

CHAPTER V

The Occupational Pattern and Economic Status of Bhutias in Sikkim

Occupation and the economy together are strongly correlated with development. The economic progress of a society is directly associated with the changes in the occupational structure and hence, any change in the occupational structure essentially influences economic growth. In other words, the socio-economic status of a region or a state purely depends upon the occupational pattern and the size of the population working in different areas (Clark, C., 1940, p.182). Broadly looking at the social impact of the occupational pattern, the individual status in a society is directly attached to their occupation (Maurya, 1989, p. 110). Furthermore, the occupational structure of a society intimately depends on related factors, such as agricultural activities and their development, industrialisation and civilisation (Chandna, 1986, Pp. 245-46).

In most cases, a group's occupation is embedded in culture and tradition which has a specific value in society. An occupation may be defined as an event in which a series of actions occur that form an activity and a number of activities form an occupation (Bendixen, Kroksmark, and others, 2006, p. 2). The level of participation of an individual or groups contributing to the economy of a state or nation is known as an occupational pattern.

To quote Townsend *et. al.*, "*Occupation is everything people do to occupy themselves, including looking after themselves (self-care), enjoying life (leisure), and contributing to the social and economic fabric of their communities (productivity)*" (Bendixen, Kroksmark, and others, 2006, p.3). In describing occupation as a pattern of actions and activities, it may be studied in reference to temporal and environmental context. These two temporal and environmental contexts influence the occupational patterns the most. In other words, occupation also refers to the activities of communities and groups within a specific environment or influenced by the culture and tradition of the existing society. Hence, the socio-cultural environment forms a basic component in which occupational patterns occur.

In a simple sense, occupation implies a trade or profession adopted by people for their earnings in daily life. It may be related to agriculture, industry and other services available, and also the activities carried forward from older generations. The occupational pattern of the people determines the distribution of the population and its composition. Occupational structure is a key component and manifestation of population composition of a given society. The study on

occupational pattern gives a proper illustration of the ratio of the people engaged in different occupations and jobs in the state.

The socio-economic status (hereafter SES) is one's access to collectively desired resources, be they material goods, money, power, friendship networks, healthcare, leisure time, or educational opportunities. And it is access to such resources that enables individuals and groups to prosper in the social world. To some scholars, the main perimeter to measure the SES was basically the annual income of the individual. However, now, the measurement of SES includes ethnicity, health status, education, etc. SES meant individuals or groups accessing the available resources that will enable them to prosper (Kaufman, Cooper and McGee 1997; Oakes and Rossi 2003, p 7). Measurement of SES enables us to understand the intergenerational change in the social status of people and society over subsequent periods. Studies based on socio-economic status allow a better understanding of the individual or group's position and their influence in society.

This chapter provides a comparative insight into the occupational pattern and economic status of the Bhutias in both pre-merger and post-merger Sikkim. First, a historical background of Sikkim's economy is presented, followed by a general survey of the occupation of the Bhutias that built their socio-economic status in the pre-merger period. This is followed by a comparative assessment of their status during the post-merger period. A comparison is also made with the other communities.

The spatial distribution of Bhutia people engaged in different occupations and jobs in the pre-merger and post-merger periods has been considered through the data provided by the Census of India and other sources. The proportion of Bhutia people engaged in various occupations highlights socio-economic status of the community. It also reveals the state's position in the social and economic stratum in general and Bhutias in particular.

Section I

An Overview of Sikkim's Economy

The economy of Sikkim has passed through various phases. The demographic and political changes brought about by the migration of various communities, starting with the Bhutias and ending with the opening up of the state post merger with India, have left their impact on the economy of the state. The economy has diversified and now opportunities have opened up for those inhabitants. In order to understand how the Bhutias have fared in this changing economic environment, we begin with an account of the phases of the economic transformation of Sikkim.

The Lepchas are said to be the original inhabitants of the region when the Bhutias set up their kingdom in 1642. Though very little is documented about the economic pattern or system of the Lepchas, history says that they lived a nomadic life. The Lepchas were purely dependent on flora, fauna, forest and to some extent, agriculture as an essence of life (Roy, 2012, p. 74). The main characteristic of the kind of societal structure of the Lepchas was that all production and means of production were equally distributed amidst communities. After the founding of the Bhutia Kingdom in 1642, major changes were seen in the socio-economic pattern of pre-settled groups in Sikkim. The Bhutias brought with them their own pattern of living, mostly influenced by Tibetan culture. The Lepchas were forced to move towards and adopt the Bhutia pattern.

