

CHAPTER - 1

CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Religion and Politics - A Conceptual Framework :

The relation or interaction between religion and politics is not a new phenomenon in the history of the world. Religion was and had always been used as one of the most vital and effective instruments of state-craft, not only in the Asian countries but in the whole world, since the birth of statehood. The state is not merely a political institution but a compact social organization as well. Religion, on the other hand, being the faith and creed of the members of the society, must have a great deal of influence, determination and orientation on the socio-political norms of a state. Those religious impacts ultimately have to be reflected in the functioning of the state, in the formulation of laws and in the implementation and enforcement of those laws. Other political aspects of the state too have to be covered up by that faith which the rulers and the ruled follow as the highest virtue.

It is said that at the dawn of human civilization, Egypt had an official religion which was used for various social and political purposes. The law-givers of Egypt established many contemptible religious superstitions for making the common mass accustomed to obey the commands given by their superiors and to be equally law-abiding in every

other respect. It also can be said that the foundation of the greatness of the Roman Empire lay primarily on the religious superstitions. Those supernatural elements based on religion, had been introduced in every aspect of public and private life of the people for a smooth and uninterrupted administration of the state. In the name of religion, the rulers were able to achieve an unquestioned surrender and submission from the people.

The socio-political history of the world had been designed in accordance with the three principal religions prevailing in three distinct zones, e.g. Christianity in Europe, Islam in Arabian countries and Buddhism in Asia. Political philosophy, applied in the governance of the states, had also originated from and was associated with the particular religion of the particular zone. Religion and political disciplines were inter-woven for keeping the toiling masses under control, in every part of the world.

In medieval Europe, Roman Catholics had the firm belief that the Pope was, after Jesus Christ, the Head on the earth. The Papal decrees, therefore, were binding upon every Christian and it would be a moral sin to contradict or contravene such decrees by any authority including the ruler. To them, religious laws were superior to secular laws and the latter derived its authority and sanctity from the former. However, in 1540 or thereabout, the blood-shedding movement of religious reformation started, from which the people of Europe learnt painfully that there should be liberty of faith but religion should not enable an individual to contravene the law of the land. Since then, the Pope

had to take a separate shelter at the city of the Vatican and the superiority of the secular law was firmly established. In Europe, it is now accepted that nobody is free to do what he believes his religion teaches him to do, but only what the state allows him to do. The authority of the state is above the religious faith of the people.

From the above statement it should not be presupposed that religion in Europe was completely detached from the political field. Religion, rather, got an indirect entrance in the political arena of Europe. Christianity had been used as one of the most vital weapons in expanding European imperialism in the Afro-Asian countries. The Christian missionaries acted as the emissaries in establishing European colonialism by converting thousands and thousands of people into Christianity, throughout the Afro-Asian continents. Secondly, as Karl Marx pointed out, religion had been used as opium to exploit the working class in the society. The role of the Church was as the centre of motivation for the common mass, not only in Europe but also in other continents, to strengthen the position of the colonial rulers. Christianity, again, was unofficially established as the state-religion in the European countries. Religion which had once been persecuted, then tolerated, then granted equality, finally emerged as triumphant. It is to protect the state from the domination of religion that the Americans had to erect a wall of separation, so to say, between the Church and the state in their Constitution enacted towards the end of the 18th century.

As Christianity was in the Christendom, so also Islam had and still has a similar dominant role in the growth and development of state power in the Islamic countries. Islamic Arab was, probably, the first and the

most glaring example where all state actions used to masquerade in the form of religion and religious tenets. In the Prophet of Arab we have found the most striking demonstration of religion and state power merging and converging into one. The Prophet and his successors were both the spiritual and temporal Lords. In fact, from the time of the Prophet upto the living present, in all countries where Islam is state religion, it has moulded and structured the entire body politic and the state process as an all-pervading omnipresence and omnipotence.

