

CHAPTER - X

The Political Process and the Government.

I

The People and the Political Changes.

The struggle for achieving democratic government started in Sikkim since 1949. But there could not be any doubt that the demand for popular government or democracy was primarily the demand of the Nepali people living in Sikkim. The Nepali settlers of Sikkim had disturbed the ethnic balance of the State long ago, by virtue of their overwhelming majority. The Bhutia-Lepchas, therefore, clung to the Darbar and looked at it as the saviour of their culture, tradition and economic privileges. The Chinese attitude towards India during the end of the fifties led India to fortify its strategic bases on the border of Sikkim.

The huge communication network which had to be started, necessitated the engagement of labourers. Since the Sikkimese could not make up the requirements, a huge number of Nepali labourers had to be engaged from outside. Once these Nepalese came, they settled in Sikkim. A time came when the construction works were over, hence a good number of labourers had to turn to other means of living. But these basically agriculturist people could in no stage get rid of their greed for land. With the passing of time, demand for their rights on land was generated. This, therefore, created a pressure upon the socio-economic structure of the state. Nepali migration to Sikkim practically did never stop. Every year a few thousand Nepalese used to come to Sikkim on the basis of 'work permits'

to work in the paddy or cardamom fields. A good number of these people got integrated with the local Nepali population. The swelling Nepali population had therefore been a problem to the Darbar. The Darbar's policy towards the Nepali immigrants were criticised by the Nepali leaders on different occasions. But, in fact, no country could be expected to be so magnanimous as to accede to such unwanted influx of foreign nationals. The most unfortunate part of the development in Sikkim was that the Chogyal had to accept it. The Bhutia-Lepcha elite was alive to this problem and the National party never failed to gear up efforts to resist the demand for democracy, a demand which, if accepted, would immediately oust the Bhutia-Lepchas from the centre of power and make their existence precarious.

The Nepali elite and the articulate section on the otherhand, kept the zeal for democratic government and constitutional rights burning. They knew that by this alone, they could come more close to the centre of power and privileges. They demanded 'one man one vote' because they knew, that would bring them in a commanding position in the Council. The numerical strength of the Nepali people also kindled the desire among the Nepali leaders for establishing their rule. The policy of the Darbar to corner them, led to the consolidation of the Nepali forces. The prevailing conditions also helped this. "For years, an exclusive elite had been build up in Sikkim which comprised bureaucrats with vast perks and privileges, concessions in allotment of land, buildings and vehicles and with most of them sending their sons on generous scholarships to India and abroad for training, to be absorbed on return in lucrative Government

posts. The bulk of the peasant population in South and West Sikkim (mostly Nepali) were untouched by these bounties. These were the multitude that the Sikkim Congress successfully mobilized in their anti-palace political campaign. The Chogyal had (1) nothing to match this strength and that marked his final defeat!

After the Tripartite Agreement, the National Party was reluctant to join the Advisory Council. The Bhutia-Lepcha group was in such a condition of disarray that the National Party could not put up more than five candidates, though a number of them contested independently in the elections of 1974. When the question of formulating a constitution for the state came up and an expert was deputed by the Government of India for the purpose, a number of Bhutia-Lepcha people including most of the leaders of the National Party requested the Constitutional Expert to safeguard the interest of the Bhutia-Lepcha people in the Constitution. They also urged upon the authority to undertake the enumeration of the Bhutia-Lepcha people to ascertain their real population to counter the false propaganda of certain interested quarters to the effect that the number of the Bhutia-Lepcha people in Sikkim was only a few thousand. They demanded the continuation of parity system. For the preservation of the identity of the country and the Bhutia-Lepcha ethnic groups, they wanted safeguard against the influx of Nepali people and others from outside Sikkim. To prevent the horrors of over-population and unemployment, it demanded constitutional provision for a marriage clause where it would be illegal for one man to have more than one wife and for one woman to have more than one husband. (2) This point is really significant in so far as it, at

least the first one, a practice very common among the Nepalese, reflects the socio-economic problem of Sikkim. The Sikkim Congress leaders also demanded that the Constitution should be so formulated as to reflect Sikkimese genius and identity. (3)

