

CHAPTER - XI

Concluding Observations.

In order to trace the evolution of the political process and the system of government in Sikkim and to assess their nature and peculiarities, the study of the politics and Government of Sikkim necessitated the study of its political history. Different factors and forces, such as geographical setting and strategic importance, population distribution and ethnological diversities, religion and religious institutions, which influenced the political process, shaped the political institutions and moulded their working, had to be studied. That is why the present study has been set on the backdrop of political and social foundations.

The early political history of Sikkim has therefore been narrated in brief for this purpose. The Namgyal dynasty, established in Sikkim in 1642, survived for more than three hundred years. In the early nineteenth century, the Sikkim Rajas came in touch with the British Government of India, from which time the Indo-Sikkim relations started. The interest of trade with Tibet and China and security of North Eastern frontier of India, guided the British policy towards Sikkim. The confrontation between the Sikkimese and the British authority led to the establishment of British superintendence over Sikkim, and she was made a Protectorate of India. India achieved Independence in 1947. But the Indo-Sikkim relation could not be given any definite shape, prior to the signing of the Treaty of

1950, by which the Protectorateship of Sikkim continued, though the Sikkim Darbar was granted autonomy in internal administration. The rise of the political parties and demand for democracy added new dimensions to the political process from this time.

The ethnic diversity and inter-community tensions and contradictions had been one of the moving forces of Sikkimese politics. The problem of non-integration among the two primary contending groups, the Bhutia-Lepcha and the Nepalese, the distinct social and cultural patterns, the policy of the Darbar towards the ethnic groups, all had profound impact on the politics of Sikkim. The communal system of government, inter-community rivalries and the continued demands for popular government, fundamental rights, voiced by the representatives, of the majority community marked the political developments upto 1973. The agitation of 1973, ultimately led to the Tripartite Agreement through which democracy was finally established in Sikkim. But the conflict of ideal and power continued between the Chogyal and the representatives of the people throughout the year 1974. The precipitating crisis at last led the democrats to bid adieu to 'Chogyalocracy' and to merge Sikkim with India. Sikkim thus became a State of the Indian Union in May, 1975. In the last phase, the political developments appeared to have become a game of power between the Chogyal and the Government of India through the leaders of the Sikkim Congress.

The geography, and the economic and social foundations have been carefully discussed. The location of Sikkim had been the cause of her political plight. In the early

period, the Gurkhas and the Bhutanese mounted attack upon Sikkim. Tibet also annexed the Chumbi Valley. The British authority made it a Protectorate in 1890. Though it was a tiny mountain-state, it occupied a very important strategic position. It formed a gateway to the southern seas. With the rise of Communist China and its occupation of Tibet, the geo-political and strategic importance of Sikkim had also increased. It had become an important zone which played a vital role in the security system of India.

The social organisations, the cultural patterns of the different ethnic groups, the Lepchas, the Bhutias, and the Nepalese, have been discussed next. Despite heterogeneous ways of life, there have been considerable assimilation between the Lepchas and the Bhutias. Socially, religiously and politically, these two groups stand united. The Nepalese, on the other hand, are divided into several tribes and clans, e.g., Rais, Limbus, Gurungs, Mangars, Newars, Tamangs, Brahmins, Chettris etc. and the Scheduled Castes, Damai, Kami, Sarki etc. Majority of the Nepalese are Hindus, and a few are Buddhists. These different tribes have their distinct social organisations and cultural pattern. But with the passage of time, on account of suffering from the same economic, social, and political ordeals, some sort of integrity has grown among the different sections of the Nepali Community.

Buddhist religion has united the Lepcha-Bhutia people, the rich and the poor alike. Though Hindu religion could not act as the cementing force among the Nepalese

it created at least a sense of belonging among them. Lamaist Buddhism had been the state religion of Sikkim. The Lamas exerted tremendous influence upon the common Bhutia-Lepcha people. The Chogyals also were incarnations of great Lamas. In a theocratic State the Lamas therefore, were a great force. The monasteries had vast landed properties and the Lamas were also a privileged class. Therefore, the interest of the landed gentry and aristocracy coincided with that of the monasteries. These classes were the real political forces in the State. But, with the passing of time, the influence of the monasteries began to decline. With the establishment of democracy, their old avenues to political control had gone.

