



20 YEARS OF GREAT GOVERNANCE

**THE REMARKABLE
PUBLIC POLICIES THAT MADE
SIKKIM THE BEST GOVERNED SMALL STATE OF INDIA**

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Preface

Whenever a work of this nature is conceptualised, there is always some solid reason to do so. In this case, we found that the volume—Twenty Years of Great Governance—needed to be written so as to discuss, understand and share with others, the unique policies of the Sikkim government which have made outcomes possible. The driving force for being associated with this work comes, in part, from the everyday experience of these outcomes. And, in part, because one is so closely associated with the man who made it all happen over the last twenty years. Pawan Chamling was not only able to convince the people of Sikkim that he was their ‘first servant’ but also inspire them to dream and dream big.

In India we have a democracy that elects governments into power. The power is used to guide the nation or sub-nations like states to better the lot of the people. Whether it is lifting people out of poverty or ensuring food security, whatever road map is chosen to actualise the vision of a government, there is always a ‘how’. This is articulated through a carefully constructed policy or a set of policies.

Policies are meant to address public issues and are hence referred to as public policies. This book has been crafted from the need to understand in totality the set of public policies that enabled the Chamling-led governments of 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009 to attain the heights of performance, which is not just the talk of the state but has also generated much discussion, both nationally and globally, about the ‘Sikkim model of governance’.

The book has been organised thematically, with the policies categorised under sets of themes. This has not always been easy. Certain policies are cross-cutting and hence apply to different agendas of the government, bringing into play the work of different departments.

The vision of any government is first articulated as a kind of ‘dream’ that is to be achieved. For instance, in the case of Sikkim this vision is best encapsulated in the phrase ‘Naya Sikkim, Sukhi Sikkim’, meaning ‘A new Sikkim, a prosperous Sikkim’. To achieve this vision, the government and the people have had to grapple with a series of policies. And achieve the Chamling-led government did. Today more people are prosperous than ever before in Sikkim. The poverty levels have fallen to less than 10 percent. Moreover, the state has achieved a Gini index of less than or equal to 2

percent, which is much lower than that at the all-India level. How was all this possible? To understand this journey, one needs to delve into the various policies that made the vision for Sikkim a reality. For one, the government went all out to make the budgets rural-focussed. More empowerment to the people through decentralisation and by strengthening grass-roots democracy forms the foundation of Sikkim's public policies. Women are empowered. And with them, entire families and communities have been empowered.

It is stories of the people and their aspirations that come to the fore when one analyses the making and implementation of policies. This constitutes the very rationale behind putting together a book which looks at the policies that the Chamling government designed to bring about a revolution in Sikkim.

As Chamling's good governance has been the talking point of many a thinker in India and abroad, he is now looking forward to take the next leap with another mandate, so that the journey can be taken to its logical end. I am happy to be a part of this journey.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the team of young people who have helped in the research that has gone behind this book—Satyadeep Chettri, Tilotama Pradhan, Binita Rai (SU), Sarad Gurung (SU), Suman Ghimiray (SU), Manodeep Guha, Sanjog Rai, Vashistha Iyer and Ravi Kiran.

P. D. Rai

Introduction

The Sikkim Democratic Front Party (SDF), led by the charismatic leader, Pawan Chamling, first assumed power in December 1994 through democratic elections. This was a historic moment for Sikkim as the SDF was the first party to put an end to the dictatorial system of government and the culture of fear its people had been living in. Since then, the Party and its leader, Pawan Chamling, have firmly resolved to institutionalize democratic values and principles, and develop an innovative and people-centric form of governance.

In Sikkim, every public policy revolves around its citizens—their needs and demands are directly heard and acted upon. This has been achieved through enactments such as the State Panchayati Raj Act and democratic initiatives such as the Chief Minister's periodic village-to-village tour.

In view of this it makes eminent sense to come out with a book which will document broad themes listing the public policies that have been initiated by this Government in nineteen years of its continuous reign; this volume looks at Sikkim's progress through the public policy lens. It chronicles a series of executive actions that have been designed and executed by the Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling, through his pro-poor and pro-people ideology.