The draft constitution created a sharp reaction among the Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepali Leaders. The Chogyal was made practically acipher, which disappointed the Bhutia-Lepcha group. Again the Chief Executive, an Indian Officer, who would be in charge of administration of Sikkim, was made all powerful. The assembly and the cabinet were given limited power. All these disappointed the Nepali leaders. A section of them openly opposed the Government of Sikkim Bill, 1974, while others kept mum. Though Kazi Lhendup Dorji criticised the opponents of the Bill, a later development showed that he himself had no doubt about the limitation of the Bill. It seemed that Kazi and his group considered it important to implement the Government of Sikkim Bill as early as possible and so, by some way or other, the intra Party cleavage and dissension of the members of the party were patched up. When the Ministry started functioning, its limitations were realised. It was gathered that a memorandum was prepared with the blessings of Kazi demanding the transfer of Finance and Home Departments to the Ministry, and diminution of the powers of the Chief Executive. However, the move could not proceed further. In the meantime Sikkim was given the status of Associate State of India.

A pertinent question now arose as to the role of the common people of Sikkim in the political developments.

A number of Nepali people indeed took part in the agitation of 1973, though many people believed that a considerable section of the participants were non-Sikkimese. It was learnt that the common Bhutia-Lepcha people were quite bewildered and they could not get rid of this bewilderment till 1974, when a section of them living in and around Gangtok started participating in counter demonstrations against the Government of Sikkim Bill along with a section of the Sikkimese Nepalese. It was learnt that a great majority of the villagers, whether Bhutia-Lepcha or Nepali, had practically no part in the movements. Elections were held in 29 constituencies in 1974 and about 39% of the total electorate of these constituencies participated in the voting. The opinion poll held in April 1975, of course showed a different picture. A great majority of the voters participated in that poll and the resolution of the Assembly seeking merger with India was overwhelmingly supported by the electors. But many in Sikkim, questioned the fairness of that poll.

However, Sikkim joined the mainstream of Indian political, social, cultural and economic life^{as} its twenty second State since May, 1975, and she settled to a new political life. Since then the Sikkimese had experienced a lot. The currents and crosscurrents in the political life, the intra-party squabbles, intra-community and inner-community contradictions, the working of the democratic government, the development of the State and the disappointment of the people -- all were the characteristic features of the time. While mixing with and interviewing the people in and around Gangtok, the author came across two distinct trends of attitude of the people towards the

political changes and new dimensions of the governmental function. First, there was a section, very much enthusiastic, conversant, or eager to be conversant with the process and ready to assert their role in the political arena; while there were others comparatively conservative and apprehensive of the radical changes. This section particularly became very much disturbed with the unthinkable influx of much more articulate and assertive outsiders. They seemed to be quite uneasy being perplexed as to what their role might be in this changed circumstances. They appeared to be not in a position to judge from the face value of the changes that took place in the political and economic spheres, whether those would ultimately be conducive to them or be detrimental to their interests. This group of people not only included Bhutia-Lepcha but Sikkimese Nepali also who were living there from generations. The author had come across this trend of attitude in different parts of the State, in the South, in the West as well as in the North.

Several factors generated disappointment both among the elite and the common mass. The Nepali elite who longed for a larger share in the effective control of the governmental machinery, who struggled for a long to have reflection of the weightage of their position as a majority people in the power structure, were not happy to see that the actual control of the affairs fell with the Indians. The Governor with his dominating personality vis-a-vis the novice Ministers, the Indian bureaucrats with their superior training and experience of the most complicated system of modern administration, the superintendence of the Central Government, — all made them

uneasy partners in the power game. The Bhutia-Lepcha elite from the very beginning could not admit the merger of the state with India from their hearts. The pro-Chogyal elements took time to get themselves adjusted with the changes. The erstwhile National Party leaders kept themselves away from the political affairs for a long time. But from 1977, the Bhutia-Lepchas started to consolidate their position with a view to protecting and preserving their rights in the face of an ever increasing pressure upon their social and political positions. The unprecedented influx of the Nepali people since 1973, from Nepal and other neighbouring States, particularly from Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Dooars areas of West Bengal made, not only the Bhutia-Lepcha but also the Nepalese living in Sikkim through generations, apprehensive. It was learnt that the idea of greater Gurkha Land, supported by certain people, the increasingly dominating role of the outsiders, generated a sense of insecurity among the Bhutia-Lepchas who were afraid of becoming alien in the land of their own. There was a tendency among them to hold the political changes of these recent years and the Government of Kazi Lhendup Dorji as responsible for their plight.