Three aspects have been discussed in the chapter dealing with political dynamics. The electoral process and behaviour constitutes by far the most important determinant of political dynamics. The Constitutional Proclamation of 1953, established a legislative organ, the State Council, composed of elected representatives and nominated members. There was no fixed law relating to elections. The Proclamations issued by the Chogyal, from time to time, regulated the affairs of elections. The system was based on communal distribution of seats, communal voting pattern and counting process. The study of voting behaviour established the fact that the political parties were identified communally, and they represented either the Bhutia-Lepcha community or the Nepali community. After the Tripartite Agreement, the elections to the new Assembly took place under new Rules and Regulations in 1974. In October 1979, the elections

to the State Assembly took place under the Constitution of India for the first time. The elections revealed the political currents and cross-currents centering round the age-old communal rift and cleavages, the aspirations and apprehensions of different communities. It also revealed the triumph of regionalism and defeat of the pro-national forces. It also revealed the attitude of the electorate and the political parties that conformed to the regional interest - oriented politics.

The role of the pressure groups has been discussed in the context of the influence of the interest - articulation function on the decision-making process of the political system. The feudal economic and social structure of Sikkim and an authoritarian system of government prevented the growth of diverse groups in Sikkim. Economic backwardness, illiteracy, lack of communication, absence of industry, etc., retarded the growth of pressure groups. The groups that prevailed during the rule of the Chogyal were primarily of non-associational type, though two associational groups and one institutional group were there. With the advent of democracy, several groups have been formed in Sikkim which include trade unions, merchants' association, ethnic association, linguistic groups, etc. The pressure groups of Sikkim have not become highly organised interest groups as yet, and none of them can have developed the techniques of influence into a fine art. Most of them use the technique of persuasion as a device for articulating their interests; one or two trade unions, however, resorted to strike, demonstration, etc. The channels of access to decision-making in Sikkim are still very limited. Except the

traditional channels of executive and bureaucracy, the other channels of access are practically non-existent in Sikkim. The working of the groups shows that, they have involvements in the political affairs, though they are professedly non-political organisations.

The evolution of the political parties in Sikkim, their organisations, role, influence and working come next in the sequence of discussion as a matter of course. The authoritarian rule of the hereditary kings, illiteracy, abject poverty, general isolation of the people from the outside world, etc., could not pave the way for the growth of the political parties in Sikkim even in the early forties. The victory of the popular movements in India, that culminated in the achievement of her Independence, inspired a section of educated and articulate people in Sikkim to organise political parties. The Sikkim State Congress could mobilise the downtrodden people under its banner very quickly. The fear that the Nepalese were getting organised, immediately led the Bhutia-Lepcha elite to organise the Sikkim National Party. The demands for democracy and merger of Sikkim with India raised by the State Congress, were opposed by the National Party which considered democracy as unfit for the Sikkimese and merger as a move to abolish the identity of Sikkimese culture and tradition. The Constitutional Proclamation of 1953 established a Diarchy in Sikkim. The State Congress became an easy prey of the policy of the Darbar. The National Party and the State Congress, the two major parties became the political forum of the Bhutia-Lepcha and the Nepali communities respectively. The political parties unfortunately could never

get rid of communal identity. The Sikkim National Congress, which emerged in 1960, ultimately also identified itself with the Nepali community. The frustration or greed for power which dominated the behaviour of the leaders, led to the split in or amalgamation of the political parties from time to time. The major parties, except the National Party, continued their demands for popular government, fundamental rights, 'one man, one vote' system etc. But they could not make their demands effective. The agitation launched by the National Congress and the Janata Congress could ultimately become successful in 1973 mainly due to the sympathy of the Government of India, which ushered in an age of democracy in Sikkim. The communal considerations always had regulated the politics of Sikkim and even when Sikkim became a component unit of India, the political parties appeared to carry on the same legacy with them. The amalgamation of heterogeneous forces and elements in the ruling party could not bring about any cohesiveness or integration within it. Before it could stand the test of the time, it started to break up. The new parties, those which grew during these periods with their avowed regional trends, brought an old element, the anti-Indian (presently, anti-national) feeling back. In any case, the mutual distrust and antagonism between the communities, personal rivalry among the leaders, ambition of some and rigidity of others, kept a constant pressure upon the working of the political parties which retarded the growth of cohesiveness within themselves. Absence of mass-movement, reluctance of a great majority of the rural people to be involved in the political

fray, organisational weakness, absence of party organisations at the grass-root level, etc., all point to the fact that full-fledged party system is yet to take shape in Sikkim which has lived for ages under a feudal monarchy.

Under the title of political framework and the governmental process, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary have been discussed in the context of their structure, functions, role and behaviour within the political system. The nature of the legislature, its functions, and relations with the executive during the rule of the Chogyal, and the changes that have taken place after 1973, have been discussed first in the sequence of analysis.