Under the Bhutias the traditional economy of Sikkim was characterised by agriculture, which for many centuries remained under feudalism. Just like in any feudal society, land was the basis of the socio-economic structure. The Maharaja or Chogyal, was the sole proprietor of land in the country. The next in the social strata were the *kazis*, the feudal lords who enjoyed considerable authority in the realms of administrative and economic arenas. The *Kazis* were the most influential and powerful people after the ruler. They administered and collected revenues from the land on behalf of the Chogyal. The village headmen, called *mandals*, extended their support to the *Kazis* in performing their functions as land lords. Hence, land and feudal system became the prime factors in the socio-economic settings of Sikkim. In this type, the system of private ownership of land did not exist and the farmers were forced to work free on the lands of the landlords and also pay certain taxes. Agricultural activities were carried out mainly by the *mandals* (village headmen) and *bustiwalas*. The *mandals* were appointed by the *Kazis* to collect rents and revenues from the cultivators. The actual cultivators were the *bustiwalas*. The exchange of good was based on barter system, which prevented the development of a currency

system. Lives stocks were used for exchange of goods. For the first time, Indian currency was used after the British Political Officer, J. C White took administrative charge of the country (Debnath, 2009, p 67). The main agricultural products were rice, maize, millets and vegetables.

Though agriculture was the main occupation of the people during the monarchy, this sector was characterised by low productivity and poor economy. Many factors were responsible for this agricultural backwardness. Sikkim's location and physical features, practice of terrace farming, feudal land-holding pattern, practice of mono-cropping, use of traditional technologies of production, lack of appropriate agricultural investment and planning, inadequate support in infrastructural set up, mode of transportation and communication, irrigation facilities, and above all marketing facilities were some of the major factors for the low economy of the country (Human Resource Development Report, 2001).

The factor that led to this underdevelopment of agriculture was that there existed a system of forced labour and rural indebtedness. The British, under the administration of J.C White, brought about some administrative changes. One of these was the Sikkim Debt Law of 1910, which was introduced to limit the rate of interest to be charged on the peasants and prohibit lending of money by the money lenders.²³ Sikkim Debt Law was violated by most of the money lenders as the government (Darbar) did not have direct control over them.

As for public revenues and expenditures, prior to the British entry and takeover of the administration in 1889, the country was functioning without any organised and systematic revenue system. The land revenue, house tax and income tax were the only sources of revenue. There was no government agency to collect the revenues. The collection of the taxes was done on a contract or farming basis. Even though the term for the payment of taxes were not fixed, it was collected from one to fifteen years.

²³ At that time in Sikkim, money lenders were mostly Marwaris. Money lending system first came in Mangan in 1908. Even though the system enabled the people to meet their requirements. It ultimately led almost all people to debt.

The *Elakhadars*, or the lessees were supposed to pay the royal government the amount fixed at the rate of per acre of land²⁴ (Bhattacharya, 1994, p.110-111). In this type of system, the commoners were the most exploited group. In Sikkim in 1929-30, there were all together 71 landlords.

Table 5.1.1. Total Landlords in Sikkim -1929-30

Sl. No	Categories of Landlords	Total numbers
1	Lamas	13
2	Kazis	21
3	Thikadars	37
4	Total	71

Source: J.C. Debnath, 2009, p. 67.

Out of these, the *Lamas* and the *Kazis* belonged to the Bhutia- Lepcha community and *Thikedars* included Nepalese also. Bhutia-Lepchas had more representatives as landlords.

To some extent, the land revenue system that existed prior to British intervention was responsible for the low economic growth of the country. The existing land revenue system was introduced through ‘*elaka*’ leases in 1925 by the Durbar. An *elaka* was a revenue collection unit under each revenue collector, basically under the *Kazis*. J C Debnath, gives an account of the number of *elakas* in Sikkim according to the Administrative Report of the Sikkim state for the year 1929-30. Altogether there were 104 *elakas*.

