusion in a biological social group).

The Instrumentalist version, which is comparatively richer in terms of publications, on the other, considers ethnicity as social, political and cultural resource used by various groups and ethnic mobilization process as a means for gaining political and economic goal. The arguments of D.L Harowitz (1985)¹⁰ and L.A.Despres (1975)¹¹ belong to such variety. While, Despres views ethnic mobilization as a convenient tool for asserting or reasserting monopoly over resources; Harowitz links it with keeping of group's ethnic honor compared to others (i.e. of backward & forward). Similarly, for Brass (1991)¹² elite conflicts for resources is a major cause behind ethnic mobilization. According to Barth¹³ it is the existence of 'set of prescriptions' (do's) and 'proscriptions' (don'ts) imposed by rulers to maintain control over a given society which fuels ethnic mobilization. Apart from these, Michael Hechter (1975)¹⁴ and B.Anderson (1991)¹⁵ consider ethnic differences, mobilization and national movements as inevitable corollaries of a particular type of economic development and domination in the age of capitalism. Hechter's analysis of the Celtic fringe of Great Britain indicates that modern capitalist market system has historically evolved a social-division of labour. As a result of this social spatial division of labour, different types of cultures have gradually emerged in different regions including the Celtic Welsh. Cultural identities and cultural conflicts are thus related to a particular type of division of labour and economic domination.

An interesting argument is found in Walker Connor (1994)¹⁶ who equates ethnic-cultural mobilization with growth of nationalism. For him, ethnic development is almost like national development. Hence, Connor prefers to use the term ethno-nationalism instead of just ethnicity to address cultural-territorial issues. He emphasizes that the source of ethno-national loyalty cannot be explained in terms of either rationality or tangible interest. It is essentially affective and this sentiment is inherent in present societies. He, along with A.D.Smith (1971)¹⁷, shares the view that nationalism is a special type of consciousness, different from patriotism.

The cultural-territorial mobilizations and efforts to conceptualize them are not new in India. However, owing to the conceptual variation and nature of mobilizations, scholars have taken refuge to different terminological creations among which terms like 'Nation' or 'Ethnicity' or 'Regionalism' are most commonly used. For instance, M.R.Barnett (1976)¹⁸ prefers to use 'Cultural Nationalism' to explain the Dravidic Movement in Tamilnadu. For her, cultural markers are the sole objective factor which determines the existence and non-existence of a nationality. Amalendu Guha (1980)¹⁹ in the context of Assam describes such cultural-territorial movements as little-nationalism. The term little-nationalism owes its origin to the sociological terms like little community and great community. Little nationalism is like sub-nationalism which operates within the framework of great-nationalism. This is an attempt at demonstrating a dual identity or divided loyalty; one for linguistic cultural community and another for the nation-state. From this sense little nationalism may be viewed as a component or a reflection of the greater nationalism i.e. loyalty to the nation-state. The two, however, may come into conflict under certain circumstances.

Few other scholars have tried to understand the problem from the point of view of ethnicity. Urmila Phadnis (1989)²⁰ and R.A.Schermenhon (1978)²¹ belong to this variety. A combined argument of both the instrumentalism and primordiality is presented by M.Weiner's "Sons of the Soil" (1978)²². To him cultural nationalism is the result of conflict between the migrants and the natives over the resources. Weiner argues that cultural-nationalism or nativism in Assam, which attempts to legitimize the claim of the 'Bhumiputras' and exclusion of the migrants, essentially is an ethnic movement which demands resource distribution on the basis of cultural identity. P.R. Brass (1991)²³ relate such cultural-mobilization with the elite conflict in a plural society.