Islam is based on 'Koran'. To the Muslims, the 'Koran' is not merely a religious scripture to be revered. It is the supreme law to them and no secular law can contradict or contravene any norm or any principle prescribed by the Holy Koran. That supreme law governs not only men, but also nations and groups. And, every Muslim believes, as the cosmic divine law destroys or upholds men and other created things, so also it causes the rise and fall of nations and states. According to Islam, Alla is only the true sovereign in a state.

The role of Islam in structuring and moulding the policy of the state in Islamic countries would appear with clarity if we look to the Constitution that our neighbouring country Pakistan adopted in 1956. The Constitution was called "the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan". The Preamble to that Constitution categorically declared,- "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful; whereas sovereignty over the entire Universe belongs to Allah Almighty alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Pakistan within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust". This clearly shows that the

royal support was extended across India. Perhaps no other religion in India had such an organized body to propagate the faith outside India. The expansion of Buddhism in China, Japan, Ceylon and in other South-East Asian countries, was largely due to the efforts of the Buddhist missionaries under the active patronage of the Maurya and the Gupta rulers. The accounts of Hiuen-Tsang, the Chinese Pilgrim, also pointed out that the contribution made by the Gupta rulers to the Buddhist world, had caused Buddhism to intensify its activities. The Gupta Age, as he mentioned, was an epoch in the history in India. The Gupta rulers played a vigorous role in the political unification of Northern India as well as in the expansion of trade and commerce in and outside India. Undoubtedly, the religious harmony maintained by the Gupta rulers substantially contributed to that political and economic progress. Patronage to Buddhism made by the Gupta rulers also led to a great intellectual reawakening in India.

Buddhism was closely associated with politics and power till the revival of Hinduism again in the Indian society. But being over-powered by Vedic Hindu system, Buddhism had been nourished and flourished outside India, in Ceylon, China, Japan and other Asian countries in the later parts of its history. Buddhism also travelled to the roof of the world, in the Himalayan Kingdoms of Nepal and the snowy land of Tibet, where politics and religion merged and intermingled in the hands of the Buddhist Monks. In the view of some authors, Buddhism was and still is a religion of men and power. From the interaction of men and power and their adaptation of the faith, the politics of Buddhism is mixed up. It is an intricate politics rooted in the social norms and social habits

in all the Buddhist countries in Asia. It is also observed that in the name of Lord Buddha and by interpretations of his teachings, the history of Asia has been influenced and reshaped.

The process continues till today and the relationship between Buddhism and political power remains a significant question. For the Kings of old age it was easy to mix religion with politics due to the blind faith of the people in ancient society. But Buddhism is now used as an weapon to gain control and influence throughout the South-East Asian countries, in Ceylon, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and so on. Buddhist Monks in those countries appear as a strong religious force actively striving for power. The presence of great numbers of monasteries and their daily routines and rituals, the increasing numbers of Buddhist Monks in those Buddhist countries remain a constant factor of politics.

Tibet, on the Eastern Himalaya, was the Buddhist kingdom till the other day. The Dalai Lama¹, the highest priest, was the religious as well as the secular head of the state. The history of Tibet is called in Tibetan terminology Chho-Jung², which means the history of religion and so one can say, that the political and religious history are not separated but inter-mingled. Great Saints from India like Guru Padma Sambhava, Atish Dipankara, Maropa, etc., had travelled the snowy peaks to bring the 'Dharma' to the roof of the world. Since then India and Tibet, the two ancient lands, came very close to each other. Tibet, in many ways, could be called a child of ancient Indian civilization. As in the ancient India, the political administration appeared to be the

religious duty to the Buddhist Monks in Tibet. The Monks had to discharge their administrative duties just as they had to perform religious rites in the monasteries. Tibet continued to be a theocratic Kingdom run by the Buddhist Monks till the Chinese occupation in 1959.

The present Dalai Lama has been given political asylum in India by the Government of India. One of the reasons for that may be said to have been rooted in the common religious affinities, prevailing in both the countries. And while living in exile in India, the Dalai Lama has great faith that Mahayana Buddhism, being a living religion, is still very much in the minds of the Tibetan people even after the Chinese occupation. In an interview he has expressed his hopes that time will turn again and the teachings of Lord Buddha will be re-established there, in Tibet. Now the time is ripe for watching carefully how the history repeats³.