Table 5.1.2. Categories of Revenue Collectors and Number of Elakas -1929-30

Sl No.	Categories of Revenue collector	Number of elakas
1	Private estates of the king	29
2	Kazis	21
3	Five big Monasteries	15

²⁴ The entire country was divided into 12 Dzongs or Elakhas, each headed by 12 Dzonpons. The Dzonpons were later called kazis. Accordingly, land was divided into three types: 1). Class I Elakha: lands leased out to big landlords or kazis on fixed revenue as per the acreage of land leessed. There were 91 such Class I Elakhas. 2). Class II Elakha: there were 11 Elakhas in Class II type, where the land was managed by appointed managers of the country. The revenues received from these types of lands were put in the state Bank of Sikkim. 3). Class III Elakhas: land owned by big monasteries in the country. In total there were seven (7) of its kind. The monasteries collect the revenues and utilized for maintaining the monasteries and are also used for religious purposes. Apart from these lands, the royal family owned 15 private estates. These estates were taken care by Nang-zans, appointed by the Chogyal.

4	Nepalis	13
5	Managers appointed on commission	11
6	Lepchas	8
7	Bhutias	6
8	Domiciled Plainsman	1
9	Total	104

Source: J.C Debnath, 2009, p.68.

The land under the Chogyal, *Kazis* and monasteries were big estates. The first British Political Officer, J. C White, introduced a new lease system for land tenure in 1888 that led to the introduction of a new land settlement pattern. The new settlement pattern brought changes in the ownership of the land system (Debnath, 2009, p. 68). He did this with the help of some influential Sikkimese people, while the Chogyal Thutop Namgyal and his Maharani were at Kalimpong in exile when this event took place. The launching of the new economy dismantled the existing feudal-based economy in Sikkim. In addition, a number of the new lessee landlords, mostly Newars from the Nepali community were created. More migration of Nepalese was allowed. Not only this, the Political Officer initiated a course of new revenue generating avenues in the country. For the first time, land revenue settlement was introduced, forest excise measures were adopted and the traditional taxation system was also revised in 1898. Trade and commerce developed to such a great extent that the revenue of the country which was Rs. 30,458 in 1891 was raised to Rs. 22,00,000 in 1889 (Subba, 2011, pp. 44-46).

The first scientific survey of land in Sikkim was carried out in 1950–58. The survey was conducted using the British measurement system of acres and miles. The second survey of land was conducted in 1976–83 survey, which delimited the age-old *elakas* into revenue blocks.

The details extracted from Sikkim Human Development Report, 2001, present people's engagement in various occupations and the revenue collected accordingly. The major revenue sources recorded from 1910 to the pre-merger years, i.e 1970-71, were land, excise, forest, agriculture, house hold tax and Sikkim Nationalised Transport (introduced in 1960's).

Table 5.1.3. Major Revenue Sources (In Per Cent) 1910–11 to 1970–71

Items	1910–11	1920–21	1930–31	1960–61	1970–71
Land	34.4	22.0	27.5	16.2	2.6
Excise	22.7	18.4	17.6	9.9	7.51
Forest	2.4	5.5	5.6	7.9	2.8
Agriculture	9.15	1.6	0.32	2.9	0.3
Household Tax		4.7	8.87	-	-
Sikkim Nationalised Transport	-	-	-	25.0	29.3
Total (Rs million)	0.19	0.52	0.63	4.13	26.61

Source: Sikkim Human Development Report 2001, p 85.

Even though land had been the major source of revenue for the government, a decrease was noticed in the subsequent years. The revenue from agriculture in 1910-11 was 9.15 % and was reduced to 0.3% in 1970-71. The decrease in the revenue from land and agriculture consequently motivated people to look for other non-traditional sources of income like transport, excise, etc. The table indicates a change in Sikkim's economy.

Table 5.1.4. Growth of Public Revenues and Expenditures in Sikkim

Year	Total Receipts (Rs)	% Increase	Total Expenditure	(Rs) % Increase
1890	24,686		16,652	5
1900–01	61,899	151	1,07,049	543
1910–11	1,91,497	209	1,96,445	84
1920–21	5,15,980	169	4,84,528	147
1930–31	6,26,067	21	6,30,481	30
1940–41	6,34,800	1	6,53,800	4
1950–51	23,41,100	269	20,78,000	218
1960–61	41,30,000	76	41,10,000	98
1970–71	2,66,10,800	544	2,66,63,000	549

Source: Sikkim Human Development Report 2001, p. 84.

