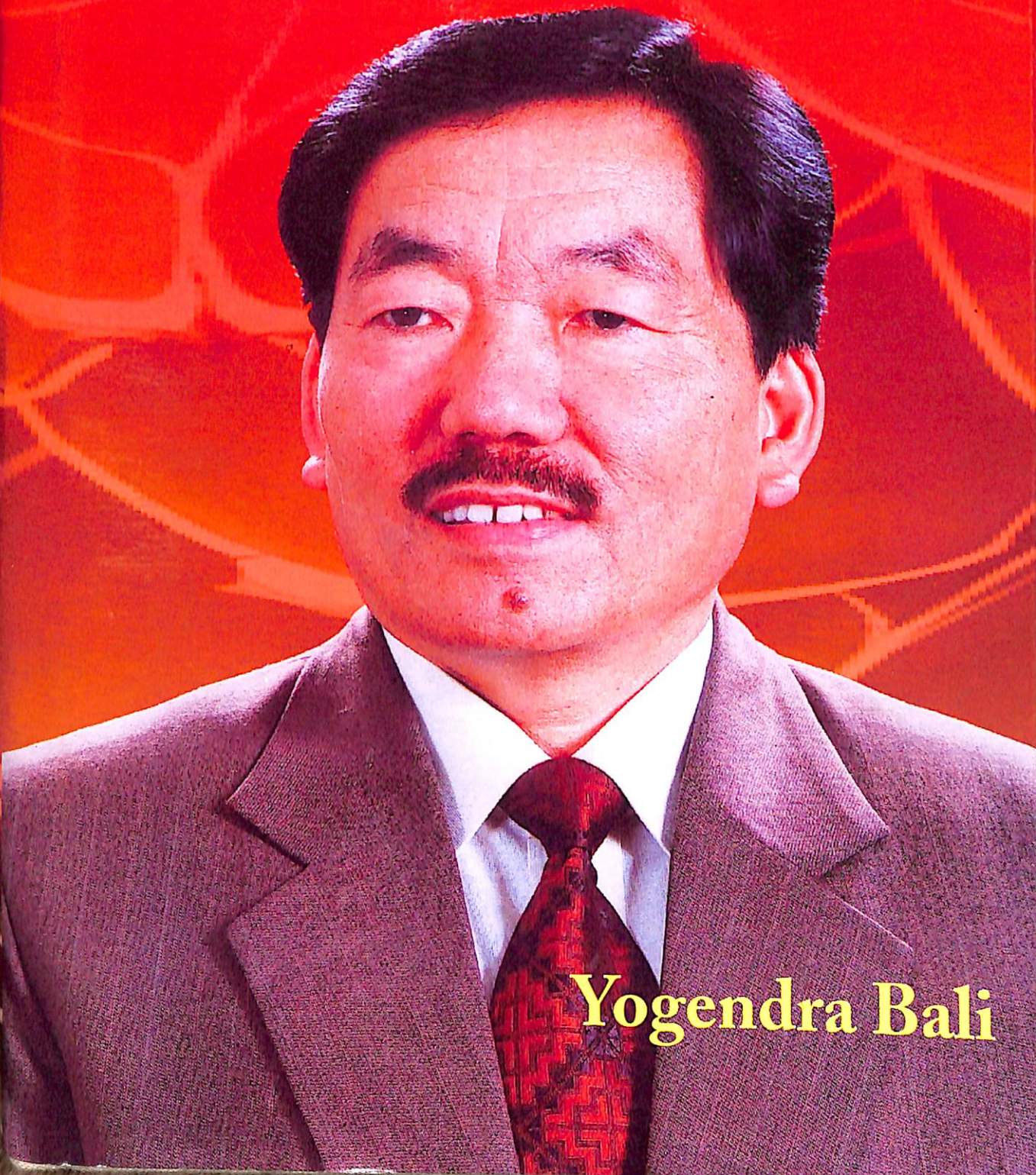


Pawan Chamling

Daring To Be Different



Yogendra Bali

Pawan Chamling

Daring To Be Different

Yogendra Bali



INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM, GANGTOK



in association with
HAR-ANAND PUBLICATIONS PVT LTD

Preface

'Sikkim—A Kingdom of Flowers', that is what Pawan Chamling, Chief Minister of Sikkim dreams of making this 22nd State of India. During a warm and frank conversation on his dreams and desires at *Mintokgang* in Gangtok, he said, "My one dream, my ardent desire is to make Sikkim truly a kingdom of flowers, the number one state in India." Incidentally, *Mintokgang*, the official residence of the Chief Minister, literally means the "Hill of Flowers". And indeed it is. Having had the privilege of seeing many official residences of chief ministers of India, one is fascinated with the beauty of the Hill of Flowers. Not only are the approaches and garden patches of the *Mintokgang* abloom with beautiful flowers, even the visitors' rooms of the residence are always aesthetically decorated with charming effect so evident in nearly all facets of Sikkimese life today.

Chamling tries to make dreams come true all the time. A healthy change is his major instrument and democratic way, his grand obsession.

First impressions are last impressions. A serious and concerned study of life and change leads to the investigation of the processes of change and their effect on the lives of people, which dreamers like Pawan Chamling strive to improve. A conversation with the political leader led to delving further into the hopes, aspirations, and changes taking place in the lives of the people of Sikkim under the spell of the 'Chamling effect'. Although this was visible in the early 1990s when the Dreamer-Chief Minister began translating his ideas of a truly people-oriented democracy into reality against all social, economic and political odds, it was evident in 2001 more than seven years after Sikkim had been under his dynamic leadership.

During a tour of Sikkim with my wife, Vijay, in May 2001, and subsequent gathering of material and research, my impression that Sikkim has much to offer as a role model to the rest of the Indian nation strengthened. It is one state

that deserves to be noticed by the rest of the north-eastern states in particular and the rest of India, in general.

Over nearly half a century of my career as a writer and journalist based in New Delhi, I have had the privilege of meeting and knowing some of the tallest personalities in India's social and political events.

When I was finally in Sikkim for this book, a series of interesting and significant events took place. Sikkim celebrated its 26th State Day, where the Chief Minister did something which few other chief ministers in India would do. His address on State Day on May 16, 2001, at the Community Hall in Gangtok was an exercise in accountability and transparency. It also underlined the importance of a constructive opposition in a democratic system. In his address, he listed the achievements and failures of his administration, no holds barred. He accepted the failures and faults where they were and sought the people's confidence in his intention of remedying the faults and the future plans of progress. He also announced the formation of a Planning Commission to work out plans for the development of Sikkim with some eminent economists and energy experts. It underlined his vision of maintaining the political and economic structure of the state and strengthening its bonds with the rest of India.

The outgoing Governor of Sikkim, Chaudhari Randhir Singh, said, "I love Sikkim which shall always remain close to my heart." That indicated that the Governor-Chief Minister relations in Sikkim could be a model for other states in India.

On that very day, the new Governor, Kidar Nath Sahani, came to Sikkim and was sworn in and introduced to eminent people and senior civil servants of the State by the Chief Minister. The new Governor, though the nominee of a different political party and ideology than the previous one, received the same respect and consideration from the political leader of Sikkim who has a record of good functional relations with the Centre, headed by various coalitions and parties. He is also exemplary in Centre-State relations, much bedevilled by and bogged in controversies everywhere else in the country.

In May 2001, Sikkim also played host to the Conference of the North-Eastern Regional Commonwealth Parliamentary

Association, inaugurated by then Speaker of the Lok Sabha, G.M.C. Balayogi. The Chief Minister, addressing distinguished legislators from the north-eastern states and the Indian Parliament, underlined the importance of the nation and its leaders paying more serious attention to the problems in the north-east to ensure its peace and progress. Development was a major issue at this significant parliamentary meet. Sikkim emerged as one of the sanest voices from the north-east and as an island of peace in the north-eastern Himalayas where other states constantly face problems of unrest, insurgency, and militancy.

