

CHAPTER II

SIKKIM - THE STATE AND THE PEOPLES

Physical Features, Environment and Eco-system
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CHAPTER II

SIKKIM - THE STATE AND THE PEOPLES

Before going through the discussion on the situation of women in Sikkim, it may be relevant to have a grasp over the background of the state and its ethnic composition .

2.1 Physical Features, Environment and Eco-system

Sikkim is located in the Eastern Himalayan region with a geographical area of 7096 sq. km. The state being a part of the inner ranges of the Himalayas has no open valley or plains. It is a tiny state joined the Indian Union as its smallest state on May 26, 1975. It is situated in the eastern Himalaya from longitude 88 degree 03' 40" to 88 degree 57' 19" east and from latitude 27 degree 03' 47" to 28 degree 07' 34" north . The state spread below the highest elevation the Mt. Kanchanjunga (8534 meters) , the third highest mountain in the world and revered by the Sikkimese as their deity . The altitudinal zone ranges from 300 meters to 8586 meters above mean sea level comprising of lower hills , middle and upper hills , alpine regions and snow bound areas . It is a beautiful mountainous that leaves lasting impression of its scenic beauty. It has a total area of 7096 sq. km., 114 km. From north to south and 64 km. From east to west. Its total territory constitute only 0.22 per cent of India's total territory .

The entire state primarily consists of gneissose rocks and half-schistose rocks. The soil developed from gneissic group or rocks is brown clay generally shallow and poor . They are typically coarse , often with ferric concentrations , neutral to acidic with poor organic mineral nutrients. They tend to carry most of the evergreen and deciduous forests . The high intensity of rainfall in the state often cause extensive soil erosion and landslides , and heavy losses of nutrients of land by leaching . Teesta and Rangit which originate respectively from Cholamu Lake and Rathong Glacier , are the two major rivers of the state.

Sikkim being the wettest part of the north eastern region, its climate varies from the sub-tropical to the alpine depending upon the altitude (Sub-tropical up to 1500 meters ; Temperate from 1500 to 2000 meters ; Alpine up to 4000 meters ; Snowline at 5000 meters and above) . the relative humidity remains above 70 per cent throughout the year at most places . The temperature varies with altitude and slope (generally 6 degree to 10 degree) . For most of the period in a year, the climate is cold and humid as rainfall occurs in each month . The state receives an average rainfall 500 cm. This is the highest in the eastern Himalayas. As a whole the state receives an annual rainfall of 2000 cm to 4000 cm.

Sikkim , the state is bestowed with abundant natural resources and has tremendous biodiversity and has been identified as one of the hot spot for biodiversity. One third of its land is covered with dense forest . The total

recorded forest area is 5841.40 sq. km. , which is 82.32 per cent of the total geographic area of the state , and the per capita forest cover has been 0.61 hectare . The details in this regard are given below.

Classification of recorded forest area, 2004

Classification of area		Area in sq. km.
Reserved Forests (including tree forest, pasture, alpine shrub and uncultivable Alpine regions e.g. perpetual snow, glacier and Alpine lakes, etc.)		5452.40
Protected Forest	Khasmahal Forest	285
	Gaucharan Forest	104
	Total	389.00
Total Recorded Forest Area	Area	5841.40
	% to total geographical area	82.32

Source: Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management Department, Sikkim.

Indeed, the forest of the state exhibit diversified variety of flora and fauna. More than 5000 species flowering plants are found in the state which is nearly one-third of the total species of the covering plants found in the country . The Sikkim Himalayas that spread over Sikkim and the hill region of Darjeeling harbors more than 26 per cent of the flowering plants reported in the country and known to be an important phytogeographical reserve of the country. Species-wise , it has approximately 5000 flowering plants, 515 orchids, 36 rhododendrons, 16 conifers, 23 bamboos, 362 ferns and ferns allies, 8 tree ferns , 60 primulas , 11 oaks, over 424 medicinal plants, 150 mammals, 552 birds, 48 fishes, over 690 numbers of butterflies and also 28 numbers of mountains/peaks, 21 glaciers , 227 high altitude lakes and wetlands and over 104 rivers and streams. Indeed, the Sikkim Himalayas has excellent scope for value added eco-tourism and traditions.