Prior to 1973, the King was the supreme legislature in Sikkim. A unique institution, some thing like a National Assembly, was there; it was called the Lhade-Mede and was composed of the leading lamas and laypeople. It used to meet occasionally when any issue of national importance arose. Its suggestions were not binding upon the ruler, though the ruler generally used to accept them. With the establishment of British supremacy upon Sikkim, a State Council was formed, composed of nominated members from the landlords and influential lamas. Its function was primarily to aid and advise the ruler. In 1953, a new legislature, the Sikkim State Council, was established. Its composition was elective as well as nominative. Equal representatives from the two major ethnic groups, the Bhutia-Lepchas and the Nepalese, were elected by the people. The Council was a

limited legislature since it could discuss and adopt resolution on the transferred subjects only. All through its existence till 1973, it remained as a deliberative organ only. The members could do little against the wish of the Darbar. The Government of Sikkim Act, 1974, envisaged an assembly with wider power. But the entire system was changed when Sikkim became a State of the Indian union. The working of the Assembly was not very inspiring during the last five years. It was criticised as an ornamental legislature and as a forum of legitimizing the Governmental actions only. Prior to 1977, the Assembly could not put to work any Committee. Even if, one or two Committees were established, they did not submit their reports. In 1977, the Treasury Bench once walked out under the leadership of the Chief Minister in protest against the ruling of the Speaker through which he recognised the opposition. Many of the members appeared not to be conversant with legislative procedure, and many were not aware of their role as members of the legislature. It is of course not likely, that the legislators will be acquainted with everything within five years. But it is expected that with the passing of time, the Sikkimese representatives will create healthy conventions and system of legislative functions.

The executive has been discussed next. It includes the description and analysis of the executive of the past and the present. The powers and position of the Chief Executive, relation between the Chief Executive and other executives, etc., during the time of the Chogyals, and the changes that have taken place after 1973, the working of the democratic government, the

Governor and the bureaucracy, have been discussed in this chapter. A rudimentary system of administration on the modern lines was introduced in Sikkim after the establishment of British hegemony. The Kings apparently were the supreme executives because the ultimate control was with the British Political Officers. The Maharajas were aided and advised by a State Council. The landlords represented the Maharaja within the jurisdiction of their estates and in the villages, the Pipons or the Mandals were the protector of law and order. In the centre, the administration was carried out under the direct control of the Maharaja through an organised Secretariat. This system continued upto 1949, when an Indian Officer was appointed as the Dewan to head the administration in Sikkim. In 1953, a Diarchy was established, by which the Maharaja retained some spheres of governmental functions exclusively with him and transferred certain spheres to the Executive Councillors, appointed from among the elected members of the State Council. In spite of this division of the spheres of governmental functions, the Chogyal remained, in reality, the source of all power. Policy decisions were made by the Darbar and the Executive Councillors were reduced to mere executor of those policies. They, in fact, worked under the tutelage of the Dewans or the Principal Administrative Officers. This system continued upto the early period of 1973, after which the entire responsibility of administration fell upon an Indian Officer appointed as the Chief Executive. In 1974, a popular ministry was established with limited power. The Government of Sikkim Act, 1974, made the Chief Executive all powerful. In May, 1975, Sikkim became a component part of the

Indian Union. A fullfledged responsible government came into existence. The inexperience of the ministers, the social, ethonological and political stresses and strains, etc., had reflections on the working of the Ministry during the last five years. The Governor, though a constitutional head, asserted his role to a great extent and practically dominated the Cabinet. The Chief Minister who was criticised as a "prisoner of indecision" and the Cabinet developed a position of dependence upon the Governor and the bureaucrats, particularly the officers who came from the Centre and other States on deputation, in respect of matters of policy decision. The new Ministry established in October, 1979, is also composed of inexperienced young leaders. Because of the different political attitude of the present Cabinet, the Governor has been reduced to his constitutional role. It cannot be said that the new Ministry has already achieved an independent character in matters of decision making, but the fact that their dependence on the deputationist officers has been somewhat limited, cannot be denied. The ethnic contradictions are still being reflected through the working of the present government.

The ethnic heterogeneity of the structure of the executive -- the Cabinet and the bureaucracy, the conflicting demands of the ethnic groups within this structure, have been the burning problems of the organisation. Inexperienced young leaders are coming up at the helm of the organisation. Their dependence upon the experienced senior bureaucrats will be obvious. But it can be asserted that greater the political maturity of the leaders in future, more assertive their role will be in the

executive.