Sikkim and Bhutan, the two tiny Buddhist Kingdoms, had emerged as the offshoots of Tibet and the Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism with religious-political expansionism in view. The Kingdom of Sikkim was established by the Buddhist Monks from Tibet. Hence, the political system in Sikkim was based on the pattern of Lamaist theocracy of Tibet. Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism was the state religion and the administration was dominated by the Buddhist Lamas. The Ruler used to be designated as Cho-gyal⁴, meaning the Dharmaraja, the righteous King, having both secular and temporal authority. The ruling family and the ruling class were of Tibetan origin and accepted Mahayana Buddhism as their faith. Religion, the Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, therefore, played a significant

role in shaping the socio-political history of Sikkim. That Lamaist tradition, which was maintained for over three hundred years, is still a continuing force in its impact on the politics of Sikkim, even after her merger in the mainstream of India in 1975.

1.2. Objectives of the Study :

The present study has sought to explore primarily two important themes, (a) the role of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism in the socio-political history of Sikkim and (b) continuation of that religious impact on the present political process of the state. The pervading influence of Buddhism, which the twelve succeeding Cho-gyals were ordained to and did preserve and protect as the state religion, can not obviously be gainsaid in the social and political life of Sikkim. As history reveals, the state came into existence with the aid of the Buddhist Lamas from Tibet and was all along being nurtured and nourished by Tibet with paternal care. The ruling family and the ruling coteries were evidently of Tibetan origin and accepted Mahayana Buddhism as their faith which was the pivot of their social and cultural system. The rulers combined in themselves the roles of spiritual as well as the temporal Lords. They were engaged in transplanting the Tibetan theocratic traditionalism into the soil of Sikkim. In this effort, they were always supported by the Lamas and Buddhist Bhutia-Lapcha community who tried to identify themselves with the Lamaist traditionalism. Religion, i.e. Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, therefore, occupied an unique place in the socio-political development of Sikkim.

The present thesis has sought to demonstrate the fact that Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism had played and still plays a great potential and

productive role in the state, in its social and cultural developments, in its political process, in the formulation and conduct of the government policies, in the functioning of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, in decision-making, even in the shifting and volatile political dynamics of modern Sikkim. Though Sikkim is now one of the constituent states of the Indian Union, her old religious and cultural traditions have clothed her with a special identity. The study has taken pains to analyse that despite ever-increasing politicisation of the hill people and the growing role of the political input agencies in the emerging political system, Buddhism has yet continued to operate as a living and driving force in the political structure, process and behaviour-pattern of the state. The Buddhist monasteries of Sikkim together form a special constituency and one seat has been reserved in the Legislative Assembly for a Monk of that constituency. The influence of the Buddhist Bhutia-Lepcha community, which forms even less than 25 per cent of the total population, is still as glaring as before. They have had to be allotted 13 out of 32 seats in the Legislative Assembly. The Buddhist society in Sikkim is thus functioning as the pressure group in matters relating to the governance of the state, in the formulation and implementation of laws and in the administration of justice. Their influence in the party formation, in voting behaviour and on the electorate, is still quite conspicuous. The relation between religion and politics and their inter-action have made the political structure of Sikkim an interesting subject of study. It has added a new challenge in the politics of Indian Union, the Constitution of which has declared it to be a secular state. The present dissertation

has amply highlighted the impact and influence of Buddhism vis-a-vis Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, in the political process of Sikkim in the true spirit of a historical researcher and a modern political analyst.