2.2 Administrative Set-up

The state is bound on the north the by the Tibet plateau , on the east by Chumbi valley of Tibet and Bhutan, on the west by Nepal and on the south by Darjeeling district of West Bengal . The state has four districts viz. North, South, East and West , and their respective headquarters are Mangan , Namchi , Gangtok and Gyalshing . Among the districts the North district is the largest and having the geographical areas of 4226 sq. km. And South district is smallest having the areas of 750 sq. Km. There is 159 Panchayat Units and 453 Revenue Blocks, which comprise of 32 Assembly Constituencies. The Bhutia, Lepcha, Nepali and Limbu are the main languages recognized by the State Government, and the Nepali language is the lingua franca of the state. The capital of the State is Gangtok, which is situated in East District and elevated at 5,840 feet above sea level . Gangtok is the principal urban center and constitute the focal point of all socio-political and cultural activities. It is connected by well developed road links with all the four districts. Gangtok is also the principal commercial center of the state. Being the seat of the state government , it has become the most important center of administrative and political activities . The administrative set-up of the State (as on 20001) is given in Table 2.

Table: 2 Administrative Set-up of Sikkim, 2001

Particulars	Number of Unit (according to district)				
	North	East	South	West	State
District	1	1	1	1	4
Area in sq. km.	4226	954	750	1166	7096
Sub-division	2	3	2	2	9
Town	1	4	2	2	9
Revenue Block					
Revenue Block	45	120	135	111	411
Forest Block	8	14	10	10	42
Total	53	134	145	121	453
Panchayat Unit	20	48	42	49	159
Panchayat ward	103	273	255	274	905
Police Station	5	11*	6	6	28

Source: Census of India, Sikkim Series, Government of India, 2001.

Note : * Including Crime Branch and Vigilance.

Human Development Index and its component in Sikkim as per availability is depicted in Table 3.

Table : 3 Human Development Index and its component In Sikkim since 1991 to 1998

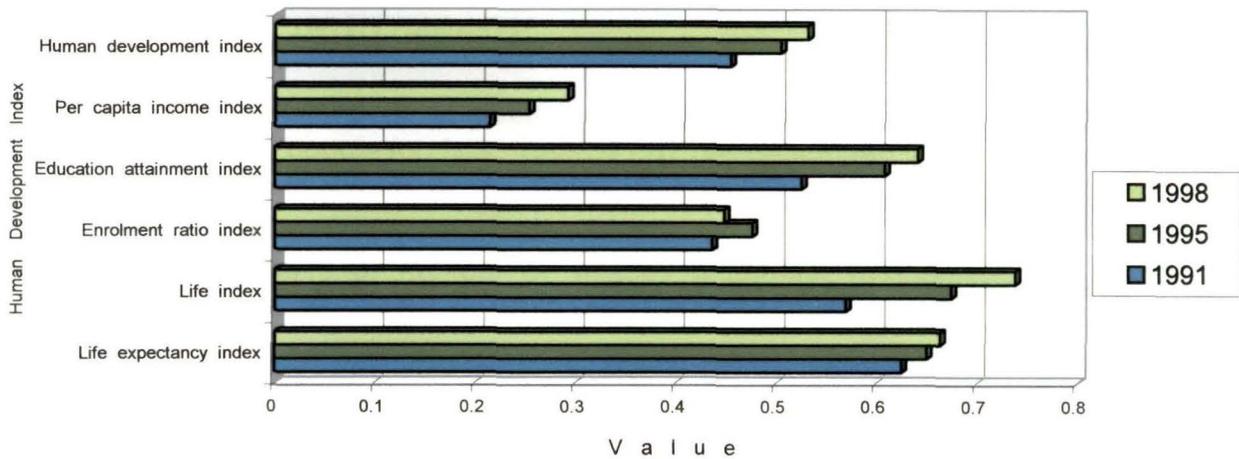
Component	Year		
	1991	1995	1998
	Sikkim	Sikkim	Sikkim
Life expectancy index	0.625	0.650	0.663
Literacy index	0.569	0.674	0.738
Enrolment ratio index	0.436	0.476	0.448
Education attainment index	0.525	0.608	0.641
Per capita income index	0.214	0.253	0.292
Human development index	0.454	0.504	0.532

Source: National Human Development Report, 2001, Planning commission, Government of India, March 2002

Actually, Human Development Index is a composite of variables capturing attainments in three dimensions of human development viz. Economic, educational and health. In other words, it may be defined as a process by which people are able to enlarge their choices, enhance their capabilities and expand their freedoms. Its goal is to place people and what they value most - their aspirations, their rights, their priorities - at the center of development.

Taking the human development indices percentages in Sikkim, literacy rate has been 69.68%, fertility rate 2.75, infant mortality rate 52, index of social and economic infrastructure 108.99, plan expenditure in social sector 45.38%, access to safe drinking water in percentage of households 73.19%, per capita consumption 182 KHz, and per capita income Rs. 11,356/- (Table 3).