It is a matter of great pride for all Sikkimese to be part of this glorious history (1994–2013) of development and growing prosperity. Not a single Sikkimese has stagnated or regressed; all have done better, much better in terms of overall human development. Especially now that most of the pucca house schemes, under the REDRH and CMRHM policies, are getting finished or new ones sanctioned there will be no one with less than Rs 5 lakhs worth of assets. In effect, the people of Sikkim have been directly benefited through such kinds of policies which have lifted them out of poverty. Sikkim is on its way to becoming free of poverty by 2015. Already, according to Planning Commission figures, Sikkim has cut its poverty (percentage of population below the poverty line) from over 40 per cent in 1994 to 8 per cent in 2012.

These policies are in the form of enactments, statements and broad guidelines or indeed as gazette notifications issued from time to time. We have tried to cull out all of them and group them according to themes. Some of them are cross-cutting and may appear twice or will have to be read in conjunction with others.

The SDF has made significant progress in realizing its vision of a 'Sikkim Ram Rajya (golden age)', wherein each and every citizen of the state has the freedom of expression, the media is empowered and the rule of law is central to ensure the right to justice and equality of opportunity for all for the purpose of development.

The SDF has enshrined the value of subsidiarity and decentralization through the Sikkim Panchayat Act which responds to the demands and needs of the people. The State Election Commission was formed in 1997, following which, for the first time, party-based elections in the Panchayats were held. Further strengthening this process of democratic devolution, the District Planning Committee and the State Finance Commission have been made fully functional.

The government has ensured regular and timely elections and devolution of funds, functions and functionaries. In fact, Sikkim is one of the first states to devolve powers related to primary and secondary education directly to Gram Panchayat units. Management and functioning of primary schools, primary health centres, village-level officer centres, libraries, community information centres, village tourism, small irrigation projects, community buildings and grounds have been transferred to the Panchayats. In addition to delegating autonomy for various planning, implementation and monitoring functions, the government has entrusted its functionaries with some unique and critical responsibilities. For instance, Disaster Management Committees have been constituted in every Gram Panchayat to become an effective 'first responder' in times of calamities or crises. For this purpose, every Gram Panchayat Disaster Management Committee has been provided with tools and implements worth Rs 10,000 for rescue and Rs 10,000 for immediate relief. Barefoot engineers are being appointed initially at the Gram Panchayat level to enable the Gram Panchayats to undertake minor repair works as well as maintain the water and sewerage systems. Gram Panchayats have also been authorized to issue and cancel trade licences since 2011. It is for success

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stories such as these that Sikkim has consistently received awards from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India (GOI). It was honoured as the third best and the second best state for implementation of Panchayati Raj in India in 2006–7 and 2010–11, and 2009–10 respectively, and was rewarded with the Panchayat Empowerment and Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEAIS) in 2006–7.

Decentralized planning has been formalized with the Village Development Action Plan (VDAP) exercise, an innovative initiative of the State Government to usher in democratic decentralization, need-based planning and empowerment of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). As part of the VDAP, multi-sectoral plans have been drawn up for 165 Gram Panchayats. In this connection, the report for the North and South Sikkim districts has been published, while that for the East and West Sikkim districts is being finalized. Local capacity is being developed at the Gram Panchayat level, with the Gram Planning Forum in collaboration with the block team playing a key role in strategizing these plans during 2011–12.

Significant progress has been made in including different sections of society actively in the decision-making process through institutionalization of various awards, such as the Panchayat Shri awards, and rationalization of reservations at all levels. The Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1993, provided reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in both the tiers of PRIs in accordance with the population of the State. In 2011, Sikkim set a landmark by reserving 50 per cent of seats for women in PRIs. In addition to the policy of reservations, women's empowerment is actively promoted through various initiatives taken by Gram Panchayats to support livelihood generation through women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