Till the end of the 19th century, the revenue system of the country did not include land as a source of revenue because there existed no system of private land-owning. The entire land belonged to the ruler. The period which is assessed for the increase in public revenues and expenditures in Sikkim is the period when the British introduced new revenue system and brought some changes to reinstate modern budgetary system in the country. The revenue system started with the advent of the British. Since then, land has become the essential source of revenue in Sikkim. One of the important changes brought in was the monetisation of the budgetary

system. As discussed, we can see that each decade shows an increase in the total receipts of revenue and also the expenditure incurred for the developmental works in Sikkim.

Transportation was another area that received the interest of the British, which led to the easy movement of goods and items from one part of Sikkim to another. This facilitated the development of trade and commerce. Before the development of transport and communication services, people used to ride on mules to reach their destination which was more time consuming. The development of trade and commerce contributed in the increase of the state's economy. Also, as J.C Debnath writes in his book, '*Economic History and Development of Sikkim*' the development of trade and commerce led to the introduction of capitalist economy in Sikkim, which means there was a growth in ownership of private property. The introduction of the currency system led to the birth of a new economic class that paved way for modern economic system in Sikkim (Debnath, 2009, pp 47-48). The age old traditional market economy has been replaced by a modern market economy.

Industrially, Sikkim did not flourish during the Chogyal period. During that time in Sikkim, there was no entrepreneurial class. There was craftsmanship based on traditional Sikkimeese cottage industries. The practice of carpet and rug weaving by the Bhutias and bamboo-craft, woodwork, spinning of loom and weaving traditional textures by the Lepchas were some of the traces of the existence of small scale industries. The Nepalese contributed with the workmanship in metalwork, silverware and woodwork.

Carpet weaving was done in the factory owned by the Chogyal. To support the sustainability of the culture of traditional weaving, two weaving schools were opened at Lachung and Lachen in North Sikkim. The cottage industry gave training to young Sikkimeese in local handicrafts, carpentry, handmade paper, carpets, doll making, handloom and weaving. This process was emphasised in various plan periods even after the merger. However, these industries could not grow well in the pre merger period due to the limited availability of market facilities (Debnath, 2009, p 48).

Among the modern industries, the distillery of wines and liquors was the first industry established at Singtam in 1955. The second factory was for fruit preservation, established at Singtam in 1956. For the enhancement of the industrial sector, freedom to conduct business

activities is required. In Sikkim, the businessmen, mainly Indian businessmen, were barred from carrying on their business freely. They were not allowed to own landed property, which obstructed the growth of free industrial activities. To carry on their business, they had to pay very high rent to the *Kazis*. This hindered the development of entrepreneurial activities in Sikkim. Besides this, Sikkim lagged in transport and technical know-how as the important impetuses for the growth of the economy.

Border Trade was one of the thriving sources of the economy in the country in the pre-merger period. Trade with Tibet was carried through the Nathu-la Pass. Trade markets were extended to Gangtok, Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Calcutta. Human porters and animals like ponies and yaks were used to carry items in this border trade. Indian goods and commodities were supplied from Calcutta to Tibet and likewise Tibetan wool, gold, precious gems, borax, dogs, yak tails and other light and luxury items were brought to Indian markets. This border trade flourished till 1962. After that, it was closed due to the Sino-Indian war of 1962. The reopening of the border trade again in July, 2006, took the economy to a new heights in Sikkim. However, the local traders, mainly the Bhutias had more competitors in the border trade as the market was open to new traders coming from all over the region. The re-opening of the Nathula border trade boosted the economy of Sikkim.