Figure 1
Gains of Human Development in Sikkim , 1991 to 1998 (Source: Human Development Report, 2001)



2.3 Population

According to 2001 Census of India, its total population has been 5,40,841, whereas in 1991 it was 4,06,457 and 3,16,385 in 1981. Of the total 5,40,841 population in Sikkim the percentage of females has been 47.7% as compared to male (52.3%). The number of total households is 1,14,223 with average family size 4.7 which has been low as compared to national average of 5.3. Density of population per sq. km. since 1901 onwards has been shown in Table 4.

Table: 4 Density of population per sq. km. since 1901 to 2001, Sikkim and India

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Sikkim	8	12	12	15	17	19	23	30	44	57	76
Growth %	-	50.0	0	25.0	13.3	11.8	21.1	30.4	46.7	29.5	33.3
India	77	82	81	90	103	117	143	177	221	267	324
Growth %	-	6.5	-1.2	11.1	14.4	13.6	22.2	23.8	24.9	20.8	21.3

Source : Census of India, India and Sikkim Series, Government of India , 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 .

Density of population shows that after 1971 onwards the population growth had has been significant till 2001 both in Sikkim and India (Table 4).

Table : 5 Decadal population growth since 1901-1911 to 1991-2001, Sikkim and India

	1901 to 1911	1911 to 1921	1921 to 1931	1931 to 1941	1941 to 1951	1951 to 1961	1961 to 1971	1971 to 1981	1981 to 1991	1991 to 2001
Sikkim	48.98	-7.05	34.37	10.67	13.34	17.76	29.38	50.77	28.47	32.98
India	5.75	-0.31	11.00	14.22	13.31	21.64	24.80	24.66	23.86	21.34

Source : Census of India, India and Sikkim Series, Government of India , 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 .

Decadal growth particularly during the decade of 1971-1981 had been much higher in Sikkim. Indeed, the decadal growth of population as a whole

significant since the decade 1961-1971 onwards . Indeed, the decadal growth percentages have been higher in each decades as compared to national growth rates since 1961 (Table 5) .

The majority of the total population live in rural areas (88.93 per cent) . The percentage of urban population has been 11.07 per cent in the state. According to population size the distribution of villages has been given in Table 6 .

Table: 6 Distribution of number of villages according to population size in Sikkim, 1991 and 2001

Population size	1991		2001	
	No. of village	Percentage	No. of village	Percentage
0	0	0	0	0
1 - 200	52	11.63	42	9.33
201 - 500	125	27.96	82	18.22
501 - 1000	159	35.57	157	34.89
1001 - 2000	79	17.67	120	26.67
2001 - 5000	29	6.49	40	8.89
5000 above	3	0.67	9	2.0
Total	447	100.0	450	100.0

Source: Census of India, Sikkim Series 2001, Government of India, Sikkim.

It is apparent from Table 6 that due to increase in population the number of villages having population size 1001-2000 , 2001-5000 and 5000 above have increased to a extent since 1991 to 2001 . As a whole , 62.44 per cent of the total 450 villages in 2001 has been having the population size in between 1-200 to 501-1000 .

2.4 Education

The total literacy in the state has been 69.68 per cent with variation district-wise. Of the four districts , the east district is having higher literacy rate (75.57 per cent) and lowest in west district (59.31 per cent). While this has been 69.11 per cent in the north and 68.12 per cent in the south districts.

Table : 7 Literacy rate since 1901 to 2001, Sikkim and India

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Sikkim	NA	NA	3.97	2.98	NA	NA	12.33	17.74	33.83	56.94	69.68
India	5.35	5.92	7.16	9.50	16.10	16.67	24.02	29.45	36.17	52.21	65.38

Source: Census Report, Government of India, 1981, 1991.

Literacy rate in Sikkim as shown in Table 7 presents the trend of significant increase since 1971 . The overall literacy percentage has gone up to 69.68 per cent in 2001 as against 56.94 per cent in 1991 and 33.83 per cent in 1981 . In the year 1971 it was only 17.74 per cent. In fact, since 1991 to 2001 the literacy percentages have been higher even than national average in those years .

Table: 8 Distribution of no. Of villages according to literacy
In Sikkim, 1991 and 2001

Literacy rate	1991		2001	
	No. of village	Percentage	No. of village	Percentage
0	3	0.67	1	0.22
1 to < 10	3	0.67	2	0.44
10 to < 20	12	2.68	5	1.11
20 to < 40	89	19.91	36	8.0
40 to < 60	239	53.47	124	27.56
60 to < 80	91	20.36	260	57.78
80 to < 100	9	2.01	22	4.89
100 above	1	0.22	0	0
Total	447	100.0	450	100.0

Source: Census of India, Sikkim Series 2001, Government of India, Sikkim.