Law and judicial organisation have also been discussed. The law of the land, the freedom of the people, the judiciary, its structure and jurisdiction and the changes that have taken place after 1973, have been discussed carefully.

Before the establishment of the British supremacy in Sikkim, there was no codified law. The usages and customs coming down through tradition and the orders of the Kings had been the laws of the land. The King was the supreme judiciary. The landlords also enjoyed judicial powers. In a feudal state under the authoritarian rule, the ordinary subjects could enjoy rights in a very restricted sense only. Unchecked exploitation, dependence of the poor ryots upon the economically dominant class, left them completely at their mercy. These conditions continued upto 1949, after which, with the gradual modernisation of the administration, the rights of the people were also enlarged.

The entire state was parcelled out in different estates. The landlords in charge of these estates were the ipso facto courts of the estates. They were called the Adda Courts. Above the Adda Courts, there was the Chief Court with unlimited powers in civil and criminal spheres. Above it, there was the Supreme Court of the Maharaja. From 1949-50, the Adda Courts were abolished. District Officers and Tashildars were given judicial powers. A High Court was established in 1955. These arrangements continued upto 1973, after which certain changes were made. Since 1975, several changes have been made in

the judicial structure. With the establishment^{of} an independent judiciary, the courts, particularly the High Court, have been extending the horizon of law through judicial decision-making.

Political process and the government has next engaged our attention. The people and the political change and the new dimension of the government and its working have been discussed carefully. The demand for democracy and merger of Sikkim with India had been a very old demand, particularly of the Nepali majority of Sikkim. With the passage of time, though the latter demand went into recess, the zeal for democratic government remained burning primarily among the Nepali leaders. The Bhutia-Lepcha leaders knew that democracy meant the rule of the Nepalese. This contradictory attitude of the major ethnic groups influenced the politics of Sikkim during the last three decades. The unprecedented influx of the Nepali people since 1973, the idea of a greater Gurkha land nourished by a section of them, made the Bhutia-Lepcha people apprehensive. The fear of becoming alien in their own land has gripped the minds of many. The author has come across two distinct trends. There is one group of people, very eager to assert their role in the changed situation, while there are others who are too bewildered to decide as to what their role will be. The Nepali elite expected that with democracy, political control would come to them. But they became dissatisfied because they felt that the control actually fell upon the plainsmen. None of the political parties actually wanted the superintendence of the Centre. The influx of the plainspeople, the more assertive role of the business community, etc., irritated the Nepali elite. Common people, on the

otherhand, became dissatisfied with the Kazi Government for several reasons; they felt that this Government could not introduce a better system of administration, could not guarantee better economic justice, etc. But there is a general trend of appreciation of democracy as a system among them. A record number of the electors has participated in the last assembly election. A majority of the people considered this election to be more interesting than any other election. The majority also considers that they have a better chance of political participation now.

With the merger of Sikkim with India, a fullfledged responsible government, an independent judiciary and centralised bureaucratic pattern has been introduced there. With the proliferation of governmental functions, a number of departments have been created. Developmental plans have been undertaken, and establishment of small and medium size industry, adoption of different measures to improve agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, forestry etc., implementation of the policy of spreading education, have been the characteristics of the working of the government during these five years.

The main problem of Sikkim appears to be the non-integration of the heterogeneous ethnic groups, the inter-community contradictions, feudal socio-economic structure and the dependence of the majority of the people upon the economically dominant class in an agrarian economy. Poverty, illiteracy and dependence upon tradition of the majority of the people, worked as a powerful deterrent to the growth of political consciousness.

The mutual distrust between and among the communities led the common people to depend upon ethnic group-leadership. The personal rivalries, ambition and frustration led the political leaders from time to time to change their political party-allegiance which retarded the growth of homogeneity within the parties, the failure of the political parties in most cases to rise above communal considerations, etc., complicated the political atmosphere. Upto 1973, political leadership was practically the monopoly of ^{the} veteran demagogues. Rise of the young leadership is a rather recent development. Unfortunately, communal attitude has also devolved upon this young leadership. A divided society is the real stumbling block of progress and modernisation there in Sikkim. Most of the energy of the Kazi Government has been spent on balancing the demands of the communities, the Bhandari Government is also feeling the fever. In such a context, the responsibility and headache of the Government of India are likely to be enormous, since on any pretext, it will be the Government of India, which will be made the scape-goat for any shortfall or discrepancy between aspirations and achievements.