Another way of describing such cultural-territorial mobilization in India is 'regionalism'. Regional movement indicates search for an intermediate control system for the purposes of resource sharing and control over local or intermediate level of administration. Iqbal Narain and A.Majeed (1984)²⁴ and Sajal Basu (1992)²⁵ identify such movements as regionalism alongside the presence of certain

socio-economic reasons. This viewpoint emphasizes territorial identity rather than the cultural one. S.K. Chaube in his "Hill Politics in North-East India" (1973)²⁶ treats the ethnic problem in the north-eastern states of India as a manifestation of clashes between the modern values (nation-state) and primordial loyalties (i.e. loyalties towards clan, tribes, caste, race, language, tradition etc.) and emphasizes that any attempt to understanding the problem and reconciliation efforts thereof must be based on the historical perspective. Books by Susana B.C. Devalle (1992)²⁷ and Dipankar Gupta (1997)²⁸ are examples of consideration of such movements as a consequence of a historical context. Gupta argues that ascriptive collective identities (cultural markers) in themselves are not always sufficient for ethnic mobilization but it undergoes context dependent transformation and mutation. Gupta points out that the Sikhs identity has developed in relation to its opposition, i.e., Hindu identity. But the former has also developed in relation to its perception of a government which discriminated the Sikhs. Such perception about the governmental context legitimizes mobilization on the basis of Sikh cultural identity. Gupta advocates for inclusion of the state or state policies as a variable, but actually the entire political process should be considered as a significant factor, for such a perspective facilitates the inclusion of non-state political actors in the analysis. While emphasizing the historical context in which a particular identity i.e., the Jharkhandi identity, has gradually evolved, Devalle equates development of ethnic identity with development of a discourse.

Paul R. Brass (1991)²⁹, in his later works, argues that conditions for identity formation among various groups or emergence of self-conscious communities in a particular situation and place can be linked with the alliance strategy and policies that the groups dominating the state structure follow in relation to ethnic or cultural groups. In other words, he portrays the State in three different forms: a) State as a resource over which groups engage in struggle for greater share of it; b) State as a distributor of resources which is nearly always done differentially or unequally; c) State, particularly in developing societies, acts as a promoter of new values and threat to locally dominant landed and religious elites. Thus, gaining control over the State becomes elite's first priority and one

who is successful must either suppress the rival elites or establish collaborative alliances with other elites to maintain dominance. When elites in conflict lack bureaucratic apparatus to compete effectively, they resort to use symbolic resources in the struggle. And when elites in conflict belong to different cultural, linguistic, or religious groups, they use these ascriptive differences as a means for mobilization. Thus, for Brass, ethnic conflict or mobilization arises when elites in conflict manipulate ethnic symbols for exercising control over state power or when the state dominated by particular elite pursues policies or affirmative actions favouring its own group or groups as against the other, it may precipitate a sense of discrimination or deprivation among those who are denied benefits. Thus, nature of elites controlling the state apparatus and the policy strategies it chooses to pursue becomes a potential source of ethnic politics.

An important analysis of ethnic mobilization for political purpose is found in the writings of Kanchan Chandra (2004)³⁰. According to her, the success of ethnic parties is a natural by-product of the process by which ethnic identities become politically salient. The political entrepreneurs who float ethnic parties in ethnically divided societies find a ready-made clientele.....waiting to be laid. In the context of Sikkim, it may be safely said that ethnic political parties have seldom succeeded in capturing political power in the post merger period but since public sector is the major provider of resources (jobs and services) under which patronage democracy generally prosper, the analysis may be especially helpful in understanding the causes of disappearance or weakening of the opposition parties.

A researcher may encounter several problems when it comes to publication on Sikkim. The historical accounts of the pre-Bhutia regime are almost non-existent and have been reduced to mere oral or folk stories. Some materials of the 17th century Sikkim still present difficulty in determining what is historically viable and what is mythical.³¹ In other words, there is a dearth of secular publications on the 17th century political history of Sikkim, in general, and on ethnic politics and/or race relations and the way such ethnic relations influence politics, in particular, though the actual political process represent frequent attempts at mobilizing people around the issues like Sikkimese – non-Sikkimese

relations, rights of the minority Lepcha-Bhutia communities etc. Though such issues are present in the process of mass mobilization yet such ethnicised political issues are seldom properly attended. However, insightful discussions are available from historical and sociological accounts. The various works on Sikkim deal with the following categories of books:

- i) Nineteenth century early accounts of British civil servants and travelers which provide valuable insights on demographic character and race relations or relations among communities in Sikkim;
- ii) Anthropological as well as Sociological investigations elaborating the nature and condition of various races and ethnic groups;
- iii) Studies on Sikkim's history, particularly political history which reveals the process of emergence of State formation, Gorkha invasions in 18th and 19th centuries, Anglo-Sikkimese relations, historical developments in 20th century and finally the merger with India. From such historical accounts useful information about relationships among various communities can be acquired.
- iv) Studies on political institutions and political process in Sikkim, particularly the period after the merger with India. The publications on various political issues and developments are provided below.

Risley's "Gazetteer of Sikkim" (1928/1993) is one of the earliest publications on the history and population of Sikkim. Apart from the discussion on the nature of governance under various rulers of Namgyal dynasty, it provides interesting details on the purpose of the British involvement in Sikkim and adoption of ways and means, particularly racial and religious, to maintain its political control over the affairs of Sikkim and maximize economic benefits. Talking about the modus operandi of the British officials, Risley writes, "Here (Sikkim) also religion will play a leading part. In Sikkim, as in India, Hinduism will assuredly cast out Buddhism, and the praying-wheel of the Lama will give place to the sacrificial implement of the Brahman.....Thus, race and religion, the prime movers of the Asiatic world, will settle the Sikkim difficulty for us, in their own way. We have only to look on and see that the operation of these causes

is not artificially hindered by the interference of Tibet and Nepal.”³² Similar accounts on the history and population of Sikkim can also be found in the writings and travelogues of many British officers among which J.D.Hooker (1854/1969),³³ J.W.Edgar (1874/2005),³⁴ Richard Temple (1875),³⁵ Colman Macaulay (1885/1977/2005),³⁶ J.C.White (1909/1999)³⁷ are interesting for reading.

Apart from C.J. Morris’s “Living with the Lepchas: A book about the Sikkim Himalayas” (1938),³⁸ Geoffrey Gorer’s “The Lepchas of Sikkim” (1938/1996)³⁹ represent some of the pioneering works on the Lepcha community of Sikkim. Gorer believes that the confinement of the Lepchas in the Dzongu reserve area had far reaching consequences on the religious, educational and economic backwardness of the community. A.R. Fonning’s ‘Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe’ (1987)⁴⁰ is an inside view of the Lepchas. Tracing the cultural history of the Lepchas, the author provides valuable information about the Christian and Buddhist influence that were brought to bear on the tribe, and how the Lepcha habitat, “Mayal Lyang”, fell into the hands of immigrants from other areas. K.P.Tamsang’s ‘The Unknown and Untold Reality about the Lepchas’ (1983)⁴¹ explains the extent of perversion that has taken place in the cultural history of the Lepchas at the hands of both foreign and Indian writers. R.K. Sprigg, also called ‘Lepcha Saheb’ is perhaps the only living Englishman today who possesses an excellent knowledge of the Lepcha language, literature and history. His recent publication “Shedding Some Light on the History, Language and Literature of the Lepchas” (2005)⁴² provides some of the rarest information with documentary evidences about the history and life of the Lepcha community during the early nineteenth century.

The existence of multiple ethnic groups in Sikkim is as old as the Namgyal dynasty of Sikkim but it was only during the late 1940’s that mobilization of these ethnic categories for political purposes began. First hand information regarding arousal of ethnic consciousness and political manipulation of it at the party or organizational level can be found in Basnet’s work, “Sikkim-A Short Political History” (1974). The first section of the book deals with the early political history of Sikkim and its inhabitants while the second section deals with democratic

processes including emergence of political parties and mobilization of various communities and cultural groups for political purposes. Basnet observes that the use of ethnic symbols such as race, culture, religion etc. for political purposes began with the emergence of the Sikkim National Party in April 1948.⁴³