When Sikkim joined the Indian Union in 1975, some far reaching economic changes were brought in after Sikkim was declared a backward state, both in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Hence, the post-merger developmental strategy was to enhance state's economy. In this aspect, various services aimed at consolidating the agricultural economy. The new schemes covered renew of land reforms, provisions for agricultural marketing, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides and irrigation. The services provided encouraged horticulture, for which new crops like wheat, rajmah, rape and mustard were introduced. The services also included the extension of more agricultural land, high-yielding varieties of seeds and also introduction of multiple cropping. Thus, agricultural development made considerable progress in Sikkim. Sikkim underwent many changes in its economy and demography after it joined the national mainstream in 1975. Development activities were increased considerably, which led to rapid urbanization, especially in towns likes Gangtok, Jorethang, Geyzing and Namchi. The migration of rural people in search of job opportunities enabled growth of these towns which were driven by

administrative and commercial growth. This urbanization accelerated the economic growth in Sikkim.

Tourism has emerged as one of the world's biggest industries. Tourism enables the viable and sustainable development of a region or a state. Through travel and tourism, new jobs and employment capacity are built up that strongly contribute to the socio-economic progress of the state. In recent years, Sikkim has developed as one of the most prosperous tourism destinations in the country. Sikkim's economy has become the mainstay of Sikkim's tourism. Most areas in North district are tourist destinations. From Kabi (where the brotherhood agreement 'Lho-Men-Tsong' between the Bhutias, Lepchas and Limboos was made) to Chungthang, Lachung, Lachen and Tsho Lamo lake and Guru dongmar lake are the sites of tourist attractions in the North district. In West Sikkim, most tourist visit Pelling and Yuksom (the first capital of Sikkim). This has provided economic and livelihood opportunities as hotels, resorts and home stays are increasing. Transport has also received support from tourism, providing jobs and income to many. Shops, restaurants and the sale of souvenirs are another source of income patronised by tourism.

Hence, the primitive agriculture based occupational pattern has undergone total transformation in Sikkim. Apart from agriculture, pasturage and trade, people in Sikkim have entered into a new occupation, jobs and employment through industrialisation and tourism in modern Sikkim. It is evident from the case studies conducted that change in the occupational pattern has been understood largely as a change in their economic activities to earn their livelihood. Change has been noticed in the occupational pattern. The economic and technological developments of the modern world have contributed to form this change. The economic transformation is accompanied by a rising number of educational institutes that also provide job opportunities for many. We have a detailed discussion about that in chapter VII on Education.

To understand the economic status and position of Sikkim, indicators like the size of work force and the distribution of people in different economic activities are taken into account in the post merger period as well.

This study rests on the census classifications that have changed time and again. The Census authority of 1971 enumerates the working population into nine categories considering the Indian economy. However, this classification of workers was changed by the Census authorities in 1981

and reduced into four broad categories: 1). Cultivators, 2). Agricultural labourers, 3). Household Industry and 4). Other workers. The Census authorities in 1991, again revived the 1971 census classification of workers into nine categories. The 2001 census curtailed the earlier classification into three categories of working population as main, marginal and non-workers. The main workers are comprised of the cultivators, agricultural labourers, workers in household Industry and other workers (Socio-Economic Caste Census, 2011). On this ground, a comparative analysis of occupational characteristics has been made. The specific data about Sikkim has been collected from Government Reports.

Table 5.1.5. People in Different Categories of Occupational Pattern in Sikkim, 2011

Item	1981	1991	2001	2011
Population	316385	406457	540851	610577
Main Workers	147436	164392	212904	230397
(a) Cultivators	88610	97834	101200	117401
(b) Agricultural Labourers	4887	13793	9081	25986
(c) Worker in Household Industry	1586	1309	3168	5143
(d) Other Workers	52353	52353	99455	159608
Marginal Workers	5378	4329	50139	77741
Non-Workers	163571	237736	277808	-

Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Government of Sikkim, 2011.