While ecology has been damaged and destroyed in most parts of the world threatening human and animal existence, in Chamling's Sikkim, forest cover has increased by more than 4 percent. Sikkim has a lot to offer to the rest of India and the world. Chamling is sincerely trying to bring it to the notice of the world. Sikkim has one of the world's largest collection of orchids, butterflies and medicinal herbs. It has India's highest peak—Khangchendzonga, the second highest peak of the Himalayan range. It is the land of the ethnic Nepalese, Lepchas, and Bhutias, besides other tribal groups of great heritage and folklore!

In Chamling's Sikkim, endowed with great gifts of nature, an even greater gift is sought to be planted and nourished—democracy. His greatest gift to his people has been the restoration of democracy.

This 'Preface' seeks to introduce the shape of things to come in the following pages, which are not exactly the biographic chronicle of a man seeking to realise his dreams for his people and state. It is, in fact, an introduction to his political journey, which continues. It is not a lone journey. There are many in this young state keen to journey with one of the youngest chief ministers of India.

While offering this work to readers, I would like to own up to the flaws owing to erroneous perceptions and judgement. I would also record my sincere thanks to many people of Sikkim, including Tika Mayaji, Shri Aashbahadur Chamling and Shrimati Aasharani Chamling (wife and parents respectively of Chamling). I am rather very grateful to C.B. Karki, several legislators and senior civil servants, journalists and eminent citizens for accepting my long interview schedules. Some of them provided me with



Contents

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 1. | <i>The Boy from Yangang</i> | 13 |
| 2. | <i>The Land of Chamling's Birth</i> | 26 |
| 3. | <i>Education—Seeds of Change</i> | 37 |
| 4. | <i>A Politician in the Making</i> | 40 |
| 5. | <i>The People's Revolution</i> | 44 |
| 6. | <i>Sikkim in the Mainstream</i> | 57 |
| 7. | <i>The Journey Begins</i> | 67 |
| 8. | <i>The Nirman Story</i> | 76 |
| 9. | <i>Representative Chamling</i> | 88 |
| 10. | <i>Minister Chamling</i> | 100 |
| 11. | <i>Is Fire Allowed Inside the House?</i> | 115 |
| 12. | <i>A Party is Born</i> | 129 |
| 13. | <i>He Goes Underground</i> | 143 |
| 14. | <i>Date with Destiny</i> | 162 |
| 15. | <i>The Troubled Times</i> | 174 |
| 16. | <i>Messiah of the Poor</i> | 179 |
| 17. | <i>Honouring the Past</i> | 186 |
| 18. | <i>Building the Future</i> | 200 |
| 19. | <i>Redefining the Security Dynamics</i> | 209 |
| 20. | <i>Sikkimising the Globalisation Process</i> | 219 |
| 21. | <i>Upholder of Women's Rights</i> | 233 |
| 22. | <i>Into the 21st Century</i> | 238 |
| 23. | <i>Looking Beyond the Horizon</i> | 267 |
| 24. | <i>Pawan Chamling—His Intimate Self</i> | 282 |

| | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|
| 25. | <i>The Man and His Vision</i> | 292 |
| 26. | <i>Three Cheers for 2002</i> | 307 |
| | <i>Appendix</i> | 323 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 341 |



1

The Boy from Yangang

September 9, 1992. Zero Hour in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. The lone opposition member in the 32-member House seeks the permission of the Speaker to raise an issue that would normally be allowed. The chair, on this occasion, however, disagrees.

There is a moment of uneasy calm. The tension is almost palpable. There has been almost no opposition to speak of in the Assembly's history since 1975. What will this one man do in the face of such daunting ruling party presence? Nonchalantly, the opposition MLA reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a candle. As the 31 other MLAs watch, he calmly lights it, stands up from his seat and starts making a round of the House, carefully cupping the lit candle in his hands. No one moves, no one titters. Everyone watches the MLA, who seems to be searching for something with the help of the candle. Then in a clear voice that reverberates around the hall, the candleholder asks, "Where is democracy? I am looking for it here in the Assembly hall."

The defiant one-man opposition member then walks up determinedly towards the seat of the leader of the House. Standing resolutely in front of him, he asks, "Isn't democracy trapped inside the pocket of the chief minister?" His rhetorical question is an indictment and the 31 members of the ruling party can do little but sit back in consternation. Then he adds, "I will go to every corner of Sikkim in search of democracy and I will keep searching until I find it." With those words he walks out, leaving a bemused legislature chamber behind. Outside, the news spreads like wildfire. "Where is democracy?" echoes in all the picturesque towns and rustic hamlets of Sikkim.

The man who set out to search for democracy in 1992 and then ensured it did not vanish from Sikkim was Pawan

Chamling. A ruling party minister till he was expelled for objecting to the politics of corruption in the state, he was to prove that his words in the Assembly hall that day were not said in vain. In strengthening democratic norms in Sikkim, he had lived up to the expectations of the *homey* the Rai clan priest who while naming him had called upon him to be as firm and pure and tall as Mt Everest, the highest mountain peak in the world.

Pawan Chamling was born in Yangang in South Sikkim on September 22, 1950 (corresponding to the 7th of *Ashoj*, *Sumbat* 2007) between 3 and 4 in the morning, the first son of Aashbahadur Chamling and Aasharani Chamling. The place of his birth was perhaps to have a special meaning in the life of Pawan Chamling, for he was born just 3 km from a hilltop known as Nyaya, or Justice.

In an early history that is replete with skirmishes, there is a story of a hard battle that Sikkim fought with Nepal at a place called Varam in South Sikkim. Today there still are remnants of stone barricades as well as a dilapidated fort there. Many Sikkimese soldiers are believed to have died in that encounter giving the place its name of Varam, which means a pile or heap. Just above Varam is a hill called Niya. There Damodar Pandey, commander of the Nepalese forces, is said to have won the war and felt he had given justice to the day. Owing to this, local lore has it, the hill was called Niya. Apparently Pandey washed his sword of his enemies' blood in the Teesta river below Varam.

It was at this place that Chamling was born. While there are records of sorts about the various Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha landlords who served as the Sikkimese king's feudal *thikadars*, there isn't any sufficient records available on tribal lineages. Pawan Chamling's family tree goes back in the past to the time when his ancestor Aguwa Raja was strutting the landscape as an independent chief. After Aguwa Raja, many generations passed without any surviving record of the family heads. From the little that is available, the heads of the Pawan Chamling's ancestry at various points of history were:

1. Dilungjeet Chamling
2. Harkajeet Chamling
3. Birgum Chamling

4. Manbahadur Chamling
- o. Aashbahadur Chamling

Pawan Chamling has four brothers, namely Partiman Chamling, Santa Bahadur Chamling, Rupen Chamling and Ashok Chamling.

For one who looks at the masses as a single entity that has to be served and shown the way to development, Chamling comes ironically from the multi-clan Rai ethnic group, which continues to engage the curiosity of anthropologists. There still is no consensus among them on the exact composition of the Rais, who are divided into numerous subgroups.

The Rais, like giant tree, branch out into sub-tribes, further into clans, into kindred and finally into lineages. Thus, the Chamlings are one of more than fifteen linguistically, and to a certain extent, ethnically distinct segments or sub-tribes (*thar*) subsumed under the ethnonym "Rai". Within the same tribe, they speak different dialects. So much so that the wide ranging differences at times give us an impression that the Rais come from different roots. According to some scholars, there are more than 50 distinct Rai dialects or languages. The origin of the Rai dialects can be traced to one of the branches of the Tibeto-Burman family of language.

Pawan Chamling, as the surname denotes, comes from the sub-group Chamling, which is one of the branches of the ethnic Rai identity.