Another oft-quoted article on Sikkim is “A Plural Society in Sikkim: A Study of the Interrelations of Lepchas, Bhotias and Nepalis” by Chie Nakane published in Furer Haimendorf (Ed.) ‘*Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon*’ (1966).⁴⁴ On the basis of her field work carried out during February and March, 1955, in the vicinity of three monastarial hamlets of Gangtok, namely Pabyuk, Phodong and Phensung, she provides an interesting views on the belief, way of life and inter-community relationship among the three communities of Sikkim, though the observation which she had derived particularly from Pabyuk village cannot be considered a true picture of the whole of Sikkim. Her comments about the Nepalis as immigrants, landless farm labourers and coolies gives an impression that either she was unaware of prevailing rules called ‘Revenue Order No. 1 of 1917 (originally promulgated in 1897) and rules prohibiting settlement of Nepalis in the north or she was trying to avoid them intentionally. It must be mentioned that not all of the castes and communities which now constitute Nepalis were immigrants or coolies or farm labourers. Furthermore, Nakane also seems to be unaware of the fact that the Limboos or Tsongs, Mangers etc. were living in Sikkim even before the immigration of Bhutias.

B.S. Das (1983)⁴⁵, however, argues that the ethnic melting pot situation was due to Sikkim’s territorial contiguity with three international boundaries (Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan) and growing competition among the major groups over economic and political resources of the State. He also explains changing political scenario in Tibet and Chogyal’s invariable demand for independent status for Sikkim hastened the process for merger. Similar explanation may also be found in Rao’s ‘Sikkim: The Story of its Integration with India’ (1978).⁴⁶ On the other hand N. Sengupta (1985)⁴⁷ and host of other writers consider discriminatory measures undertaken by the ruling elite against the Nepali subjects as a primary cause behind ethnic divide in Sikkim. Apart from this, the book also explains as to

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how disillusion prevail among the elites, both Bhutias-Lepchas and Nepalis, after the merger and general apprehension among the erstwhile ruling elite in a parliamentary democratic set up.

Datta Ray's 'Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim' (1984)⁴⁸ and Rustomji's 'Sikkim – A Himalayan Tragedy (1987)⁴⁹ are somewhat written as a biographical account of the last Chogyal, P.T.Namgyal. Both were personal friends of the Chogyal and, thus, both of them spoke against the merger though, owing to their profession, Datta Ray advances the concept of class conflict between the Lepcha Kazis and the Royal family/Bhutia Kazis, while Rustomji rely on bureaucratic maneuver of the Indian civil servants in order to explain the issue of merger.

An aspect of culture and history of Sikkim can be found in the writings of George Kotturan (1983)⁵⁰, S.K.Jha & Mishra (1984)⁵¹, and P.K.Bhattacharya (1984)⁵². While Kotturan highlights on the political, administrative and economic set-up of the people of Sikkim, Jha & Mishra provides insightful discussion on the evolution of various organs of the government in the light of the changing institutional framework from a protectorate to a full-fledged State of India. Bhattacharya's book, on the other, is a study of coinage of Sikkim. The information collected from various primary sources highlight the contribution of the Newars' (one of the constituents of the Nepali) in the economic development of Sikkim in earlier days.

'Politics of Sikkim- A Sociological Study' by A.C.Sinha (1975)⁵³ is a sociological investigation into the world of political elite in Sikkim. The book has three segments – the first segment deals with the political evolutions and various social forces with specialized interests and pursuits, and conflicting communal, racial and religious tendencies. The Second segment analyses the socio-economic status, political affiliations and perception of the elites in Sikkim. His findings reveal that religious elite (i.e. the Lamas) was not only politically significant but responsible for the propagation of communal feeling in Sikkim's society too. The third segment deals with the dilemma regarding adaptation and re-structuring of the power hierarchy in a new democratic atmosphere in post-1947 era and

institutional accomplishment.