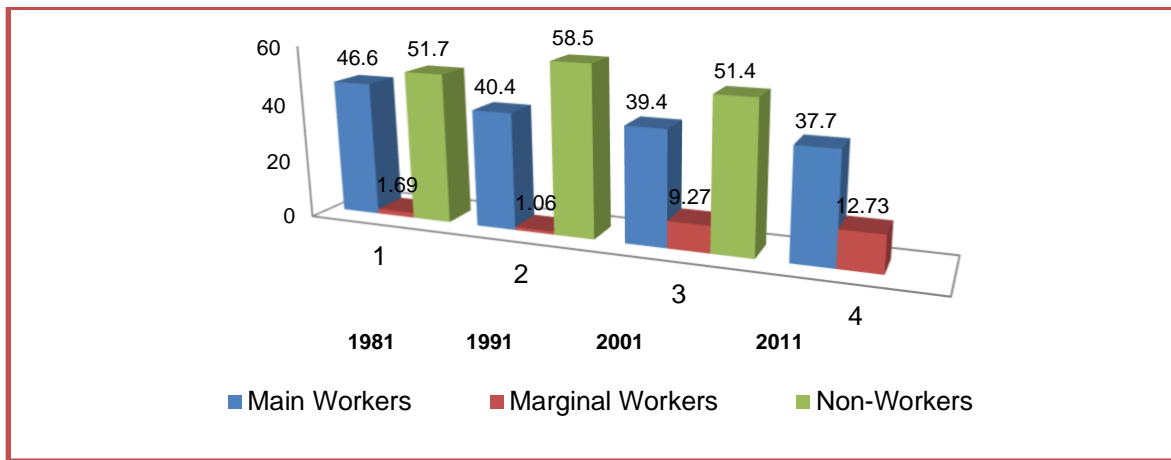
Table 5.1.6. Percentage of Population in Different Categories of Occupation Pattern in Sikkim, 1981-2011

Item	1981	1991	2001	2011
Population	316385	406457	540851	610577
Main Workers	46.6	40.4	39.4	37.7
Marginal Workers	1.69	1.06	9.27	12.73
Non-Workers	51.7	58.5	51.4	-

Source: Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011, Rural Development Statistics, GOI

The study reveals a decrease in engagement of people as main workers. Not much of an increase has been noticed in the category of non-workers. However, there has been a slight increase in the number of marginal workers. Bulk of the people are non-workers, that is more than 50%. The next category are those who are classified as main workers. The lowest number of people are marginal workers.

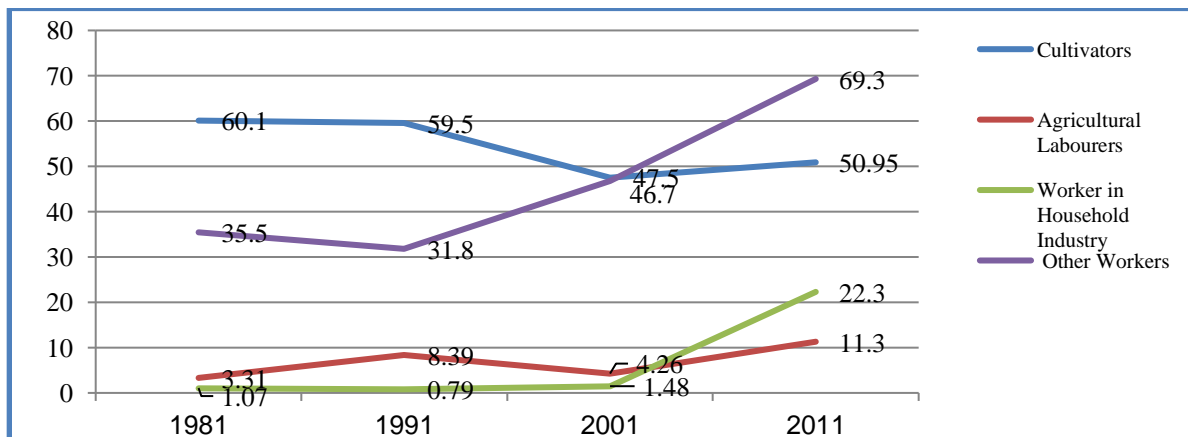
Fig 5.1.1: Graphical Presentation of Percentage of Population in Different Occupations, 1981- 2011



Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Government of Sikkim, 2011.

From 1981 to 2011, the overall working population increased as a marginal worker, while the percentage of main workers decreased to 37.7 % in 2011 from 46.6 % in 1981. But there seemed to be an upward movement among the marginal workers. No major change in the number of non-workers is observed, though the population has increased in each subsequent years. The increase is recorded as 12.73 % in 2011 which was just 1.69 % in 1981. Non-workers have always remained above the 50 % mark.