The Rais, as one of the ethnic groups within the greater Nepali community, are basically nature worshippers. The tribe, which nurtures an involved kinship with nature, never consciously developed spiritualism or godliness as its attribute. Passing through the commune system it was slightly influenced by the feudal tradition while arriving at the modern world. Indeed, spiritualism with this tribe, like many other tribes in the world, is a part of life and culture. Spiritualism here is concerned more with the well-being of people than mere godliness.

One custom distinguishes the Rais among most tribes and religious followers. Among Rais, the custom is to bury the dead in a designated burial ground or to cremate them in a crematorium. This explains their belief in the

philosophy of short-lived bodily existence and the immortality of soul. Some sub-tribes (*thar*) of the Rais bury their dead on their own premises. The desire to preserve the body of their relatives on their own farmland indicates their unwillingness to come to terms with ephemeral existence. The immortality of soul among Rais is further reinforced by *petre-puja*, like worship of ancestors.

The structure of Rai houses is latent with ethnic symbolism. The house altar located at the extreme interior is the most intimate and sacred site—the *sanctum sanctorum*, where no outsider is allowed including the high priest in the society. In particular, “goat eaters” are meticulously kept away from the altar. The souls of the dead ancestors as well as ancestral deities are believed to reside in this altar. The next site sacred in order of symbolic classification is the hearth, *situlung* (three stones placed in a triangular formation, used in cooking, also revered as ancestral stones). The pillar at the intersection of the imaginary dividing lines acquires special symbolism during rituals.

Many ritual activities centre around the household. All ancestral cults which occupy an important place in the ritual cycle of the Rais must be celebrated regularly by each individual household. One that may be mentioned here is the harvest offering. After the harvest, the Rais offer grains like wheat, millet, rice to the ancestors as first-fruit offerings. The practice is known as the harvest festival of *nuwagi*. The priests of the Rais are generally known as the *homey* and *mangpa*. While the priest chews on ginger, he invokes the souls of dead ancestors and offers the newly harvested grains at the *situlung*. All this while *washim* (beverage prepared locally from millet and maize) is sprinkled over the hearth from a *chindoh*—the dried, bottle-like fruit of the gourd family botanically known as *Lufa cylindrica*. The idea is to involve the ancestors in the share of the produce in the farmland. In pursuance of this ritual, various ancestral cults associated with different clans are also celebrated in combinations that vary according to individual household.

With the change of season, *pujas* known as *udhaulee* (falling period) and *ubhaulee* (rising period) are held for the well-being of people, for plenty and abundance, health and prosperity. These *pujas* are normally held in the months of

March to May. In essence, this is worship of nature. The *puja* is followed by a long procession in which men and women from the tribe beat drum and cymbals, sing and perform *selee* dance. The *selee* dance is known for its mimicry. Each step and movement is suggestive of the corresponding song—a tribal song that celebrates good yields and the blessings of the ancestors.

When a baby boy is born to a family, the naming ceremony is held five days later. In the case of a girl child the ceremony is held on the third day. The death rite is accordingly observed on the fifth day for a male and third day for a female. During the mourning period, the family members refrain from taking oil and salt as a ritual abstinence. In the period of the mourning rite of *chokhine*, i.e. becoming pure, the sons shave their heads and don white clothes. On the thirteenth day, the death ritual is observed, on the 45th day the *anthesi-kriya* is observed. The death anniversary known as *barkhi* is observed every year.

Although nature worshippers, the Rais have now come under the influence of different religions. However, they continue to observe the established traditional customs and rituals. In marriage, Rais have two practices—*magi biha*, i.e. literally 'ask for', meaning an arranged marriage, and *chori biha*, i.e. marriage by eloping with the bride. Under *magi biha*, the parents and close relatives of the man go about establishing contact with the family of a potential bride. For this purpose, matchmakers are employed or hired to negotiate with the family of the bride asking for the gift of the daughter. While the consent of the daughter is important, the interest of the parents plays a decisive role. The success of negotiation depends on the deft persuasive skills of the matchmakers. The tradition of *chori biha*, that is marriage by elopement with tacit consent of the bride, is a common practice. Once the boy resolves to marry a particular girl, he normally deposes a 'go-between' to ascertain the mind of the girl. Only if some willingness on the part of the girl is felt is there a possibility for elopement.

Following a successful elopement once the girl has been won, the boy's parents send two persons for both information and reconciliation to the girl's family along

country whose *Dharma Raja* he was appointed to be. It was only during the long reign of Maharaja Chogyal Tashi Namgyal between 1914 and 1968 that the full power of the monarch was restored.

In 1950, the year Pawan Chamling was born in Yangang, significantly the Indo-Sikkim Treaty was signed to give birth to a new era of Indo-Sikkimese relations which was to result in the people's revolution or the movement for democracy. This finally resulted in Sikkim joining India of its own volition as the 22nd state in 1975.

The Indo-Sikkim Treaty in the year of Chamling's birth was a landmark in the political development of modern Sikkim. With this, the protectorate status of Sikkim was maintained, the only difference being the protector was now India and not Britain. The Government of India revoked all previous treaties and affirmed the protectorate status of the state under independent India. Defence, external affairs, customs, and communications of Sikkim became India's responsibility. It reaffirmed India's authority and responsibility over the state. The first step towards emotional and political integration of Sikkim was taken in the year the man who is now generally admired "for giving the gift of real democracy" was born.

Chamling was not the son of a Chogyal or a Kazi, a member of the elite aristocratic class of Sikkim. He was the son of a farmer. His dreams and ambitions had to be the dreams and ambitions of a common farmer's son. Being a farmer's son in a far-flung area of Sikkim he realised at a very tender age that there were rich and there were poor, and the rich were few but the poor were too many.

Pawan Chamling's educational dream turned him into a poet, philosopher and scholar of considerable originality and impact at a very young age. He had a very keen appetite for social work and was eager to help his fellow students and elders in doing jobs which seemed hard and taxing. He often showed them the way to solve problems and to tackle situations with ease and confidence. Was he totally devoid of the joys of childhood and the little adventures boys savour while eagerly wanting to attain early manhood? According to his parents, "He was like all other normal village boys and enjoyed doing things the boys do. But he did them in his own special way and style which

made him the leader and envy of other young boys of his age.”

Another characteristic of this little politician, was his early fascination for democracy and freedom of speech and action. It seemed that the question of the identity of man, his society and his country, became a significant obsession with Pawan Chamling in his boyhood itself. Those dreams and realities gradually wove into the question of identity. Chamling later used this very new perception of grassroots identity to usher in a new kind of social democracy in Sikkim. He had amply demonstrated that confusion of identities in a society led to chaos, conflict and confrontation in communities and societies. This could tear the cohesiveness and harmony endangering all efforts at progress and development. This kind of perception and analysis of the making of a politician like Chamling from his very boyhood might appear a grandiose formula to many. But to do so one had to go far back into his personal make-up and its interaction with the environment and circumstance in which he grew.

Early in his boyhood, he had realized that conflict management must be replaced by conflict prevention. He felt that crisis prevention was a better approach to social peace and stability than crisis management. To eliminate the genesis of social conflict and crisis, identification and strengthening of true identities of men and women who formed the ethnic and social bricks of a nation were important. Identity could be the best instrument for building peace and harmony. It can be the basis for preventing conflict and crisis in a society.

These were some of the things of great significance and consequence that one would come across, as one went deeper and deeper into the remarkable political journey of the boy from Yangang. He had stepped into his journey more than four decades ago, when he was just a school boy. But his journey became more and more visible, trying, testing when he became totally committed to bringing in democracy. The strong mainstreaming of Sikkim and its people with the rest of the Indian nation from 1993 onwards, is a distinct feature of what many political commentators call the “Chamling era” in Sikkim.

