CHAPTER - IV

Political Relations
Political awareness and participation has acquired greater importance in Ladakh Society after the demand and grant of Autonomous Hill Development Council. The constitution of India also ushered in greater importance to secular social life to undermine the discrimination on the basis of Sex, Caste, ethnicity and religion. It opened up new opportunities for the hitherto deprived sections to participate in all categories of occupation, education, politics and so on. The democratic form of Govt. encouraged increasing political participation and today political power has almost emerged as a status symbol.

This study of political relations deals with maintenance or establishment of Social order. Such a social order is maintained or established by the organised exercise of coercive authority, through the use or possibility of use of physical force (Redcliffe Brown, A.R 1961 preface in Fortes and Evans pritchard (Eds) African Political system. London Oxford University Press). The authority structure among the Ladakhies has two dimensions on the one hand the traditional mode of maintenance of social order and on the other the modern institutions dealing with the legislative, Judicial and executive powers and the system of franchise. The two antithetical authority structures work side by side in Ladakh. The traditional authority powerful in rural areas while as the modern institution of control are more strong in the towns.

Every hamlet and village of Ladakh has a strong Association of village elders headed by one person called Gopa. Mostly the status of Gopa is ascribed. These traditional institutions are elected on basis of ethnic and religious grounds. The Gopa of every village is usually from the dominated religious or ethnic group. No doubt exception are there, for example the village Mulhik is headed
by a Buddhist Women, Rani Diskit Tashie, despite the fact that the village is Muslim dominated. The status of this woman is ascribed. These associations are little Governments at Grass root level representing every section of the village or hamlet. These associations have assumed importance in manifold aspects of their community life. Whether it is a marriage or a divorce, festival or reception to a dignitary, or the case of crime or dispute the association has to play the Pivotal role. In some parts of rural Ladakh even the case of divorce has to be approved by the association. The members of the association meet prior to sowing, harvesting, celebration of festivals etc. and decide the dates and necessary arrangements. The Provisions for welcoming politicians religious leaders and Government officials is also their Jurisdiction. The associations negotiate disputes concerning property, debts and quarrels and the Ladakhies rarely approach to the political authorities. Even the criminal cases whether inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic concerning theft, rape, fight, adultery and so on: except murders and such major crimes are arbitrated by the village associations. But this does not mean that Ladakhies seldom take a dispute to a court of law or seek police intervention in cases of crime. There are various instances of seeking mediation of modern political forces as well such situation arise in those settlements where there are strong factions and rivalries. Maximum areas of Ladakh are inaccessible and are separated from one another due to lack of transport. People of rural area are yet caught in the web of traditionalism and are scared of modern procedures to settle the disputes. They consider these expensive, impedimental requiring a couple of years for settlement. Therefore, the village organisations retain all power over the social life of villagers. The educated rural Ladakhies generally show a sort of indifference towards their traditional organisational system. When asked the reasons
their response was that these associations have become little Governments and have taken all rules and laws in their own hands. They are deciding any problem as per their own wishes and interests and have established a hegemonic character. However, the remaining populace have full faith in the impartiality and Judiciousness of the village associations.

Another aspect of the political organisation is participation in the newly established democratic political order. The concept of Panchayat Raj and local Governments have drawn all citizens into participation in Governing at different levels. For greater participation of schedule Tribes the constitution of India has made provisions for reservation of seats at all levels. Ladakhies too have availed themselves of this constitutional benefit. At present there are 4 Ladakhies who are elected to the state legislative Assembly, one for the Parliament, and one member of Legislative Council.

In the two districts the election of candidates is determined on the religious grounds. In Leh Buddhists are elected while as in Kargil Muslims have an edge. Basically Lamas and Aghas hold the top most position in Ladakhie Society. Gompas (Worship places of Buddhists) have social, cultural and political linkages with the Buddhists in Ladakh and their religious life is governed by the framework set by Kushak (Head Lama) of Gompa. The Spiritual functions of Gompas are carried out by the Lams and Chomos (nuns). In addition to teachings in the school attached to the Gompa, they train young lamas to function as astrologers, prescribe and supply indigenous medicines, participate and direct dramas and dance organised at the festivals, and conduct the birth, marriage and death rites for the people.
The Gompa run educational institutions called Lhaprim teaching culture, art, astrology, amchi system of medicine and the philosophy of Buddha. The political set up of the domain of Gompa has been laid down by the Kushaks since historical times. At present Kushak of Thiksay Gompa is very strong and it is said that he played the major role in the state assembly elections (Oct. 1996) as he is a close associate of Dr. Farooq Abdullah. Similarly the Aghas (religious Heads of Shias) are very influential in determining the way of life of Shia community. 68.5 percent of the Sample revealed that their political affiliation is subject to the direction of Aghas and 81 percent revealed that it is subject to the directions of Lamas.

It is interesting to note the link between the traditional village association and modern voting pattern among Ladakhies. The village elders and leaders have the full confidence and support of all the members to vote in favour of whichever party the former decided upon. These village associations had a great influence of Lamas and Aghas or peers (religious Head of Sunni Muslims). The important political leaders usually contact the religious heads or at the most the village elders.

**Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council**

The Ladakhi demand for self rule was as old as Indian Independence but it took violent struggle in October 1989 when Ladakh Buddhist Association gave the call to "Free Ladakh from Kashmir" and demanded union territory status. This resulted in Tripartite agreement with LBA, the state and the Central Government representatives under which Leh was to have an Autonomous Hill Council (AHC). The LBA rescinded its demand for Union Territory status in favour of AHC and called off the agitation. The Buddhists also considered
patching up with Muslims and lifted the social boycott they had observed since 1989. This was followed by a new co-ordination committee for Leh Autonomous Hill Council (CCLC) which pressed for early settlement of the issue. After a series of meetings with CCLC, on October 1993 the Government finally conceded an AHC for Leh and Kargil district as well. The central Government gave its final approval in 1995 and the state legislation in October 1996. The Leh Council is virtually a one party forum, with 24 congress members, two independent members and four members to be nominated by the Governor from women and minorities. Its composition is expected to ensure cohesive functioning to promote the interests of the people who have distinct cultural and ethnic identity as revealed by the Chief Executive of AHC Thupstan Chhewang. However, the LBA President Mr. Tsering Narboo Lampa was reluctant on Union Territory status for Ladakh despite they have succumbed to the AHC status, when asked the reason his simple answer was that they did it at that time in consideration of the larger national interests.

The Presidential orders of 1995 had also provided for a council in the Muslim majority Kargil because that district also faces the same problems vis-a-vis development as Leh. But the Kargil leaders had never raised the demand and instead, argued that geographically and economically the district is linked to the valley. (Times of India dt. 02-09-95) Their reluctance according to some analysts was that the acceptance would mean end of their "moral" support to Kashmiri movement. The leaders are under the impression that the formation of the Council will physically separate Kargil from Kashmir, others argue that the Kargil leaders will wait and see how the Leh Council works before they opt for a council of their own. The more plausible reason, however, seems the lack
of political awareness among the people of Kargil and Zanskar (Indian Express dt. 08-10-95). However, when the investigator sought the response to this question it was mixed. 30 percent of the sample consider it as a political blunder not to accept the AHC status while as the 70 percent were opposite to it. Their argument in favour was that councilors are unduly interfering the minor matters and therefore hinder the smooth functioning of offices and consequently the development.