Table 8 gives that with the increase in total literacy since 1991 to 2001 the number of villages having higher literacy rate 60 to < 80 has increased substantially from 20.36 per cent in 1991 to 57.78 per cent in 2001 . Besides, there has also been the trend of increase in the number of villages having higher literacy rate 80 to < 100 e.g. from 2.01 per cent in 1991 to 4.89 per cent in 2001 . As a whole , 62.67 per cent of the total 450 villages in 2001 has been having the higher rate of literacy in between 60 to < 80 and 80 to < 100 .

In this context it may be relevant to have a grasp over the distribution of schools in Sikkim as shown in Table 9.

Table: 9 Number of schools and students by category, 2004

Category	Government		Private	Total	No. of Student (2004 year)
	State	Central			
Lower Primary Schools	166	1	49	216	19,674
Primary Schools	336		181	517	78,585
Upper Primary Schools	147		59	206	27,549
Secondary School	92	1	17	110	9,147
Higher Secondary School	41	3	6	50	5,675
Total	782	5	312	1099	1,40,630

Source: Human Resources Development Department, Sikkim.

Apart from schools, there is 7 number of Colleges including one Law College , and 5 numbers of Teacher Training Institutes in Sikkim .

2.5 Economy

The economy of the state is mainly based on agricultural and animal husbandry . The agriculture in Sikkim is of the mixed type and still at the subsistence level rather than commercial level . Agriculture is practiced on terraced field. The work force participation rate as per 2001 census is 39.31 per cent . The distribution of working population and land use are shown in Table 10 and Table 11 .

Table: 10 Distribution of population according to working, Non-working and category of works, 2001

	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total Population	2,88,484	100.0	2,52,367	100.0	5,40,851	100.0
Total workers	1,65,716	57.4	97,327	38.6	2,63,043	48.64
Non-workers	1,22,768	42.6	1,55,040	61.4	2,77,808	51.36
Total Workers	1,65,716	100.0	97,327	100.0	2,63,043	100.0
Main workers	1,46,541	88.4	66,363	68.2	2,12,904	80.94
Marginal workers	19,175	11.6	30,964	31.8	50,139	19.06
Total Workers	1,65,716	100.0	97,327	100.0	2,63,043	100.0
Cultivators	70,107	42.3	61,151	62.8	1,31,258	49.9
Agricultural Labourers	8,762	5.3	8,238	8.5	17,000	6.5
Household industry worker	2,849	1.7	1,370	1.4	4,219	1.6
Other workers	83,998	50.7	26,568	27.3	1,10,566	42.0

Source : Census of India, Sikkim Series, Government of India, 2001 .

Table : 11 Land use pattern in Sikkim, 2004

Category of land	Area in hectare
Irrigated	11.31
Un-irrigated	49.31
Non Agriculture Use	6.22
Barren land	8.98
Groves/Bushes, etc.	17.34
Grass lands	4.12
Uncultivated fallow	8.54
Cardamom	21.22
Operational area	127.05

Source: Food Security and Agriculture Development Department, Sikkim.

Besides, horticulture is another important activity of the people. Large cardamom, ginger and turmeric are principal horticultural crops in Sikkim. In a predominantly rural economy such as Sikkim, animal husbandry activities has been playing an effective role to bringing about substantial improvements in the subsistence as well as living standard of the people.

The state is not rich in mineral resources and apart from the deposits of copper, lead and zinc, no other viable and exploitable mineral deposits have so far been discovered. As regards to the industrial development , a number of small and medium units have been promoted in the state. For instances, The Sikkim Time Corporation (SITCO) and Government Institute of Handicrafts and Handlooms. Indeed, the overall area available for agricultural operations is limited to 11 per cent of the total geographical areas of the state and with the increasing population , per capita land has been continuously declining . Under such situation , the household/cottage industry like handicrafts and handloom has also been playing important role and has become an integral part of the household economy of the region and that too add to household income substantially as well as providing wage employment opportunities apart from entrepreneurship in such cottage industry, besides jobs in government services , etc. Moreover, the various cooperatives also has been playing important effective role in the development of economy of the state . The details of various cooperatives has been shown in Table 12 , which indicates

the overall trend of growth in the number of various cooperatives from 1999 to 2003, except decline in the case of Consumers Cooperative Society. Moreover, Table 12 also indicates a rapid growth (740.0 per cent) of Weavers' Society since 1999 to 2003.