His journey is still unfinished. And like the poet Robert Frost Chamling too feels that he has "miles to go". To really understand the traveler on this journey, one would have to assess and evaluate his promise, pronouncement and performance, rather than seek criticism from enemies and certificate from admirers.

Again, as a Chief Minister, Chamling said that more than the role of active politicians and his individual biography, it is important to tell the people about what he stood for. How he has translated his dreams into reality for his own people and the people of the country. He confesses that he has many unfulfilled dreams with regard to creating a better life and environment for the people of Sikkim.

His response to several questions about the progress and development of Sikkim in diverse fields is normally, "Don't ask me, better come to Sikkim and see for yourself. Ask the people. Take a look at them and their lives. Listen to those who are critics and have grievances. Then you will have a clearer picture of what we seek to achieve. Where we started, where we have reached, and where we want to go. Just ask, talk and see, and the truth will be known." Then one would also know that Pawan Chamling is not alone on his journey. He has with him dedicated and committed young cadres of his Sikkim Democratic Front and the majority of the people of Sikkim belonging to all the major ethnic communities, the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese.

Responding to a discussion on the need to tell the rest of India about his hopes, aspirations, and achievements for Sikkim as also its agonies and sorrows, Chief Minister Chamling says with some regret,

"it is a pity that people in Delhi and the rest of the country know so little about the 22nd state of India. Today also many have failed to recognise what the rest of the country can learn from Sikkim and what Sikkim must learn and gain from the mother country. When we in the north-east say and suggest to the Centre that each application of ours should be treated as a rightful demand from important, proud, and patriotic partners of the Indian federation we should get proper attention. When there is peace,

The Land of Chamling's Birth

History reveals that prior to the 18th century, the territory of Sikkim was much larger and extended upto the present day Morung and Arun rivers in Nepal. Towards the middle of the 18th century, Bhutan waged war against Sikkim in alliance with Manger and later the Gorkhas did the same. From 1750 onwards, the west of Teesta river fell under the dominion of Nepal. The dominion had even expanded to the extreme district of north Sikkim along the Dzongu range. There still can be found many such relics and remnants to support this historical development in Dzongu region.

At a certain point of time, Nepal was a highly prosperous kingdom and one of the most powerful nations in Asia. The invaluable natural resources of Nepal had made it prosperous. The value of Nepal's currency was once greater than that of India. Together with its economic power, Nepal also had immense military power. Owing to its military background, Prithvi Narayan Shah initiated the unification of the Nepal mainland. It is seen that prior to this unification campaign, various communities—Mangar, Limboo, Rai, Gurung, Thami, Chettri, Pradhan (Newars), Kami, Damai, Sarki, and Majhee—were already living in a number of places in west Sikkim.

This showed that Nepal had invaded many parts of Sikkim and established its rule in many parts of Sikkim for 37 long years. From all these available historical footnotes, it becomes clear that most of Sikkim was part of Nepal, especially after the 1780s, which, however, shrunk considerably after the Britishers intervened.

But long before the Sikkimese fought for territorial integrity against Nepalese and Bhutanese army, the region was home to the peace loving Lepchas. Then, as legend has it, sometime in the 13th century, a prince named Guru Tashi of the Minyang dynasty in Tibet had a divine vision

3

Education—Seeds of Change

Like many other children in the village, Chamling's school life began quite late. He says,

"I was fortunate that I could at least go to school and learn. Even today children are engaged in different productive activities owing to acute poverty from a very early age. Or else, they are required to look after their younger siblings while parents go to tend the field. Today the attitude has largely changed and the parents at least want to keep their sons away from this assignment. Due to backwardness and lack of options, many parents in rural Sikkim still do not encourage girl children to attend school. Ever since my childhood, I have witnessed this rural backwardness around me coupled with inaccessibility to education."

Having been a victim, he says, he is trying to rectify the situation. At this juncture, his government is trying to attend to this unfortunate historical aspect of economic disparity and rural backwardness and enrol as many children in schools as possible. The government is trying to compensate for the loss that the family may incur while sending their children to school through various means. In additions, school children are provided with free textbooks, exercise books, uniforms and education is free of tuition fees.

In his school days, Chamling took every opportunity to improve upon his performance and build his personality. In addition to academics, he became proficient in sports, cultural, and literary activities. He had great interest in football and volleyball and represented his school many a

A Politician in the Making

Since Chamling's parents and forefathers all took up farming as their main occupation, he still considers himself basically a farmer. Even at present, his family is primarily engaged in agricultural activities. His family always drew sustenance from agricultural products and they still continue to be self-sufficient. Besides supporting the family, their farm products are also sold in the market to meet other expenses. They mainly grow rice. They also extensively cultivate ginger, cardamom, vegetables, and flowers. Besides, cattle farming, milk production, poultry and piggery are additional income generating activities with his family. His brothers are engaged in construction work and are equally self-sufficient. At a certain point of time, Chamling himself was a successful government contractor. As a first-class contractor, he built a number of roads, bridges, buildings and irrigation canals. This gave him adequate ideas about the practical issues involved in the grassroots development activities.

Chamling was actively involved in the cooperatives movement in Sikkim. After completing a Diploma in Cooperatives from Pune's Cooperatives Institute, he set up a 'Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society' at Yangang in 1976. He held the post of secretary and president of the society for a long time. During those days, he also dabbled in politics, contract works and the *panchayat*. He remained equally active in literary and cultural activities. In 1977, he established Nirman Prakashan and began the publication of *Nirman* a monthly literary magazine. These years in the 1970s happened to be the most fruitful and innovative phase of his life. His talents and dynamism as a leader actually matured during this time.

There, however, is some form of discontentment within him *vis-à-vis* his activities in the 1970s. Chamling says,

A Politician in the Making

Since Chamling's parents and forefathers all took up farming as their main occupation, he still considers himself basically a farmer. Even at present, his family is primarily engaged in agricultural activities. His family always drew sustenance from agricultural products and they still continue to be self-sufficient. Besides supporting the family, their farm products are also sold in the market to meet other expenses. They mainly grow rice. They also extensively cultivate ginger, cardamom, vegetables, and flowers. Besides, cattle farming, milk production, poultry and piggery are additional income generating activities with his family. His brothers are engaged in construction work and are equally self-sufficient. At a certain point of time, Chamling himself was a successful government contractor. As a first-class contractor, he built a number of roads, bridges, buildings and irrigation canals. This gave him adequate ideas about the practical issues involved in the grassroots development activities.

Chamling was actively involved in the cooperatives movement in Sikkim. After completing a Diploma in Cooperatives from Pune's Cooperatives Institute, he set up a 'Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society' at Yangang in 1976. He held the post of secretary and president of the society for a long time. During those days, he also dabbled in politics, contract works and the *panchayat*. He remained equally active in literary and cultural activities. In 1977, he established Nirman Prakashan and began the publication of *Nirman* a monthly literary magazine. These years in the 1970s happened to be the most fruitful and innovative phase of his life. His talents and dynamism as a leader actually matured during this time.

There, however, is some form of discontentment within him *vis-à-vis* his activities in the 1970s. Chamling says,

“There is comfort in my mind that I was successful as a contractor and as a farmer. Although not an eminent *littérateur*, I was able to contribute towards the development of language and literature. But as far as spreading the movement of cooperatives is concerned, I was not satisfied as anticipated. Therefore, after becoming Chief Minister, my government has undertaken to spread this movement to every part of the state. We have established a cooperative society in each gram panchayat unit. The government has been giving every possible support to people to open more and more cooperatives. The success of the cooperatives movement depends on collective participation of people. We feel that it is equally necessary for the people to be aware and conscious about their rights and duties.”