The common people, on the otherhand, gradually became dissatisfied with the new Government. The ruling party promised to do a lot for the villagers, such as supply of cheap essential commodities, land reform, construction of roads and bridges, improved agriculture, better administration etc. The rise of prices after the emergency which raised the cost of living in the villages, the failure to implement land reforms,

eradicate corruption, ever widening gap between the rich and the poor, — disillusioned the people about the Government to a great extent. The field study by way of interviewing the people conducted by the author in all the four districts revealed that only 6% respondents believed that the ruling party had fulfilled the pledges made by it before the elections of 1974, while 13% considered that it could not fulfill the pledges, 29% thought that the pledges were fulfilled partially. 52% had no definite idea. About 66% of the respondents did not think that they had a better system of administration during the reign of the Kazi Government than what they had during the reign of the Chogyal. 23% conceded Kazi's administration to be better, while 11% had no definite idea, 48% of the respondents did not consider that they had better economic justice now. 22% considered that there was better economic justice during the Kazi Government's rule, while 30% had no definite idea. 70% of the respondents considered that the economic opportunities were being enjoyed by a handful of few during these days, while 19% thought that a good many people enjoyed the opportunities. Only 11% had no definite idea. But 84% of the respondents admitted that they had a better chance of political participation since 1975, than what they had during the Chogyal's time. Only 16% had no definite idea.

The merger of Sikkim had always been a burning question in Sikkim. Whenever occasion arose, the political parties, particularly the Sikkim Prajatantra Congress and the Janata Parishad, ventilated their grievance and displeasure over the accession. During an exciting debate in the Sikkim Legislature in 1978, Mr. N. B. Khatiwada said "32 members of this House are

now being blamed for selling out the country. We including the Kazi Sahab have never imagined that such things would happen. I have been very close to Kazi Saheb and I know he never wanted such things The Speaker himself had told me once 'history will not pardon us. We have been the victim of circumstances' Sri R. T. Lepcha, Sri B. P. Dahal, Sri Dugo Bhutia, Sri N. T. Lepcha had also expressed the same opinion".⁽⁴⁾ In their representation to the Prime Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai, the leaders of the Prajatantra Congress alleged that the Sikkimese were deceived and betrayed. One of the then ruling party members Mr. K. C. Fradhan also contradicted the idea that the merger of Sikkim was done in accordance with the desire of the people. The Assembly, which adopted the resolution in favour of merger, had no mandate from the people to do so. This was done violating all constitutional and judicial restraints.⁽⁵⁾ During the elections, held in 1979, the issue of merger was raised again and again. Whatsoever, the political parties and a great majority of the people have accepted the merger as a fait accompli. The Bhutia-Lepchas, however much regard for and faith with the Chogyal they have, know it well that Chogyalocracy will not come back. The majority of the Nepalese, on the otherhand, does not want the Chogyal to come back. Though it was revealed in the field study that 36% of the respondents considered that the Chogyal should have some share in the governmental system because of his long standing experience, majority of the people appeared to be confused as to their opinion over the issue.

In any case, minus the different apprehensions of a section of people, a definite trend of appreciation for the

system of democracy is growing in Sikkim. In the last Assembly election, held in October, 1979, about 65% of the electors participated, though in the Lok Sabha poll, the percentage of participants came down to about 45%. Majority of the political leaders appreciated the management, control and conduct of elections and praised it as free and fair election. The idea that they could install a government by themselves, undoubtedly inspired the people politically.

II

New Dimensions of the Government and its Working.