1.3. Specific Research Questions :

The present study has sought to find answers to the following questions :-

- a) What are the philosophical, social and political aspects of Buddhism ?
- b) How did the roots of Buddhism spread in the mountain-top Kingdom of Tibet ? In what way did Buddhism take the new form of 'Vajrayana' and come to be recognized as Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism ?
- c) How did the Grand Hierarch system of Lamaist polity develop in Tibet ?
- d) Did Sikkim emerge as the prototype of Lamaist Tibet ? Should it be justified to say that it was the religio-political expansion by Tibet ?
- e) Who were the early inhabitants of Sikkim before the advent of the Tibetans ? Was there any socio-religious interaction when the Tibetan immigrants settled in Sikkim ?
- f) How did the geographical situation help the establishment of Buddhist theocracy in Sikkim ?
- g) Had Buddhism played any significant part in building up the socio-cultural life of Sikkim - its customs, usages, festivals, education etc. ?
- h) Should Sikkim be described as a Buddhist theocracy ? How did the rulers and the ruling class patronize the growth and development of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism in Sikkim ?

- i) How did Sikkim come in contact with the British ? Did the British policy towards Sikkim enable her to maintain the traditional political patterns and political institutions ?
- j) Had the British brought any change in the socio-political life of Sikkim ? If so, did such change effect the traditional religion-oriented pattern drastically ?
- k) How did the new democratic force emerge in Sikkim ? Did it easily overcome the hurdles of conservative, statusquo-oriented Buddhist society that had dominated in Sikkim ?
- l) What was the nature of the democratic movement in Sikkim ? What was the role of religion in the formation of the parties ? Should it be correct to say that the leadership of Kaji Lendup Dorji, who himself was a Buddhist Monk, was the key to open the political knot and to mobilize the public sentiment ?
- m) What was the sequence of the political developments that finally led to the merger of Sikkim in the Indian Union ?
- n) Does the Buddhist class still dominate over the functioning of the government as pressure group, especially in the sphere of policy or decision making ?
- o) Do the Buddhist Monks have any direct role or association in the legislation or administration of the state ? Is there any seat reserved for them in the Legislative Assembly ?
- p) Does the election process of Sikkim manifest the dominance of the Buddhist group ? Is it a fact that the division of the constituencies, allotment and reservation of seats, electoral behaviour etc. were manipulated by the ruling statusquoists on the basis of particular ethnicity and religious identity ?
- q) Is there any provision in the electoral law for the protection of the Buddhist minority group under the new election system ?

1.4. Brief Overview of the Existing Literature :

The literature available on Sikkim as well as on Tibet and Bhutan are to be classified broadly into three groups, (a) Travelogues, (b) Works on Buddhist Philosophy and System with special emphasis on Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, and (c) Historical accounts of socio-political developments. The travelogues written by the European explorers and also by the travellers from the East, have primarily dealt with geo-physical, socio-anthropological and religio-cultural aspects of these states. A great many authorities have contributed to Buddhism, known as Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, as a material philosophy and as a religion as was prevalent in Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan. There are a good number of works regarding the historical evolution, social structure and political developments in these hilly countries in the Eastern Himalayas. These works, no doubt, help to have a general conception regarding natural environments, socio-cultural and political aspects of these states.

But the fact is that the Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, which was the most vital determining force and which is continuing even today as an important phenomenon in the political process of Sikkim, has not yet been systematically discussed or categorically focussed in any standard work. The relation and interaction of religion and politics, which should be accepted as the most important factor of political development in Sikkim, have not been authentically highlighted or properly investigated. The present study, in this regard, has explored an interesting aspect as to how Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism as a powerful living factor

played and is still playing a dominant role in the socio-political life of Sikkim. The study has not only covered a big research-gap by revealing a neglected field but has also unveiled a new dimension in the understanding of the true spirit of the hill politics of this area. The thesis has investigated as thoroughly as possible, the place and influence of religion, i.e. Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, in the functioning of the government, in the formulation and implementation of laws, in the decision and policy making, in the election process and in other such socio-political activities. The present dissertation, therefore, claims to be recognized as a novel work by searching a thought-provoking issue of the politics of Sikkim.