Politics for Chamling is not a means to realize his personal interests. He strongly feels that at the core of politics should be the welfare of the people. He says,

“Indeed, through my poetry I always wanted to change the world and my environment. Yet I have no reservation in accepting that my society and my environment could never be revolutionized and provoked by artistic medium alone. I strongly believe that the man who wields a pen should have ploughed the field, carried people's festoon and placards, held revolutionary flags and if driven to the wall, pulled a trigger to safeguard justice. Together with my poetic journey I was in favour of social transformation. While I was working for the overall development of our people I was slowly pulled into the political realm. After you enter politics, it becomes secondary to define your social standing. When we sacrifice our lot for the welfare of people, it is the people who decide where we stand. While I work for the people, the people elevated me to the post of Panchayat President, and later elected me as an MLA. Today I am the Chief Minister because of people's mandate, support and cooperation. If I don't hold this position in future, people will still remain the centre of my political focus. To be a successful politician, I feel that we need to be decent and ideal as an individual—with high moral bearing, modest, and

The People's Revolution

The *Jana Kranti* or the "People's Revolution" was gathering momentum and had reached its peak by 1973. The youth and intellectuals were on the streets of Sikkim demanding more rights, participation and representation of the people in the governing process. Kazi Lhendup Dorji, member of an elite family of landlords but the symbolic figurehead of the people's revolution, had with him people young and old with affiliation to various shades of political ideology. The major political force at the time was of course the Sikkim State Congress. The pro-Chogyal and pro-Durbar elements always seemed to consider the snowballing protests and processions as mere storm over their morning cup of tea that would blow over. But that was not to be. If they could clearly perceive the future, they would have realized that Sikkim was on the threshold of a radical new phase in its political journey. The reign of the Chogyal dynasty was nearing its end.

Pawan Chamling, 23 now, had already acquired his political soul. He observed the development with a keen poetic mind and political insight. The then political leaders, who were with the people's revolution, did have different shades of aims and objects. On the other hand, young people like Chamling were engaged in visualizing a society where all Sikkimese, the majority of whom were rural folk, would live a life of dignity, equality, and opportunity.

Underlining the significance of the people's revolution which marked the beginning of the democratic movement in Sikkim, Pawan Chamling and his colleagues looked at the historical background of the movement in the "Political Programme" of the Sikkim Democratic Front, the party that Chamling was to form later. It highlighted that while he was actively participating in the people's movement, the future President of the Sikkim Democratic Front and the future Chief Minister of Sikkim was also going deep into the

annals of history to draw lessons and strength for his future political ideology and programme.

In the important document of the political literature of his party, Pawan Chamling's view of the historical background was presented. It said:

"Sikkim's political history as a subject of study has attracted the least attention so far of scholars of history and as such it remains a daunting challenge that needs to be suitably met. Nevertheless, whatever facts and fiction are presently available to us, these must form the basis of its assessment and study. However, according to a rough estimate, Sikkim's history, ever since its recorded journey from the past, seems very likely to have passed broadly through four phases that are noteworthy.

The first phase was some sort of democratically run tribalism. Even while kingdom after kingdom ruled by autocrats and feudal overlords had become established, Sikkim was still a tribalism. It was broken up into as many fragments as there were tribal heads, who virtually led a nomadic existence. Amongst the various tribes constituting the inhabitants of the then Sikkim, the Lepcha tribe was solely led by the *Panu*, the Bhutia tribe was ruled by their religious head, the Tsongs were administered by their elected heads, the *Subba*, while the Mangars were led by one whose claim to leadership rested purely on his physical strength and fighting prowess. Besides, other ethnic groups like Sherpa, Chettri-Bahun, Newar, Kami Damai, Gurung, Rai and Tamang also lived in different parts of the State and ruled through their elected heads. All these tribes constituted Sikkim's ethnic group whose existence was mostly secluded, and removed from the modern concept of society and state.

The Lepchas, as a rule, were universally accepted by all as the original dwellers of the land. Hence, all other tribes who came later to this land (Sikkim) had no qualms about accepting *Panu*, the Lepcha leader,

Sikkim in the Mainstream

For many people in Sikkim, 1975 was a landmark in the people's revolution that had sparked off the movement for democracy. On May 16, 1975, Sikkim formally joined India as the 22nd state of the Indian Union. For the democratic fighters, it was literally the "liberation" of Sikkim.

Of course, this merger with India was unique and quite different from the manner in which many other Indian princely states had joined the Indian Union. Perhaps learning from the experience in Jammu and Kashmir and some of the north-eastern states, the negotiators of the merger both in Gangtok and New Delhi had shown considerable patience, care, and wisdom to eliminate all possible elements of future confrontation and conflict between the state and the Centre.

The May 8, 1973 Agreement, was in fact, an important first step that led towards the merger. Its vital safeguard was Article 371 F which was designed to protect the customary and prevalent local laws and cultural identity of the Sikkimese. Article 371 F(k) of the Constitution was the main anchor sheet of the honourable merger and the emergence of Sikkim as the 22nd state. This provided for the complete safeguard of Sikkimese rules and traditions that were in operation before the merger. There was no room for conflict and confrontation at the hands of unscrupulous political elements. This was important because to such elements both Sikkim and India had less importance than their own political ambitions and the amassing of personal power and wealth.

When one looks back at 1975 more than a quarter century later, one begins to see the political journey of Sikkim merging with the vision and political journey of Pawan Chamling. As he saw clearly, the democratic history of a liberated Sikkim in today's parlance, based on adult franchise, began after the merger with India in 1975.

The Journey Begins

Pawan Chamling's political journey had already begun way back in 1977 as a founder member and Vice- President of the Sikkim Prajatantra Congress in the state. Of course, the period between 1973 and 1980 had special significance in this journey.

The core spirit of his journey and the original political philosophy he was to evolve was guided by his extreme love for and understanding of the rural masses and the working people. He was not an aristocrat and elitist. His political philosophy took shape from creative ideas and political experiences. His dreams were born out of deprivation he had suffered as a small child, a growing student and as a teenager. His poetic sensibilities endowed him with the quality to perceive beyond the apparent and his down-to-earth practical outlook gave him the rare quality of not being cowed down by setbacks and disasters.

Pawan Chamling had not learnt the facts of life and realities of the poor man's existence from books and sermons. He had learnt his lessons from his own life. The economic compulsions of his family forced him to take to work at an early stage of his life. Like the millions of children in India, who often lacked the means which resulted in lack of education and then lack of opportunities for proper and full employment. Such children were to be the target and beneficiaries of Chamling's political ideology. He was determined to struggle for providing the children of the poor, the equality of opportunity. That was one of the key motivating factors in the evolution of his political ideology.

A farmer's son from Yangang, who could not attend a centre of higher studies, Chamling was destined to become a very distinguished political theoretician and ideologue. His political philosophy and practical policies ensured that no child in Sikkim went to school shoeless or without

The Nirman Story

Even before Pawan Chamling entered the most active phase of his political journey to battle against the pro-feudal and anti-people elements in Sikkim, he had already made a very special place for himself in the mind of the Sikkimese youth through *Nirman*, a literary journal in Sikkim first published in 1977. He established this journal and edited it himself. His *nom de plume* as a poet of wide popularity and impact was 'Kiran'. The establishment of the Nirman publishing house was a landmark in his journey. Through *Nirman*, Pawan Chamling 'Kiran' used his pen and poetry to bring about awareness to kindle the desire for change among the intelligentsia and the youth. Through this literary journal, he wanted to bring the best of the Sikkimese writers and poets and their thinking to the masses of Sikkim. Because the Sikkimese people belonged to different ethnic and cultural sub-streams, the Nepali language has always served as the *lingua franca*.