Recognizing the significant role played by the youth and women in the development of rural areas, a Core Group Committee was constituted on October 2006 to launch the Panchayat Yuva Evam Mahila Shakti Abhiyan. Promoting sports at the rural level, the Panchayat Khel Abhiyan has been constituted, providing Rs 1,00,000 at the Gram Panchayat level for conducting village-level games and Rs 3,00,000 at the Zilla Panchayat level. The Gerethang Gram Panchayat and the Aritar Gram Panchayat were awarded the Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puruskar 2011–12 by the Planning Commission, GOI, for their innovative grass-roots initiatives. The Gerethang Gram Panchayat has instituted a system of incentives and awards that has resulted in a whopping 60 per cent increase of youth participation in its Gram Sabha. Youth participation in social services and involvement in the decision-making

process have also increased considerably. The Aritar Gram Panchayat organized various training programmes for women on bag making, phenyl production and ginger seed production. By March 2012, 80 per cent of women in the Gram Panchayat area had completed their training and 50 per cent women had become financially self-reliant. Women are selling their products in the market and supplying ginger seeds to the Department of Horticulture. Instead of individual entrepreneurship, joint ventures have been encouraged through the formation of SHGs. As a result, at present, almost all wards have profit-making SHGs in operation. Ginger seeds produced by SHGs are being purchased by the Gram Panchayat and distributed among below-poverty-line (BPL) families.

Freedom of expression and the press has been comprehensively ensured in Sikkim. There is no government pressure to curtail this freedom, and this has led to a thriving and dynamic press and media. The number of registered newspapers in Sikkim was only twenty till 1994, while today more than 100 weekly and daily newspapers are published in the State. Supporting the ethics of the media, the government annually celebrates 'Press Day', besides conducting training for local journalists and presenting awards to journalists in order to honour them.

Modernization of the media has been promoted by presenting computers, digital cameras, printers and other accessories to media persons in Sikkim. The Press Club of Sikkim has been established for protecting the interests and rights of media persons. The club receives an annual grant of Rs 1 lakh

Lok Adalats were constituted in all the nine sub-divisions of Sikkim in 1999 in order to provide speedy justice to the people. The Lokayukta Bill at the Centre, aimed at creating an anti-corruption legislature, received the President's assent in July 2012. The government has established seventeen courts in the State. The former President of India, Smt. Pratibha Patil, complimented the Sikkim High Court for having a good record of disposal of cases.

To ensure maintenance of law and order and prevent crime, the number of police outposts has been significantly increased, and it currently stands at forty-five. The sanctioned strength of the state police is now 5,441 personnel, of which 2,522 belong to the civil police (including the District Armed Reserve Police) and 2,919 to the State Armed Police (SAP). There is one battalion of SAP and four India Reserve Battalions. Recruitment of women in the civil police is being backed through 30 per cent reservations. To ensure that complaints of women are dealt with promptly with all seriousness, at least

two women constables have been posted in each police station. A Special Task Force unit with a strength of thirty personnel has been set up to handle emergencies. A Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad has also been constituted. A modern forensic laboratory has been established to enable enhanced evidence analysis within the state.

The Right to Information Act 2005 provides effective access to information under the control of the public authorities; for citizens of India, the Bill was passed by Parliament in June 2005. The Sikkim Government made Rules in May 2006 to increase transparency in the government. Since then, many RTI applications have been filed by citizens.

On 17 May 2011, the Chief Minister embarked upon a unique democratic experiment in the form of a village-to-village tour of the entire State of Sikkim, with the idea of 'institutionalizing a system in which the people are supreme and the government is generally subservient to the people'. Putting the ideal of 'government is the servant of the people' to practice, Mr Chamling took along with him elected representatives and senior bureaucrats to the doorsteps of the people in order to understand their issues first-hand and evolve measures to solve their problems more responsively and sensitively.

The forty-two-day tour was carried out in four phases. It was, inter alia, meant to take stock of the status of schemes sanctioned for the rural sector. The Chief Minister expressed his dissatisfaction over the non-completion of certain schemes and projects of the government, which had been sanctioned and tendered a long while back. He directed the administration to look into the matter and take appropriate action against the defaulters and take up the work immediately. Around 7,000 petitions were received during the tour, which were documented and acted upon.

Various people's representatives from the grass roots are being included in preparation of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan. For implementation of schemes sanctioned during this tour, a sum of over Rs 24.09 crore was earmarked in the current financial year.