A brief overview of some of the standard works relevant to the present study, is cited here for general impression. In the Himalayan Journals⁵, John Hooker has mainly adverted to physical features, natural environments, flora and fauna and other botanical and geological aspects of this region. Colman Macaulay on his Report of a Mission to Sikkim and the Tibetan Frontier⁶, has dealt with the prospect and potentiality of the geo-political features of Sikkim in relation to the British expedition to Tibet. Sir Richard Temple, in Travels in Nepal and Sikkim⁷, has given a general assessment of the socio-cultural life in Nepal and Sikkim. Sir John Claud White, who was appointed the first Political Officer in Sikkim, has narrated his personal experiences about this region in his book, Sikkim and Bhutan, Twentyone Years on the North East Frontier⁸. It gives a broad and general impression of the various aspects of Sikkim and Bhutan, namely, geographical position, nature and natural resources, social, cultural and political systems and so on.

Guiseppee Tucci in Tibet, the Land of Snows⁹, has described the land, people, customs and culture, religion, festivals, system of Lamaist polity and its administration, etc., from his personal observations in Tibet. Two books, namely, Three Years in Tibet¹⁰, written by Kawaguchi Ekai, and Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet¹¹ by S.C.Das, also give a broad description of the social structure, cultural pattern, religious system and administrative design as prevailed in Tibet. Sir Charles Bell has contributed three important books, namely, Tibet Past and Present¹², The People of Tibet¹³ and Religion of Tibet¹⁴. In the last named book, he has pointed out how Buddhism ruled Tibet and dominated the nation socially, culturally and politically. L.A. Waddell's Buddhism and Lamaism of Tibet¹⁵ is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism with its basic philosophy, Lamaist rites and rituals, Hierarch system, different sects and their lineage and similar other features. It also gives a historical sketch of the Lamaic Church in Sikkim, its development and influence in the social and cultural life of the people. The Gazetteer of Sikkim¹⁶ edited by H.H. Risley is a precious guide to the knowledge of the land, people, flora and fauna, religion, custom and culture, festivals and also a brief historical background of Sikkim. N.C. Sinha's An Introduction to the History and Religion of Tibet¹⁷ and Prolegomena to Lamaist Polity¹⁸ provide an interesting account of the rise, decline and fall of the 'Dharma' in Tibet and also give a vivid sketch of Lamaist polity over there. The author has shown how, for centuries, power in Tibet had come, not from guns, but from the principle of non-violence of Dharma. N.K. Rustamji's Enchanted Frontier¹⁹ may be called a personal diary

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which gives an idea of the ruling family and ruling society of Sikkim. Being associated as Dewan in Sikkim, Rustanji had the opportunity to have a close look on the wishes and aspirations, spirit and sentiments of the people of Sikkim, which were narrated in his book. Sikkim - A Short Political History²⁰, by L.B. Basnet, has dealt with the period of the democratic upheaval in Sikkim. B.S. Das in his Sikkim Saga²¹ has contributed a sketch of the political transition that took place during 1974-75. Smash and Grab²² written by S. Dutta Ray, a very recent publication, on the other hand, is his personal observation on the political development in Sikkim. S.R. Sukla,²³ A.C. Sinha²⁴, P.N. Chopra²⁵, V.H. Coelho²⁶ and some other authors have recently come out with their contributions on socio-political development in Sikkim. N. Sen Gupta in his Ph.D. thesis, published as State Government and Politics, Sikkim²⁷, has highlighted on the structure of the state, system of government and the process of politics in Sikkim, from the point of view of pure political analysis. He has, however, overlooked the fact that Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism had and still has an all-pervading influence in the political process of Sikkim. None of the above mentioned books had covered the Lamaist traditionalism as a living phenomenon of Sikkim's politics.