Politician Chamling and the poet 'Kiran' in him made a serious and successful effort to reach the people's mind and implant ideas, spirit, and desire for democracy, and emancipation of society. As the editor-in-chief of *Nirman*, he strived to use literature, especially poetry, to inspire the younger generation of Sikkim to write and fight for their people. He wanted to plant ideas that would make the young and old aware of the injustice and exploitation to which they had been subjected to for years. He also wanted to exhort them to rise and organize themselves for action to rid the society of the burden of poverty, injustice, and exploitation. More than anything else, he wanted the people of Sikkim to realize the importance of freedom from fear. It was necessary to help them stand on their own feet and articulate their own ideas and fight for their rights to change their plight. Chamling tried to focus on the rights

and privileges of the poor and the weaker section of the society.

Pawan Chamling sought to bring about a stable, continuing, and peaceful cultural revolution through *Nirman* which would eventually have a wider impact inside and outside Sikkim. When he started editing and publishing *Nirman*, his journey acquired a strong cultural dimension. He had realised that change in society could be brought about by the use of culture. People's lives are governed by tradition, which gives them good and stable values as well as rituals and superstitions.

The cultural and historical background and perspective of a society had to be clearly understood if one were to prepare a correct and effective intellectual road map for peaceful change and progress. Through *Nirman*, the poet 'Kiran' would appear to be building a clear cultural perspective of the society he lived in, its roots, and the causes of its strengths and weaknesses. That would influence his evolution as a "cultural politician" distinct from gross politicians who only confine themselves to the power-mechanisms and fulfilment of their personal political agendas, detached from the cultural context.

Even if Chamling had not entered active politics and pursued only a literary path, he would have risen to become a Titan. His literary work would always provoke the Sikkimese people into thinking, and striving for inculcating the virtues of patriotism and cultural pride in their roots.

Nirman, like Chamling himself, was born in the same backward village of Yangang in South Sikkim. It was a non-commercial venture. Its purpose was change and progress, not profit and creation of a commercial empire. It was envisaged as a pace-setter. It was meant to promote literature and culture as an important and effective lever of dynamics of change and development. The desire for change and progress, like peace, is born in the minds of men. That was what Chamling seemed to believe in at the age of 25. At the same time he had sufficient charisma to infect some other sensitive and socially conscious young people to team up with him in the *Nirman* experiment. It was not just a magazine but a literary movement.

With his dedicated team of young idealistic litterateurs, *Nirman* soon carved out its own niche in the literary,

Representative Chamling

Yangang, the village where Pawan Chamling was born and where he went to school, also became the first launching pad for his entry into electoral politics at the grassroots level. It was here that he accepted public responsibility for the first time as a representative of the people. He was elected unopposed as the President of the Yangang Gram Panchayat in 1982. That first step was to mark the part of his political journey which would later take him into the Sikkim Legislative Assembly from the Damthang constituency.

His dedicated and selfless public service in the Gram Panchayat led him to an entry in 1985 to the third Sikkim Legislative Assembly from Damthang. He was re-elected from the Damthang constituency securing a record 96.6 percent vote in 1989.

His association with the Yangang Panchayat led him to active political activity. This brought him closer to the people of Sikkim as his constituents. This was the phase when he moved from the idealism of literature to the stark realities of politics and the pain and suffering of the people as their representative who was mandated to change their lives.

When he was elected an MLA in 1985, his commitment and style of work became a yardstick for other young MLAs to follow. The youthful representatives of the people emulated his style because they felt he was a model for "political success" too. However, it was not an easy and off-hand style. Chamling sought to reach out to every voter in his constituency. He shared their sorrows and sufferings and extended them all political and personal help to alleviate them. Their major problems are both poverty and backwardness. The more Chamling came closer to them, the more he saw and understood the burdens of injustice,

inequality, and exploitation. Silent suffering marked their lives. As their representative, he made many facilities and incentives available to such people, particularly from the rural society, which were unheard of before.

Chamling never missed an opportunity to reach out to his people. He was always by their side in times of challenge and crisis, to stand by them and to fight for them, to guide them, and to participate in their trials and tribulations.

People first saw in him a good samaritan. Then they began to accept him as a friendly politician. Eventually they adopted him as one of their very own, to whom they could always turn with confidence in times of crisis and calamity. This relationship far outstretched the frontier of government. They began to seek his help and guidance in their intimate social and personal matters also. When they came to him, they came with hope and confidence, which was never belied. Chamling would always lend them a patient ear and apply a soothing balm to their wounds. The poorest of the poor too considered him "one of our own".

Chamling's unfathomable love for the poor, the helpless and downtrodden people brought him immense popularity and political success. Since he was himself a son of rural Sikkim, they mutually understood one another better with ease and confidence. More than that, they began to realize that Chamling's philosophy sought to define the state and the country with the village as the central unit.

In fact, the 1980s marked the formative years of Pawan Chamling as the foremost democrat of Sikkim in the 20th century. This decade recorded many historic and challenging events and processes that were to influence the future political course of both Sikkim and Chamling.

He was in his thirties when democratic Sikkim was in its teens. The 15 years of democratic Sikkim as the 22nd state of India had posed many challenges and problems, some of which were successfully tackled by the successive chief ministers and governors of Sikkim. However, many critical problems were left to the vagaries of social and political drift.

What was the socio-economic scenario in Sikkim like in the beginning of the 1980s when Chamling started the most significant lap of his political journey? A Gangtok-based journal, *Broader News and Views*, presented in its October-

Minister Chamling

The bait of power seldom made Pawan Chamling deviate from his principles and his pro-people philosophy. He was ever ready to give up his crown to follow his conscience. That trait of Chamling was to form the main plot of his love and hate relationships with the Sikkim Sangram Parishad leader and then Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, who set his own record for autocratic rule. If and when one chooses to write the history of men who ruled the states of India with an iron hand and every known trick in the game of power politics the name of Nar Bahadur Bhandari would certainly have to figure alongside the most ruthless and most power-peddling politicians. Bhandari knew how to use other people's worth to suit his own designs and purpose and also to see where his bread was more buttered before grabbing it. Association with Bhandari had to be a multi-dimensional experience for Pawan Chamling.

He got to understand the hollowness of the Sikkim Sangram Parishad and the inner working of a tyrannical system wearing a thin garb of democracy. The undercurrent of the classical colonial strategy of divide-and-rule to exploit the sensitive federal relationship between Sikkim and the rest of the country was always visible. Chamling as minister began to have his reservations rather early. Chamling knew very well that the then ruling party and its sharp-eyed leader sought to cash in on his unprecedented electoral victory. Chamling had been returned from the Damthang constituency for the second time with a resounding public mandate. His work as the people's representative had gone to the hearts and minds of the electorate, the poor peasants and workers who saw in him one who understood their pains and problems.

In Pawan Chamling's own words, his joining the Sikkim Sangram Parishad was, in fact, a collective effort of

'likeminded friends' to make the party people-oriented and bring it closer to the aspirations of the masses. During his tenure as the MLA from Damthang, he reached out to every home and each individual and tried his best to attend to their grievances and share their sorrows. His frequent rounds of his constituency had given him intimate knowledge of the miseries of the people's suffering, neglect and backwardness. The people rewarded him by showing him their confidence and affection. The question about "what he can give" to his constituency and Sikkimese at large hung heavy on Chamling's conscience. That ultimately steeled his determination to do something for the people who had given him their mandate, as part of the ruling party.

During Pawan Chamling's tenure as the minister of three important departments, a number of pro-people programmes were successfully initiated and implemented. These programmes were to form the basis of future development and progress on the one hand and his differences with the then masters of the ruling system on the other.

In the industries sector, various new schemes were introduced for the benefits of the educated unemployed youth of the state and other local entrepreneurs. They were imparted employment-oriented training in various trades and given assistance both in cash and kind to enable them to start their own industries.

Chamling infused new life and gave a fillip to the activities of the Information, Public Relations and Printing departments by bringing into administration his knowledge and experience.

The offset printing unit that initiated the modernization of printing techniques in Sikkim and also considerably raised the revenue-generating capacity of the department was installed during his ministership.