Talking to students at various places, the Chief Minister urged them to become good citizens. He inspired them by citing the examples of visionaries like Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln who changed the course of the history of the world for the better. He also spread awareness about the Meritorious Scholarship and various other programmes of the State

Government in the education sector, and motivated the students to study hard so as to take maximum benefit from the programmes of the government.

The Chief Minister addressed several public meetings during that 2011 tour, emphasizing the tremendous potential of Sikkim for developing as a top destination for tourists. He noted that the State Government had been working hard for creating the necessary infrastructure to promote Sikkim as a pilgrimage tourist destination. Urging people to embrace tourism, hospitality and allied sectors as alternative professions, he stated that in addition to government guest houses, home-stays and hotels needed to be promoted more for the benefit of the local people.

Whilst concluding the village-to-village tour, the CM said: 'We have worked honestly for close to two decades and we wanted to see for ourselves its impact on the people. We have found that the people are happy with us. Before we started we had thought that many problems would come up and there would be numerous complaints from the people but in reality it was the other way around. People in Sikkim are truly happy with us.'

In the last twenty years, SDF has consistently worked towards ensuring effective functioning of the four pillars of democracy—Panchayati Raj Institutions and Nagar Palikas, Free and Open Media, Law and Order, and RTI. At the same time, this Himalayan border state has remained peaceful all through. Thanks to the democratic spirit and sense of mutual respect, the people have redefined the concept of a border state as being peaceful and progressive. In the larger context it has been able to integrate Sikkim emotionally with the rest of India over the past twenty years, along with restoring democracy in the life and thinking of the people of Sikkim.

Here, we have tried to document the outcomes through an innovative amalgamation of all the areas in which the State and the Chief Minister have received kudos. There have been many achievements and hence this document highlights that the impact is now being felt throughout the nation as well as globally.

The Start: Acceptance from a Soul Search – Pawan Chamling 'Kiran' –16th June 1992, 8 pm

In friend Sanchaman's residence:
With family, friends and well-wishers outright
Deeply engrossed in conversation and tense
Taking sides and advocating humanity and human rights!
In this kind of gravitas and suddenly
In our world of thought and thinking
Two ambassadors arrive
With news of my freedom through a letter
To me in person dealt.
News of freedom from a golden cage
Immensely light and content I felt!
The acknowledgement of my freedom
Makes my sinews and nerves fill up
With happiness—engulfing it all!
Like a fleeing Parrot or Mynah from a cage
My independent mind starts flying high
Up and up and further up
In thought—reaching the sun up in the sky.
Now the caged Parrot and Mynah
Do not have to repeat 'Sitaram'.
Somebody's food I don't have to eat
And I don't have to live caged in prison.
Now I am 'I' and only am!!
Freedom from the cage Mynah-like
Move in the jungle from branch to branch
Flying from tree to tree! I think and reflect.
Taking shelter in any place and jungle
Which I like and of my choice!
In branches of the trees I make a nest
In which I raise my less fortunate children
And nurture them fully!
Now to sing my own song, in the tune that I give
I can sing and dance! I delight.
Here and across, up and down,
I can go anywhere and come anywhere.
There is no limit and no bar
I say that the Teesta's full of muddy water



And Rangit's water is crystal clear
And I say this without hesitation.
Independence to say have I
The Tendong and Mainam hills are afire
The jungle fire lights up the night!
I can say truthfully what is white
And what is black!
What is foliage manure I say with weight
And what is cow dung at the gate!
I can differentiate!
For me there is nothing more equal
Than the truth in this Universe!
There is nothing greater than
Service of the poor!
That in itself is prayer to God.
There is no one close to me
The whole world is mine I think!
I think of humanity
My need, my ambition and my dream
Are also towards the freedoms of humanity
And their decorum and code of conduct.
I have principles:
To be born a man is to be born to freedom
In this no one greater or smaller
Neither ahead or behind nor above or below
Nor within nor outside the house
There is no difference between there and here
There is no one to give and no one to receive
To be a human is his right,
The Caged Mynah.
Eating and sleeping well is but an illusion
This is a world of denial
A world which is controlled by others
A world full of people who have sold their souls
On hearing the imprisoned Mynah's soulful song
And prayers, the 'Tandavdrama' continues
In this world of exploitative governance!