Table: 12 Co-operative Societies in Sikkim, 1999 and 2003

Type of Societies	No. of Cooperative Societies		Growth % (1999-2003)
	1999	2003	
Cooperative Bank	1	2	100.0
Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies	35	153	337.1
Farmer/Service Cooperatives	19	32	68.4
Non-Agricultural Credit Societies	8	9	12.5
Marketing Cooperatives	28	36	28.6
Dairy Union Society	96	112	16.7
Livestock Products Cooperative	2	10	400.0
Society Weavers Societies	5	42	740.0
Other Industrial Society	15	18	20.0
Consumers Cooperative Society	115	101	-12.2
Total	324	515	59.0

Source: Department of Cooperation, Government of Sikkim, Sikkim.

On the whole, tourism industry has also been playing important effective role in the property of Sikkim's economy. Every year huge number of domestic tourists used to visit Sikkim including international tourists. The number of domestic tourist has increased to 2,34,394 in the year of 2004-2005 as compared to 1,60,789 in 2002-2003. Similarly, the number of international tourists in Sikkim also has increased to 14,774 in 2004-2005 than that of 8,439 in 2002-2003 (Table 12).

2.6 Ethnic Composition

Sikkim is a multi-ethnic State. The present population of Sikkim is primarily composed of Lepchas, Bhutias, Nepalese and the plain peoples, in which the Nepalese are numerically dominant.

Lepchas are said to be the oldest inhabitants of Sikkim. The Lepchas were food gathering people who claimed they came from Mayel, a legendary kingdom on the slopes of Kanchanjunga. Some believed that they might have migrated via Assam to this mountain state. They call themselves as Rong-pa, a totem which means people living in ravines or *Rong-Folk*. The Lepchas also call themselves as *Rongkup* (children of Rong), followed *Bongthing* and worshipped the spirits of mountains, forests, and rivers that is to say nature in general and lived in close harmony with nature. Religiously, these days they belong to Lamaist Buddhism due to their conversion into this faith by Bhutia rulers i.e. Particularly after the Bhutias' immigration to this region. Besides, there are considerable number of Lepchas who are mainly the Christian converts.

They speak Lepcha language - the most ancient language and having their own script. The Lepchas are mongoloid in appearance with oblique eyes small in stature and fair in complexion who are amiable, cheerful, hospitable,

shy, good humoured , sociable, indolent and peace loving people. Most of them are concentrated in Dzongu valley of north Sikkim. They used to live in hill tops. They lived in hunting, fishing, trade and later agriculture , and paddy , oranges, cardamom are their favourable crops. They are also good entomologists in identifying the names and behavior of the wild animals, birds, insects , fishes, frogs, medicinal herbs, and also at ease to distinguish all the edible roots. The Lepcha is now spread in all parts of Sikkim because of network of roads, communications, education, and seeking government jobs.

The Lepchas have no caste distinction, but they believe that they belong to either of the five clans namely *Syang-Den Mu* , *Ling-SingMu* , *Himu* , *Karthak Mu* , and *Thikung Syalang* which originated from supernatural and mythological ancestors. There are certain other classes based on the places of residence .They acknowledge the existence of good and bad spirits and do a lot to appease the bad one . Every class has a priest doctor, who is in fact an exorcist. The priest doctors may be either male or female. The male one is called 'bon' and the female one is called generally 'monn' . The Lepcha society is patriarchal. They used to live in a joint family. Polyandry was prevalent among the Lepchas in the past (Kotturan : 1983). Marriage of wards is normally negotiated by the parents and after fulfilling certain condition, the marriage is publicly celebrated with much feasting. But with the passage of time and spread of education the modern Lepchas do not favour such practice . While , the Lepchas on the whole are free to choose their partners. But they have still a tradition of paying bride-price. Traditionally the inheritance of property according to male line. They have their own language locally known as Rong or Lepcha language which has been recognized by the Government. The script of their language has been Tibeto- Burmese.

The male Lepcha wears a dress called a *Pagi* made of cotton which is striped. The dress comes down to the knees. It is fastened on the shoulder by a pin and a belt is worn round the waist. The Lepcha women wear two piece dresses. The upper garment or blouse is called the *Tago* whereas the lower part which resembles a petticoat is called *Domdyan* . Lepchas are very good at archery. Archery competitions are held very frequently by the Lepchas. The Lepchas were expert weavers and cane craftsmen and very handy with the bow and arrow, but their crafts were meant mostly for domestic purposes. The Lepcha bags, hats, shawls and dresses have been popular in Sikkim and Darjeeling hill areas.