In the two and half years that Chamling remained a minister, he tried to initiate many little things which were to have big consequences for the development and modernization of Sikkim. For example, it was under him as the Information Minister that Sikkim went on air with a modest All India Radio, Sikkim station. This was the forerunner of the presently expanded multilingual radio and TV services from Gangtok.

Is Fire Allowed Inside the House?

Those who thought that legislative and public opposition could be suppressed in Sikkim with the sacking of Chamling and the letting loose of terror against him were mistaken. Pawan Chamling was to play a historic role in the political history of Sikkim as a champion of the democratic principle, ethic and practice of opposition. Great leaders before him had taught the nation that in a democracy difference of opinion was no aberration and dissent no crime. The Indian nation had proved over more than half a century after independence that there was room for parties and leaders with different ideologies and approaches to play their role in the policymaking and governance of a democratic society. That was the reason why democracy worked in India when it failed in many other neighbouring and African, Asian, or even European countries. Failure of democracy and democratic institutions was paved by impatience and intolerance of the ways and views of those who differed. Pawan Chamling proved that while others paid just lip service to the doctrine of opposition, he was the one who was deeply committed to it. He knew how to practice it with courage and conviction.

As one of his ardent admirers said, "the story of the political journey of Pawan Chamling would most likely remain incomplete without remembering the famous zero hour episode in the Sikkim Vidhan Sabha on September 9, 1992." With his sacking from the Government and expulsion from the ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad, he was now the lone opposition member in the 32-member Vidhan Sabha.

The eye witness account of G.K. Subba, who was then the Secretary to the Governor and the Legislative Assembly, is noteworthy. Recalling the dramatic scene, he says,

A Party is Born

The expulsion of Pawan Chamling from the Sikkim Sangram Parishad had already triggered a state-wide wave of activities. Disregarding the wrath of the powers that be, almost the entire poor and the underprivileged section of society in Sikkim ranged itself behind Chamling. Though distanced from the corridors of ruling power, he came closer to the people every day. It seemed destiny and determination were both guiding him.

Bhandari, who came to power on the de-merger issue, instead of retrieving the lost identity, ruled the state as a tyrant. People were deceived every time leaders hoodwinked them with emotional outburst and irrational slogans. When people realized the truth, it was too late. Then, yet another social awakening became essential. History repeats itself if people allow themselves to be deceived by propaganda. Something similar occurred in Sikkim. As more and more people began to listen to Bhandari, he went from bad to worse as a ruler.

On March 4, 1993, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) was born. The new party was founded by Pawan Chamling with a clear and open commitment to uphold democracy, justice, and development aspirations of the people. Chamling was unanimously elected the President of the new party which was slated to change the very social and political life of Sikkim.

The SDF was not born without reason. It had become essential to fight against the anti-people policies being pursued by the then government. SDF's objective was thus to shoulder the grave responsibility of replacing such policies by a pro-poor policy and programme. Behind its formation, there were principled thoughts and values to shape the destiny of the Sikkimese people.

Restoration of democracy was one of the foremost priorities of the SDF party. Sikkim, which had merged into

He Goes Underground

The party that Chamling built was to prove the last straw which broke the then ruling camel's back. The man in power and his governmental machine let loose its oppression to steamroll Chamling and his newly born party. The police had failed to arrest Pawan Chamling on June 19, 1993 because he was encircled and protected by surging sea of human beings. It was certain that they would strike again in a bid to nab him, like they had caught and jailed many of his staunch political followers. The then government was bent upon erasing the popularity graph of the party to the very extent of eliminating Chamling physically. Chamling had to run for cover. Not that he was afraid but the revolution against the oppressive regime had to be continued.

The movement for restoring the lost voice and the power of the people had to be continued. He recounted some of his memories of the underground days after the June 19, 1993 strike by Bhandari's police and bureaucrats. He says, "On June 19 itself, I went underground and reached Gangtok. I stayed in the residence of a well-wisher at Tadong and gave direction and guidance to the party people from the same house." The police force arrested 31 leading party supporters and thousands of workers and hurled them into jail at Sikkim Armed Police Camp at Pangthang because the state's regular jail had no room to accommodate all of them!

The people were very concerned about the whereabouts of their beloved leader. In the murky atmosphere, the whole government machinery was baying for Chamling's blood. The people were in a hurry to get released the jailed workers. Apprehensive about the security of Chamling, people were already agitated. Chamling, from his underground existence, mailed an appeal to his party

Messiah of the Poor

A Mercedes car suddenly appeared at Ghurbisey village, Pawan Chamling's home, on December 11, 1994. The car had reached Chamling's home to ferry him to the capital the next day for his swearing-in as the chief minister for the first time. The Mercedes used to be the official car of the chief ministers of Sikkim in the past. Pawan Chamling was the Chief Minister-designate after the landslide poll victory in the just concluded Assembly elections. However, the Chief Minister this time was a different man, not used to luxury and not willing to ride in such comfort when there were thousands of poor people struggling for their livelihood. The next day, Pawan Chamling reached Gangtok in his old jeep for the swearing-in ceremony.

The Mercedes remained unoccupied. Chamling had a very clear mind. He had declared and said,

“Cars like the Mercedes costing Rs. 50 or 60 lakhs are not befitting for the Chief Minister of a poor and backward state. It may be suitable for the President of USA or the British Prime Minister, but not the Sikkim C.M., where the majority are poor, struggling for their bare sustenance. Yes, I will board such costly cars only when every Sikkimese has at least a Jeep of his own. Till such time, I will use only a Gypsy or a Jeep.”

This is the quintessential Chamling who identifies himself with the plight of the poor people. He consciously sacrifices comfort and luxury. Coming from a humble background himself, Chamling is forever looking for an occasion and opportunity to serve the poor and the downtrodden. He strives to lubricate the wheels of economic and social instruments to provide the Sikkimese people a life of honour and dignity. Not for nothing have the poor people of Sikkim hailed him as the *messiah* of the poor.

Redefining the Security Dynamics

Chamling is known for his distaste for the cult of dynasty rule and nepotism. In his family comprising his immediate relations, making almost a total of 30 male and female members, he is the only one with an active interest in politics. His personal effort has always been to ensure that the Sikkim Democratic Front and its government in Sikkim are not blemished by the stain of dynastic rule. To quote Chamling, "As long as I am the President of the party, I will not nominate my wife or son or daughter to become an MLA, MP, or a minister." True to his words, there is no interference of his wife, children or other family members in state affairs.

The Chamlings, at home in Gangtok, in Namchi and in Yangang, give a clear impression of a simple and straightforward rural middle-class family devoted to traditional values and striving for a better life. Perhaps the personal chemistry between Pawan Chamling and his extremely vivacious and graceful wives, D.M. Chamling and Tika Maya Chamling, has also strongly contributed to the family ambience. The abode of the Chamlings shows that they value the richness of nature far more than personal wealth. The ancestral home in Yangang is very much a traditional farmer's home with some semblance of modernity like electricity and a telephone.

The yard at the Yangang home announces the peasant identity of the residents by the farming implements scattered here and there. The senior Chamling still looks after his cardamom plantation and a minimal stock of cattle (once he had more than 30 in his herd). The house in Namchi where Chamling and his wife lived before politics moved them to the capital Gangtok, is also a modest farmer's home. It does not pronounce any conspicuous display of wealth or grandeur. Of course, its

Sikkimising the Globalisation Process

The tiger, they say, always swims upstream against the current. The snake and the vermin proceed in a zigzag and uncertain manner. In politics too, there are the mainstreamers and there are sub-streamers. The mainstreamers are always in the thick of challenges and combat. The sub-streamers are always dubious, fissionary and engaged in factional intrigues and diplomatic permutations and combinations. Pawan Chamling is an upstreamer and the mainstreamer; upstreamer in the sense that his political and public life is open, frontal and face-to-face. If he is with you, he is with you and it will be well known to you. If he is against you, then he is against you and he makes it explicitly clear to you.