T.B.Subba's 'Dynamics of A Hill Society' (1989)⁵⁴ is another sociological study on the Nepalis of Sikkim and Darjeeling hills. It provides a comprehensive detail on the caste-class relationships in view of the growing occupational mobility and effects of modernization among the Nepalis. In his 'Politics of Culture' (1999)⁵⁵ Subba attempts to unravel the genesis of Kirata politics in Sikkim and Nepal, particularly the identity consciousness emerging among the three Kirata tribes namely Limboos (Tsongas), Khambus (Rais) and Yakhas (Dewans). He shares his view with Michael Foucault (1980)⁵⁶ and considers Kirata consciousness for identity as "insurrection of subjugated knowledge". He believes that political transformation in both Sikkim and Nepal has been crucial behind the emergence of Kirata identity though due to prevalence of overlapping identities and regional variations within the larger Kirata groups he is uncertain about the future of the Kirata politics. Another ethnographic detail on various castes and communities of Sikkim is found in K.S. Singh's (Ed.) work 'Sikkim' (1993)⁵⁷. It is a first ever-ethnographic survey by the Anthropological Survey of India under the project entitled, "People of India". This comprehensive work offers detail information on the bio-cultural, religio-linguistic and cultural profile of all the three ethnic communities of Sikkim, including other sub-cultural groups within the larger Nepali community. Sikkim Study Series,⁵⁸ volume III & V, also provides interesting discussions on the linguistic and cultural profile of various communities of Sikkim and the efforts of government for the protection and promotion of the languages and cultures of these communities.

The role of ethnicity in determining political outcome in Sikkim cannot be denied. An analytical presentation of interplay between ethnic forces and political alignment during the 1979 election is found in comprehensive detail in Urmila Phadnis's 'Ethnic dimension of Sikkimese Politics-The 1979 election' (1980)⁵⁹. The author has highlighted on the significant implication of emerging elite and their ethnic backgrounds in the process of readjusting power relations. In similar vein, S.K.Chaube (1987)⁶⁰ provides valuable discussion on the effect caused to politics by various ethnic and social forces in post-1947 political development in

Sikkim and concludes that factional politics has overshadowed ethnic alignment in new democratic setup. He suggests that though politics has gained stability, political parties have not.

Since the beginning of institutionalized politics which has started in the 17th century to till present time, maintenance of ethnic equilibrium has been the primary political goal upon which rested the success and failure of the rulers/leaders/political elite in Sikkim. The question of power and privilege has given way to the issues of equal rights (economic, social and political) and of opportunity which, to a large extent, depended upon the ingenuity of political leaders. to maintain ethnic balance without harming or causing to harm the interests of other ethnic communities and endangering prospect for development of the State. An insightful discussion in this line is found in R.Dhamala's article "Ethnicity and Development in Sikkim"⁶¹. In a positive note, she contends that the discriminatory policies introduced by the erstwhile rulers of Sikkim against the Nepalis are initiatives undertaken to maintain equilibrium between the Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepali subjects. But she undermines available historical evidences when she makes a remark on the Nepalis by calling them 'immigrants'. In another article entitled 'Emerging pattern of Political Leadership in Sikkim',⁶² she cautions that political parties in Sikkim is still in a fluid state and hence any attempt to analyze performance of the government in terms of political party and its programmes alone would be incomplete. On the basis of various social indices she contends that the leadership pattern has changed in Sikkim with the emergence of young, secular and educated politicians, though ethnic representation continue to remain as a thorny problem. In yet another article, 'Struggle for Identity Maintenance: The Bhutias of Sikkim' (1999)⁶³ she maintains that the transformation in the status of the Bhutias from a socially and politically dominant group before 1975 to that of a subordinate groups in the post-merger period has created an identity crisis among the Bhutias which is manifested in the formation of various socio-political organization.

J.N.Kazi's 'Inside Sikkim – Against the Tide' (1993)⁶⁴ is a journalistic view on the political development of Sikkim, particularly during the 14yrs rules of

Mr. N.B.Bhandari. The book is an attempt to highlight the political conditions of Sikkim and exposes the hollowness of the democratic system. Apart from this, the book is resourceful in explaining the perception of the ethnic Bhutias on various issues of socio-political importance. In his book "Who Ruined Sikkim" Pahalman Subba (1998)⁶⁵ also attempts to depict the socio-political scenario of Sikkim under the 14 years rule of the former Chief Minister Shri N.B. Bhandari in Sikkim.