Bhutias of Sikkim are the people of Tibetan origin who played important role in establishing the kingdom of Sikkim. The present days Bhutias are mainly the descendants of the early settlers from Tibet and Bhutan who came to this place some time in the 15th Century. They accompanied ancestors of the first Chogyal Phuntsog Namgyal who settled in higher altitude , driving the Lepchas into the forests and lower valleys . Racially, they belong to Tibet-Mongoloid. Bhutias are big built, tall, strong, sturdy and fair in complexion with pronounced Mongolian features and differ distinctly from the Lepchas. The Bhutias promoted jhooming (shifting) cultivation as they possessed plenty of

lands and sowed paddy, kodo (millet), maize and other cereals . The Bhutias have imbibed the Tibetan civilization in regard to their dresses, ornaments, religion and scripts. The traditional dress of the male member is known as the *Bakhu* which is a loose cloak type garment with full sleeves and is fastened at the neck on one side and near the waist with a cotton belt . They wear loose trousers. The Bhutia woman's dress consists of a silken *Honju* which is a full sleeve blouse and a loose gown type garment fastened near the waist tightly with a belt. In the front portion they tie a loose sheet of multi-coloured woolen cloth made of special design . This is called *Pangdin* and is a symbol of married woman. Ladies are fond of very heavy jewellery made of pure gold .

Being Lamaist Buddhists aligned with the traditional Tibetan and Bhutanese aristocratic houses (Sinha : 1983), the monasteries , prayer flags, prayer wheels and chortens are much a part of the lives of the Bhutias as faith in reincarnation. Earlier every Bhutia family had a male member who joined the monastery and led the life of a monk because the monks are considered the intellectual elite of the Bhutia Society and education was the sole preserve of the monasteries.

In northern Sikkim, where they are the major inhabitants, they are known as Lachenpas and Lachungpas . Indeed, Lachenpas and Lachungpas have their own traditional legal system called "*Dzumsa*" (means meeting p[lace of the people) headed by "*Pipon*" (village headman) . The "*Dzumsa*" of north Sikkim has been given full protection by the Government by deeming a status of Panchayat ward and the "*Pipon*" a status of Panchayat . As a whole, there is no caste distinction among the Bhutias. Their social structure is patriarchal. Patrilocal society with the norms of patrilocal residence and patrilineal descent male equigeniture prevails among the Bhutias. As for rules of inheritance, property is inherited only by sons. Sons get equal shares. Succession has been by the eldest son. Women have no right of inheritance in general. Normally , the Bhutias used to live in a joint family. They have their own 'Bhutia' language, and the script is Tibetan and recognized by the Government. Interestingly, According to Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes Order 1978 - Bhutia also includes Chumbipa , Dophapa, Dukpa, Kagatey, Sherpa , Tibetan , Tromopa , Yolmo , etc.

In marriage the practice of polyandry was very common among the Bhutias. Polyandry served to prevent the family being split up and the property from being divided . But with the passage of time and spread of education this practice finds no favor with the modern and young Bhutias now-a-days . Marriage is normally arranged and settled by the parents. In the affairs of marriage , maternal uncle and astrologer play an important role . In marriage, they also have the tradition of paying bride price. Both men and women can seek a divorce. If the matrimonial relation has to be served , the man or the wife would refer the case to the village elders. At present the aggrieved parties go to the court of law also . Traditionally, the parties who apply for

separation has to pay a penalty and the actual expense incurred during marriage .

Though among Bhutias and Lepchas traditionally women have no right to family property. But women and girls are given gifts and assets including livestock, utensils , ornaments and land etc. (if the household is wealthy) which may be taken with them after marriage. It is known as "*Pewa*". But Bhutia and Lepcha women who marry outside of their ethnic group forfeit their opportunity to get even "*Pewa*" property . Constitutionally, as both Bhutias and Lepchas are scheduled tribes they are not the subject to the Hindu marriage Act of 1955 , which was extended to Sikkim in 1989.

The Bhutias are expert weavers and the hand-woven rugs, carpets and blankets are very famous and quite high in demand. All Bhutia art and paintings are derived from Buddhists spiritually and the most famous are the *Thangkas*. The Bhutia craftsmen are known for the intricately carved statues , objects of worship and *choktses* – the carved tables.