Chamling is again possibly among the few chief ministers who have been reading and writing about the globalisation process. He says, "Globalisation is a fact of life today. We have to accept it, absorb it and participate in it. We have no choice. Therefore, we would like to maximise the gains from the globalisation process and minimise its negative fallouts."

While expressing his views about the globalisation process before an exclusive meeting of the "Sikkim Government—NGO Partnership" at India International Centre in New Delhi in December 2000, he remarked,

"Let me briefly tell you about my reading of the great event of globalisation. We are all now talking about the globalisation process. The world is now going to be a global village. Though no one is sure about the real impact of the ongoing process of globalisation, it is expected that Sikkim will also be both positively and adversely affected by this. Our

Upholder of Women's Rights

The women, the youth and the children of Sikkim have been the most effective instruments of change and progress in society. The integration of any society and nation is not possible if one ignores these bloodstreams of humanity. Pawan Chamling realized it quite early and all his politics and administration sought to use the dignity and participation in all the mainstreaming and upstreaming projects and campaigns.

He knew the cardinal truth that if womenfolk accepted new ideas and the validity of change, they had the potential to change whole families. If one family is changed, it has the potential to change a whole society and the nation as a whole. He constantly encourages women to come forward with courage and responsibility to building the society and the nation. He believed that unless the women come forward, the march of civilization will be incomplete.

One of the far reaching tasks that Chamling keenly carried out himself from the day one was to change the lot of women by giving them responsible roles in the affairs of Sikkim and the nation. The government committed itself to providing due status and dignity to women and making them self-reliant and competitive. Being fully aware that no state could progress without the participation of its womenfolk, the Chamling government is leaving no efforts unspared to ensure that women of Sikkim get an opportunity to work hand in hand with their male counterparts in all spheres of life.

In its manifesto for the 1996 Lok Sabha election, the Sikkim Democratic Front promised, "Sikkimese women from all sections of the populace will be given their due place in society while their rights, privileges, and status will be safeguarded and justice will be brought to them in all spheres of activities." The party has kept its promises

Looking Beyond the Horizon

Political journeys are not easy to undertake. They make the political travellers' private lives an open book. One's strength and weaknesses, follies and foibles are constantly exposed to the light and scrutiny of the public gaze. And, furthermore there is no resting point or short distance end to these journeys. Sometimes such journey undertaken by determined travelers continue even after them. And yet there are miles and miles to cover. Chamling's political journey is also an everlasting quest. None knows it better than Chamling himself. The journey has its rewards and price; it has its pitfalls too. But he is not daunted by the price he would have to pay for attaining the goals he set up for himself and the people of his beloved Sikkim.

The journey often sprouted new goals and vital new highways and the travellers have to have the vitality and imagination enough to redraw his travelling strategies. As the year 2001 was coming to a close, Chamling too was drawing a new course for his journey. In a gathering of his ministers, colleagues, and senior civil servants of his state, invited to dinner at the Old Sikkim House in New Delhi, he bared his heart and mind on the problems of the present and goals of the future. He asked every one of his colleagues to get ready to act as a volunteer to tell everyone about Sikkim today and Sikkim tomorrow, its hopes and aspirations. He was preparing them all for the 21st century journey.

In a lighter vein, Chamling asked one of the senior women civil servants how long her term of service for Sikkim remained. When she answered '2004', he smiled and said in good humour, "Well my present term is also up to 2004."

The dinner at the Old Sikkim House was an inspiring display of Chamling as a head of the state. In a normal and informal conversation, he is capable of charging and

The Man and His Vision

"Start dreaming from a very young age about the kind of life you want to live, the profession you are going to choose—a teacher, doctor, engineer, politician to serve your society, state and the nation. But please start dreaming." That was the quintessential Chamling exhorting schoolchildren in a far corner in West Sikkim. Be it as a schoolboy, social activist, panchayat president, MLA, minister or the chief minister, Pawan Chamling is one who has never failed to dream—to dream and act for the cause of society, state, nation and humanity. The dreams and his vision as set out in his creative poetry and his political programme have, in a sense, given the state and its population a new direction, a new sense of fulfillment and contentment. Obviously, Chamling as the visionary politician is prepared to see to the Sikkim of 2050 with consummate zeal and simplicity.

Restoration of democracy in Sikkim was one of the greatest changes that the Sikkim Democratic Front party was credited with. After running the government for eight years, the institution of democracy has been given a firm base in the state. Now, Chamling is sincerely working with the people and for the people to establish participatory democracy in its true form. In a historic speech at the party's first decadal convention in March 2002, he called upon the people to propose and share their ideas, their vision with the government to build a new Sikkim.

He said,

"Sikkim belongs to us—you and me. We have the full right to decide where Sikkim should go. We have guided the destiny of Sikkim these past ten years. Today, let us sit together, discuss and decide on the future course of Sikkim, the direction it should take

in the coming years. What you will command, we obey. We will carry forward your suggestions to integrate them in our policies, our programmes. When your suggestions take the shape of government policy, the government belongs to you. This is what constitutes democratic polity of running the government by the people."

In this way, Chamling is giving a new shape to the art of governance by involving the common people and the working-class people in the decision-making process. In a way, he is also bringing forth the concept of direct democracy more vigorously in Sikkimese politics, thus empowering the common man and enabling him to have an equal say in such things which affect him.

Pawan Chamling has visualized a 21st century Sikkim that is free from discrimination, injustice, and social evils. For achieving this goal, he is sincerely involved in transforming Mintokgang into an ideal place without vice and undesirable elements. He admits that there are certain forces still active in throttling his genuine aims and committed endeavour. But then he sees in his people an infinite power to overcome all evil forces. He believes that changing the mindset of the people is a pre-requisite for any real development.

At the convention he told the people to be watchful of any negligence on the part of government officials and vigilant towards any form of injustice to people. Pawan Chamling said, "I tell you, people should come together to oppose all forms of injustice anywhere. Only then will injustice receive a death blow." Regarding development irregularities, Chamling hit hard at such elements that disrupt the whole process. Chamling is well aware that many a time, economic benefits do not percolate down to needy people at the grassroots level. Time and again he has held the people supreme in bringing about change.

He exhorted them,

"I would like to believe that when the source is clean, what flows down would be nothing but clean, but at present the canal is rusted. There still are tortoises coming to the source to muddy the waters.

Three Cheers for 2002

What a wonderful year it was. 2002 recorded a range of major achievements for the Sikkimese people under the stewardship of Pawan Chamling. As usual he worked hard throughout the year along with his cabinet colleagues and officials. His daily routine remained very tight and stretching. The year again began with a strong sense of conviction to do more and more for his people. He had the blessings of the mass. He did not want to be distracted by petty political chicaneries. He had much larger issues to tackle both at the State and national levels.

His worry was time. It was fast running out. He wanted to give people everything when they most needed it. When the year began he said to himself that it was going to be the eighth year of his Government. He needed to fulfil some of his outstanding promises. At times he tended to become impatient and restless. This was because it was constantly in his mind that despite so much unflinching public support and his personal commitment he was not able to give a final solution to some of the key political and development issues in the state.

He knows that they are all in the pipeline. But he is also fully aware of the harsh realities that the pipeline at times tends to be elastic to time, particularly at the national level. He is quite realistic too in accepting the fact that in a federal structure the smaller states and geographically distant states always get sidetracked. This is both because of the political numbers games in Parliament and the gigantic and varied nature of the problems of bigger states.

He had promised a large number of tangible and intangible benefits to his people. Most of them were there in his last election manifesto. His manifesto was simple but comprehensive. It had incorporated in it the core issues of preservation of the identity of Sikkim and Sikkimese. He