Yogendra Bali's 'Pawan Chamling – Daring To Be Different' (2003)⁶⁶ is a biographical account of Mr. P.K.Chamling, the reigning Chief Minister of Sikkim.

Although the demand for merger of Sikkim and Darjeeling is not new, the re-emergence of the demand in recent past has acquired lot of attention among the authors. The historical account of the transfer of Darjeeling is meticulously discussed by Fred Pinn in his work 'The Road of Destiny-Darjeeling Letters - 1839' (1986)⁶⁷ Taking clue from Pinn's work, S.B.Wangyal, in his book "Sikkim and Darjeeling-Division and Deception" (2002)⁶⁸ provides information regarding the extent of insincerity in Major Lloyd. He argues that the Deed of Darjeeling Grant was neither binding nor was it signed on 25 February, 1835. Though the issue of merger of Sikkim and Darjeeling is not the subject of the book, he, however, believes that the social peculiarities together with elements of proximity of the people of Darjeeling and Sikkim are such that a good number of people believe, and even fear, that two areas will one day amalgamate to form a bigger and a more viable state. Relevant documents regarding Darjeeling and Sikkim can be found in R.Moktan's, 'Sikkim: Darjeeling - Compendium of Documents' (2004).⁶⁹

Among the edited books containing articles on Sikkim, mentioned must be made of 'The Himalaya: Aspects of Change (1981)⁷⁰ edited by F.S.Hall, 'The Himalayas: Profiles of Modernization and Adaptation' (1985)⁷¹ edited by S.K.Chaube, 'Eastern Himalayas: Environment and Economy (1986)⁷² edited by R.L.Sarkar and M.P.Lama, 'The Himalayan Heritage' (1987)⁷³, Edited by M.K.Raha, 'Religion and Society in the Himalayas' (1991)⁷⁴, Edited by T.B.Subba & Karubaki Datta, 'Sikkim – Society, Polity, Economy & Environment' (1994)⁷⁵, Edited by M.P.Lama, provide introspective views and

valuable information about Sikkim and its people.

All these publications on society and politics of the State of Sikkim constitute a valuable information-store on which the present work relies heavily to understand the process of evolution of emergence of cultural-territorial or ethnic politics in Sikkim. However, the present work is different from previous publications in the sense that the present study addresses the issue of interrelations between political process and emergence of cultural-ethnic politics directly.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The problem of ethnic mobilization in general and ethnic politics in Sikkim in particular, it seems from the discussion, has multiple dimensions; it involves growth of ethnic consciousness and mobilization, prevalence of competing ethnic boundaries emphasized by different leaders and intellectuals. At the academic level it involves identification of the causes behind ethnic mobilization, multiple contributing factors, effects of ethnicity on socio-political developments and linkages between cultural politics and the State. Hence, the basic issue is to understand and explain the phenomenon of cultural politics in order to present a clearer idea of the relationship between ethnic identity and modern political process which is founded upon liberal-secular values. This general objective of the present dissertation requires categorization into several specific objectives:

- a) To undertake a study of various cultural-ethnic groups in Sikkim and the growing importance of such identity in politics of Sikkim. The issue is to understand the extent to which cultural-ethnic identity has become the platform for political mobilization and the way in which ethnic question is presented for the purpose of mobilization.
- b) The purpose of the present work is also to understand how cultural-ethnic identity has become a significant item of the political agenda and how it has become a force of mobilization. In this respect the work aims at understanding the historical process and the political context which facilitates ethnic mobilization.