The feudal Socio-economic structure had its reflection on the Governmental structure of Sikkim also. Though the introduction of democracy could not all on a sudden wipe these out from the functional sphere of the Government, the changes could not evade also the notice of the people. Comparatively a simple governmental organisation under the supreme control of a hereditary ruler might have been deemed sufficient for Sikkim during the rule of the Chogyal. But after the introduction of a democratic form of government the new dimension of the Government of Sikkim have become perceptible. A responsible government, a fullfledged legislature, an independent judiciary and an organised bureaucracy have now been placed on the saddle of the governmental functions. With the proliferation of policy decisions, and implementation of policies, the functions of the Government have increased manifold.

Many departments have been created and placed under trained and experienced Officers. Immediately after Sikkim became the twenty second State of India, the Governor, in exercise of the powers conferred by clause (3) of Article 166 of the Constitution made rules for the allocation of business of the Government of Sikkim; ⁽⁶⁾ twenty five departments were authorised to transact the business of the Government. These also included rules for the allocation of business of the Government among the Ministers. By another notification, the Chief Secretary and all Secretaries to the Government of Sikkim were authorised to execute on behalf of the Governor, the contract and assurances of property made in the exercise of the executive power of the State. ⁽⁷⁾

With the inauguration of the popular government, different developmental plans and projects were under taken and a new life was given to the process of planned economic development in Sikkim. Though this process started in Sikkim since 1954 and by 1975, a number of plans were implemented, the investment pattern showed that enormous emphasis was laid upon tertiary sector than on primary and secondary Sectors. This trend continued upto 1976. But the investment pattern proposed for the Sixth plan (1978-83) emphasised the need to revitalise some of the areas which would "have a direct effect on introducing growth with Social Justice." ⁽⁸⁾ One of the most important goals of this plan was to rise the level of income of the rural population to eliminate abject poverty by creating opportunities for employment

and ensuring distributive Justice.

During these years, the Government had accelerated the developmental works in all the economic spheres. Different measures had been taken to improve irrigation, medium irrigation, soil and water conservation, animal husbandry and diary development, forests, fisheries etc. Attempts had also been taken to generate an industrial climate within the State and for that, the simultaneous development of the necessary infra-structure in the form of power, communications and water supply was also taken up. Different schemes for boosting small and medium size industry had also been taken up. Apart from these, social welfare, medical and public health facilities, welfare of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes had been promoted. Effective measures had also been taken to universalise elementary education, to intensify adult education, and to vocationalise education. Number of schools and non-formal education centres in different parts of the state had been established, steps had also been taken to provide for higher education. All out rural development programmes had been taken up. "One of the immediate outcomes of the political upheaval of 1973, in Sikkim, was the realisation by the Government as well as the people's representatives of the need to put a fresh impetus to the task of bettering the lot of the rural people of the State. Accordingly, a separate Department of Panchayat and Rural Works was created in October, 1974 to devote itself exclusively to rural development".

The expansion in Plan activities had necessitated the spread of Governmental organisations not only within Gangtok and the District head quarters but also in many remote areas of the State. These developmental programmes necessitated the employment of quite a good number of experienced and expert hands from outside Sikkim. The dearth of expert personnel among the Sikkimese was the reason for that. Until the Sikkimese become capable of managing their own projects, there seems to be no way out.

The main grievance of the opposition parties in Sikkim is that the benefit of Developmental Plans has not reached the greater part of the rural population. It has been alleged that the major benefit of investment has gone to the rich and to the contractors, the neo-rich class. The problem, infact, appears to be the problem of ensuring popular participation in the developmental activities. It is learnt that the Kazi Government has failed to take tangible steps to ensure the participation of the common people of the rural areas in the developmental projects undertaken throughout Sikkim during their rule. Until effective steps are taken to guarantee popular participation in the matters of development and other activities of the Government, the responsibility of the people to guard and guide the system will not grow.

The new Government under the leadership of N.B. Bhandari has also been taking up different developmental schemes with a view to maximising the welfare of the people. "It has been the endeavour of the State Government to work in a manner

conducive to the furtherance of the national integrity of the country and to develop the best of relations between the Centre and the State." (10) The new Government appears to be alive to the problems of inter-community contradictions and hence it "seeks to preserve and promote the ethnic harmony and has been formulating its policy and programmes to this end." (11) If the Bhandari Government succeeds in ameliorating the conditions of the general people and in developing the bonds of friendship and fraternity among the ethnic groups, a lot for Sikkim will be achieved.

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