Nepalese indeed comprise over 70% of Sikkim's population. They begun to settle down in Sikkim since the last two decades of 19th Century. Their settlement in Sikkim was encouraged by the British. The Nepalese community of Sikkim is the *mélange* of various castes and a highly stratified society, speaking their own vernacular and having a culture of their own. Among the castes of Nepalese origin settled in Sikkim the Bahuns (Brahmins) , Thakuris and Chetris are notable . The Bahuns have the highest position among the Nepalese caste people and normally do not have any matrimonial relations with lower castes. The Bahuns are basically monogamous but some of them were earlier known to be polygynous. They would not even eat together with other non-Bahuns. Next in social rank are the Thakuris followed by Chetris . Both Thakuris and Chetris wear sacred threads. Indeed, Chetris have little difference with Bahuns and Thakuris in terms of ritual practices and social ceremonies . Along the lower castes, there are Kamis the blacksmiths , Damais the tailors and Sarkis the cobblers etc. , who are also regarded as Scheduled Castes in Sikkim. They are the artisans and engaged in trades which are forbidden for the higher castes Nepalese. All of these caste groups are Hindus by religion. Besides castes , there are several tribes normally enumerated as *Kiratis* . Among the Kiratis, the Gurungs, Rais, Mangars, Limbus, Sherpas, Tamangs, Newars etc. Are important. In fact, Gurungs, Murmis, Mangars, Rais etc. were previously enumerated as *Kiratis* but now are treated as middle castes in the Nepalese caste hierarchy , and they are mainly the Hindus and have their own dialect .

Limbus are mainly Hindus , though some Limbus are still found as animists in the interior part of Sikkim . Limbi also believe that they are indigenous people of Sikkim. Indeed, they are supposed to have been immigrants, but are identified with a region covering Eastern Nepal and western Sikkim and traditionally called Limbuan (Chaube : 1987). The Limbus have their own Limbu language which is recognized as one of the state languages in Sikkim . Though, Limbus are regarded equal by other middle castes Nepalese , yet they are not completely assimilated into the Nepali caste hierarchy. Now, the

Limbus want to retain their own Limbu identity in contrast to the Nepali identity .

Sherpas were normally grouped with Kirati tribes in earlier periods. Sherpas are not assimilated into Nepalese caste hierarchy. They have their own dialect. Religiously they belong to Lamaist Buddhism .Under the Constitution of India , Sherpas are subsumed under the term 'Bhutia' and recognized as Scheduled Tribe. Tamangs also were enumerated with Kiratis. But now they represent as Nepalese in a broader context. Tamangs are not normally included in the Nepalese caste hierarchy , but are regarded as equal to the other Nepalese middle castes in Sikkim . Religiously they also belong to Buddhism and have their own dialect . Newars in Sikkim are regarded as equal by other Nepalese middle castes. Though they are mainly Hindus but worship both Hindu and Buddhists deities together and combine rituals of both faiths in their religious and domestic levels . They also have their own Newari dialect. In fact, Newars are predominantly traders.

Above all , Nepali language is the lingua-franca of the State and spoken by all communities in Sikkim . It is recognized by the State Government as well as in the year 1992 it has also received Constitutional recognition and included in the VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

On the whole , Nepali society in Sikkim had been a rigidly patriarchal society with the norms of patrilocal residence and patrilineal descent and male equigeniture prevails among the Nepalese. As for rules of inheritance, property is inherited only by sons. Sons get equal shares. Succession by the eldest son. Women have no right of inheritance in general and thereby do not inherit property. Nepalese are mainly monogamous but the cases of polygamy is also there. Marriage is mainly arranged by the parents and at the time of marriage a non-compulsory gift or dowry known as '*daijo*' is given, which may include household goods or livestock. As Hindus, Nepalese are subject to the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, which governs property relations in marriage among Sikkimese Hindu Households. Among the Nepali higher castes, divorce is not practiced by custom. Widower remarriage and sororate take place but widow remarriage is not practiced.

The traditional costume of Nepali men consists of *Daura* and *Suruwal*. *Daura* is a knee-length double breasted shirt, fastened at four points across the body by a string of cloth called the *Tuna* ; and *suruwal* is the trousers . They wear a sleeveless coat over the *Daura* and a cap called the *Birkhe Topi* . The women wear a double-breasted blouse called *Choubandi*, held at four points across the body by the *Tuna*. They wear a *Phariya* or the *Gunui* which is worn from waist down and reaches to the ankle with tiny pleats in front . The *Phariya* is held at the waist by a long strip of cotton cloth called *Patuka* . The women cover the head with a triangular or rectangular piece of cloth called *Majetro* and tie a cloth around the bust down to the hips called *Hembari* .

The Nepalese women are expert in hand-knitting of woollen products, handloom weaving too. Many of them also are now also involved in carpet weaving and handloom weaving in Sikkim.