- c) The purpose of the work is also to explain the development of cultural-ethnic consciousness in Sikkim. In other words it involves identification of the causes which contribute to the growth of cultural-ethnic mobilization. In this respect the objective is to investigate whether the cultural boundaries and differences are naturally translated into the birth of ethnic-political groups and the ethnic mobilization or whether economic differences and competition are creating ethnic mobilization.
- d) Finally, the objective is to understand and explain the interface between the political institution, policies and processes, on the one hand, and cultural-ethnic identity and mobilization, on the other. The purpose, therefore, is to examine the relationship between legal political framework as well as State policies and politicization of ethnic identity in Sikkim.

The above objectives of the present work indicate that the major thrust of the study is to understand how and why ethnic mobilization takes place; and a special emphasis has been given on a role of political institutions, the state and political organizations in accentuating or containing ethnic politics and differences. For the attainment of these broad objectives, the present study attempts to raise and answer certain consequential questions which may be sequentially presented below:

- a) To what extent are the present manifestations of cultural-ethnic consciousness in Sikkim is shaped by the 20th century socio-political developments of Sikkim and to what extent state decisions till 1975 has created differences and exclusive attitude among various communities?
- b) Are the cultural differences among different communities of Sikkim such as to prevent political unity and cooperation? In other words do the cultural differences only create exclusive result which develops mobilization on the ethnic lines?
- c) How far the socio-economic arrangements are responsible for ethnic rivalry and political mobilization?
- d) To what extent the State policies and activities of political organizations are responsible for escalation of ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilization.

e) Why in Sikkim have the ethnic issues received so much prominence in the political life while the ethnic-political groups are seldom returned in elections?

These specific research questions have been designed not just to fulfill the objectives of the study but the purpose is also to test certain assumptions regarding the process and causes about ethnic-political mobilization. The primary assumption of the study is that in a modern political system, particularly in a liberal democratic system, the state and political parties, which influence political articulation and decisions, are capable of either aggravating or containing ethnic politics. This assumption is founded upon another assumption that neither cultural differences nor economic structure provides adequate explanations to ethnic mobilization in a liberal democratic polity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD:

Political mobilization based on social and cultural and territorial identity has been primarily conceptualized with reference to the idea of ethnicity. The word 'ethnicity' is originally taken from a Greek word "Ethnikos" which means 'living together'. It is identified formerly with the elements of culture and race. It has been also used to refer to minority groups or 'groups in an exotic primitive culture'. Glazer and Moynihan (1970)⁷⁶ consider any group of distinct culture or origin, including the majority, as an ethnic group. A recent analysis of the concept of ethnicity includes both objective and subjective ingredients besides the interplay of historical forces. For instance, Hutchinson and Smith (1996) have identified the following features as important in an any ethnic group such as (1) A common name of the community; (2) An idea or a myth of common origin; (3) Shared memories of a common past, events, heroes etc.; (4) One or more elements of common culture including language, customs, religion etc.; (5) Idea of a common homeland; and (6) A sense of solidarity, at least among a substantial section of the group.⁷⁷

The above mentioned features of ethnicity indicate that it is essentially a group identity in which group boundary is created and group solidarity is maintained by involving essentiality and permanence of certain selective cultural

elements and historical events, real or mythical. Existence of such a group identity is not unnatural in societies, ancient or modern, but the problem arises when such identity is presented as the sole ingredient around which political articulation, mobilization and decisions should occur. The modern idea of politics, particularly development of ideas and institutions during the post-French revolutionary days, has emphasized the values of equality, individual freedom, secularization etc. and the ideas of legal equality, representative government, adult suffrage etc. Division of society on cultural lines and political decision on cultural basis become incompatible with such a concept of politics. Thus, ethnic cultural political mobilization, in a sense, creates problem for the concept of modern politics which is based on either individual or class, and not cultural communities. It creates a dichotomy between the concept of politics and actual behaviour of people engaged in it. The research problem which arises from this dichotomy concerns how it does happen and why does it happen?