It should be mentioned here that one unpublished book, containing very valuable information about the development of Buddhism, its socio-cultural pattern, historical events etc., is available in typed manuscript form in some of the old families in Sikkim. The book, titled, History of Sikkim²⁸, was written by Maharaja Thutob, the tenth Ruler of Sikkim, and his consort Maharani Yeshe Dolma, who was a

renowned scholar in Mahayana Buddhism and Tibetan Language and Literature. The book originally was written in Tibetan and then it was translated in English by Kazi Dawa Samdup, the then Inspector of Rajsahi Commissioner, ably assisted by Rai Bahadur Lobzang Choden, the Private Secretary of the Maharaja, in about 1908. Yapa D. Dadul, the former Chief Secretary of the Government of Sikkim, has also written a book named The Hidden Land of Rice²⁹, which has not yet been published for certain reasons. These two unpublished works specially help to know the early history of Sikkim, which can not be available elsewhere.

1.5. Methodology :

The study has combined both historical and empirical methods of modern social science research to establish the fact. With a view to collecting data and other particulars, in the first place, the author has availed of, as widely as possible, both primary and secondary sources like authentic publications, historical materials, government and semi-government records and documents, official papers and reports, brochures and booklets, journals and periodicals, manuscripts and unpublished works, memoranda and manifestos, and so on. In the second place, a systematic programme of field study has been made by formal and informal interviews of the eminent personalities, Lamas and Incarnates, political leaders, average citizens of different ethnic sections, voters in national, state and local elections, and government functionaries. Besides, detailed case studies on visiting important monasteries, village panchayats, social and political institutions, market places and public forums have been made with personal care.

It was a coincidence that the author happened to reside in Sikkim for nearly ten years and got the opportunity to attend personally and to participate directly in almost all kinds of private and public functions like social gatherings, religious rituals, community festivals and ceremonies, political meetings and processions, and also at various state functions. During this pretty long period of stay, the author had also availed of the advantage of extensive tour from 'Yumthang' in North to 'Namchi' in South and 'Yoksum' in West to 'Chhangu' in the East in Sikkim. These wide-ranging travels have helped her to have a close look at the characteristics of the different ethnic groups, their sentiments and emotions, aims and aspirations and their faith and ideas. The author has, with a specific intention, attended and observed the sessions of the Legislative Assembly and functioning of the Judiciary and other government departments. She was also privileged to observe and study personally two consecutive Assembly Elections and Parliament Elections in 1979 and in 1985. This long and direct association with the private and public life of a state has specially benefited the author to make a deep observation of the political process as well. The dissertation, thus, has explored an unique feature of the State of Sikkim.

NOTES AND REFERENCES TO CHAPTER-1

1. The 'Dalai Lama' is the title of the highest priest of the Tibetan Buddhists. In 1640, the Ge-lug-pa sect of the Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, occupied the temporal power of Tibet under the fifth Grand Lama. The Chinese Emperor recognized the Sovereignty in 1650 and conferred the Mongol title 'Dalai' meaning 'Ocean' to the spiritual as well as secular Head of Tibet. Tibetans also call the Grand Lama as "Gyalwa-Rimpoche" which means 'the great gem of majesty'. Waddel, L.A., Buddhism & Lamaism of Tibet, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1979, p.39.
2. The term 'Cho-Jung' denotes the growth or development of Religion. 'Cho' or 'Chhos' in Tibetan means 'Dharma' and 'Jung' is growth. As N.C. Sinha has observed, in Tibet religion is known as the root of history and no history of Tibet can do without religion. "When even the great warrior Kings of Tibet, who had carried their victorious arms into the interior of the neighbouring countries, sought refuge in the Three Jewels : Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the Story of Religion naturally replaced the Story of Dynasty in the imagination of the people". Sinha, Nirmal C., An Introduction to the History and Religion of Tibet, Sree Saraswaty Press, Calcutta, 1975, p.1.
3. Karkaria Bachi, J., "A free dog is better off than a caged Lion", The Sunday Statesman, December 7, Calcutta, 1986.
4. 'Chogyal' or 'Chho-gyal' is the Tibetan synonym of King. It signifies that the King is not only the temporal head but also the spiritual guide, - having both spiritual and temporal authority ('Cho' = Dharma and 'Gyalpo' = King). Dadul, D., The Hidden Land of Rice (unpublished).
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