Other Communities

There are many people (plain peoples) from other states of India and settled in Sikkim. Firstly, the Marwaris who belong to the business community and came to promote trade via Sikkim to Tibet and later also in Sikkim. They have settled in Sikkim since long. Besides Marwaris, there are people from Bihar, Hariyana and Rajasthan. These communities are also involved in business and other associated works and allied professions. Rest people from other States are employed in Central and State Government jobs and in other professional areas like teaching and other technical areas. The distribution of population of Sikkim according to communities is given in Table 13.

Table : 13 Population by community since 1891 to 2001, Sikkim

Year	Community	Population	
1891	Total	30,458	
	Lepcha	5,762	
	Bhutia	4,894	
	Limbu	3,356	
	Nepalese	15,458	
1911	Total	30,000	
	Lepcha, Bhutia and others	50,000	
1931	Figures based on religious affiliations (Indians & Tibetans excluded)	Total	109,808
		Lepcha	13,060
		Bhutia	11,955
		Nepalese	84,693
1951	Total	137,725	
	Buddhists	Total	39,395
		Lepcha	13,625
		Bhutia	15,626
	Hindu including Limbus	97,863	
1961	Total	162,189	
	Buddhists(Lepcha, Bhutia and others)	49,894	
	Hindu	108,165	
1971	Total	209,843	
1981	Total	316,385	
	Scheduled Caste	18,281	
	Scheduled Tribe	73,623	
1991	Based on Language	Total	406,457
		Nepali	256,418
		Bhutia	32,593
		Lepcha	29,854
		Others	87,592
2001	Total	5,40,851	
	Scheduled Caste	27,165	
	Scheduled Tribe	111,405	

Source : Sikkim since Independence, by Amal Datta, Mittal Publication, Delhi, 1991 and Census Report, Government of India, 1991 and 2001.

Table 13 shows that the population of each communities had has been increased significantly since 1901. Obviously, it may be said that the female population also has been increased significantly in all communities.

Findings

Climate of Sikkim varies from sub-tropical to the alpine depending upon altitude. The temperature varies with altitude and slope. For most of the period in a year, the climate is cold and humid. As a whole the state receives an annual rainfall of 2000 cm to 4000 cm.

Sikkim, the state is bestowed with abundant natural resources and has tremendous biodiversity. One third of its land is covered with dense forest.

The human development indices, percentages in Sikkim have increased since 1991 to 1998.

The decadal growth of population as a whole significant since the decade 1961-1971 onwards, and such growth percentages have been higher in each decades as compared to national growth rates since 1961.

Of the total population 88.93 per cent live in rural areas and 11.07 per cent in urban areas. Number of villages having population size 1001-2000, 2001-5000 and 5000 above have increased to a extent since 1991 to 2001.

Overall literacy percentage has gone up to 69.68 per cent in 2001 as against 56.94 per cent in 1991 and 33.83 per cent in 1981. In the year 1971 it was only 17.74 per cent.

District-wise, the east district is having higher literacy rate (75.57 per cent) and lowest in west district (59.31 per cent). While this has been 69.11 per cent in the north and 68.12 per cent in the south districts.

The number of villages having higher literacy rate 60 to < 80 has increased substantially from 20.36 per cent in 1991 to 57.78 per cent in 2001. Besides, the number of villages having higher literacy rate 80 to < 100 e.g. from 2.01 per cent in 1991 to 4.89 per cent in 2001.

The economy of the state is mainly based on agricultural and animal husbandry. Besides, horticulture is another important activity of the people. The work force participation rate is 39.31 per cent.

The state is not rich in mineral resources and apart from the deposits of copper, lead and zinc, no other viable and exploitable mineral deposits have so far been discovered.

As regards to the industrial development, a number of small and medium units have been promoted in the state.

Overall area available for agricultural operations is limited to 11 per cent of the total geographical areas of the state.

Various cooperatives has also been playing important effective role in the development of state's economy. Number of cooperatives has increased from 324 in 1999 to 515 in 2003. On the whole, there has been a rapid growth (740.0 per cent) of Weavers' Society since 1999 to 2003.

Tourism industry has also been playing important effective role in Sikkim's economy. Numbers of domestic and international tourist have increased to 2,34,394 and 14,774 in 2004-2005 as compared to 1,60,789 and 8,439 in 2002-2003 respectively.

Sikkim is a multi-ethnic State. The present population of Sikkim is primarily composed of Lepchas, Bhutias, Nepalese and the plain peoples, in which the Nepalese are numerically dominant.

It may be said that with the increasing population, per capita land has been continuously declining. Under such situation, the cottage industry like handicrafts and handloom has been playing important role and has become an integral part of the household economy of the region and that too add to household income substantially as well as providing wage employment opportunities apart from entrepreneurship in such cottage industry, besides jobs in government services, etc.