The present study focuses on the general question of why, how and under what circumstances ethnic-cultural identity and consciousness become instruments of political action. The study further attempts at, in a specific sense, an examination of the relationship between political institutions, organizations in the one hand and ethnic politics on the other. To examine such questions, the present work attempts an analysis of the issue of growth of ethnic politics in Sikkim. For such an analysis, generally either the primordialist or the instrumentalist perspective is employed. But the present study avoids either of these two perspectives as they emphasize on one single element: either the cultural factor or economic interest of a group. It tends to make the work primarily mono-causal. Rather the perspective of 'triadic' analysis, offered by Dipankar Gupta, is more acceptable as it examines the political or governmental context in which an ethnic mobilization occurs. Similarly the present work is based on contextual analysis of ethnic politics, i.e., it attempts at an examination of Sikkim's ethnic politics by situating it in the socio-economic and political context which has nurtured it. At the same time, historical and analytical methods will be used to examine the process of development of ethnic politics in Sikkim

and to analyze the relationship among various elements/factors; generalizations will be formulated partly on the basis of the norms of case-study method as observations will be based on the findings about the specific case of Sikkim. The work will rely on both secondary and primary sources of information. For this purpose, existing publications and governmental documents will be consulted along with publications by political parties, local press and various ethnic organizations. Observations will be drawn on the basis of analysis of information in the context of actual socio-economic and political situation. The study also proposes interviewing of important political activists and members of ethnic organizations to examine their perceptions; structured interviews, however, has not been contemplated.

CHAPTERIZATION:

Considering the nature and scope of the study, the research work has been divided into following seven chapters.

- Chapter I - Introduction: the Problem, Survey of Literature, Objectives, theoretical framework and methodology.
- Chapter II - State of Sikkim: A brief Profile: Political History of Sikkim, Sikkim after the merger with India, Political-Administrative structures and evolution, Economy and demographic profile of Sikkim.
- Chapter III - Ethnic communities of Sikkim: Their history and Identity - the major communities (Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis), Other communities / groups, Question of identity.
- Chapter IV - State policies, Political parties and Ethnic questions before 1975 – State policies and ethnic divide, Revenue order No. 1, Parity Formula, Sikkim Subjects Regulation of 1961, Emergence of political parties and ethnic mobilization in pre-merger era.
- Chapter V - Parliamentary System, New Modes of mobilization & Ethnic Politics -

Merger with India, Government after the merger, Rise of anti-merger sentiments, Amendments to Representation of Peoples Act, 1950 & 1951 of India, Election and Ethnicization, 1979, Bhandari Regime: 1979-89, Division within the Nepalis: Growth of New Identities, Chamling and the rise of OBC, Citizenship & Question of left-out persons, Seat Reservation, State policies and tribal communities

Chapter VI - Political Organizations & the Issue of Ethnic Identity: Role of political Parties & ethnic organizations: Political Organizations before the Merger with India, Sikkim State Congress: Beginning of Political Process, National Party & Bhutia-Lepcha consolidation, the Independent Front and the Lepcha Community, Political developments during 1970s, Political parties & their role during post-merger period, Regional political parties and Sikkimese identity, Ethnic social organizations & their role in Sikkim

Chapter VII Conclusion

Dimensions & nature of Ethnic Politics in Sikkim

As has been stated above a very little work focusing on ethnic politics on Sikkim has been carried out so far. Therefore, the present attempt would be a significant contribution in the field of ethnic politics. More importantly the ethnic issue has become one of the burning questions of recent time and had been a major concern for both the government and the scholars alike. It is important that such ethnic movements or ethnicity oriented politics must be properly understood and explained, particularly the causes responsible for the emergence of such issues. Therefore, the present work, in its own little way, will help this process of understanding the issue though it does not claim to provide a comprehensive theory of ethnicity. The dual approaches of Primordialism and Instrumentalism have been successful in understanding and explaining reasons behind ethnicity related issues but the approaches have neglected the political factors which, in certain cases, are found prominent. Therefore, there is a need to understand the

role of the State and other political and non-political organizations and actors, and by including the same, the present work provides yet another dimension to the world of ethnic mobilizations or ethnic politics.

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