Fig 5.1.2. Percentage of Marginal Workers in Sikkim, 2011.



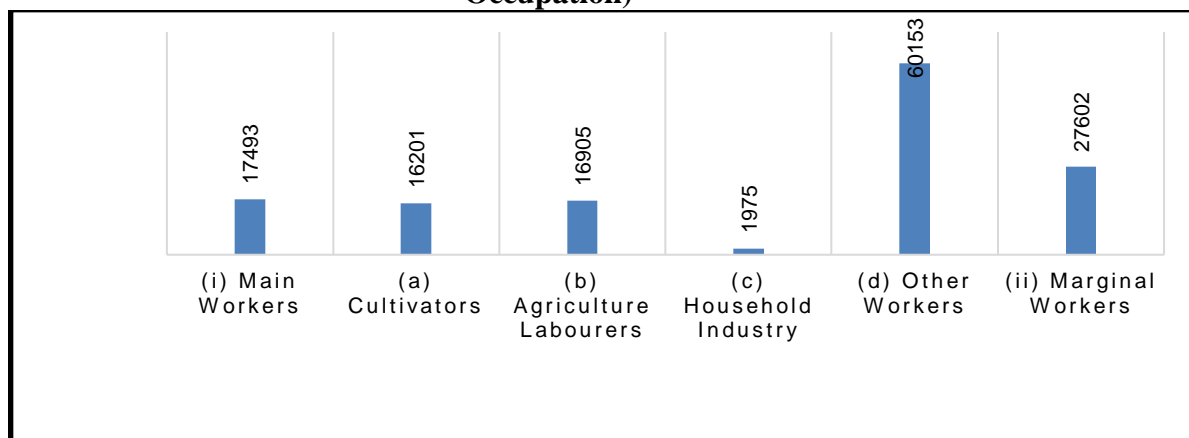
Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Government of Sikkim, 2011.

The graph of the marginal workers across the decades reveals a gradual decline in the population as cultivators. The decline is more prominent in the year 2001. The increase in the population as other workers and workers in the household industry has been noticed. A shift in the occupation

pattern among the people is seen in 2001-2011. Similarly, a decline has been noticed in the population as agriculture labourers.

Growth has been noticed in the number of people as main workers and marginal workers in 2011 over 2001.

Fig 5.1.3. Increase in 2011 over 2001 (Number of people in different categories of Occupation)



Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Government of Sikkim, 2011.

In total, 17493 people have increased as main workers in the state in 2011 over 2001. The highest increase is seen as other workers, with 60,153 person increase, 27,602 marginal workers was increased in 2011. About 16905 main workers increased in agriculture in 2011 over 2001.

So far, we have seen the overall population in different categories of occupational pattern. Sikkim's population as main workers is decreasing as compared to other categories of occupation. The section focuses on the community wise distribution of population into different categories of occupation in the post-merger period. The discussion that follows is based on the community wise study of occupation.

Employment as one of the indicators that allow us to measure the economic condition of the country. Before discussing the community wise employment and income status of Sikkim, an understanding on the state (Sikkim) comparison with nation (India) on employment and income status becomes necessary.

The Socio-Economic Caste Census, 2011 provides the details of employment and income characteristics in India and Sikkim.

Table 5.1.7. Employment and Income Characteristics (Rural India) (Number in Lakhs), 2011

	Households (in Lakhs)	No. of Households with Salaried job		No. of Households with Salaried Job						No. of Households Pay Income Tax or Professional Tax	No. of Households Own/Operate an Enterprise registered with the Govt.
				Government		Public Sector		Private			
				No	%	No	%	No	%		
India	1794.45	173.3	9.66	89.90	5.01	20.14	1.12	64.10	3.57	82.17	48.93
Sikkim	0.89	0.24	26.86	0.18	20.58	0.01	1.19	0.05	5.09	0.14	0.05

Source: Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011, Rural Development Statistics, GOI

The statistics reveal that the state shares 0.24% of households out of the total households in India. The number of households with salaried jobs makes 20.58 % in the government sector, 1.19% in the public sector and 5.09% in the private sector. Out of a total 48.93 % of households owning and operating an enterprise registered with the government, Sikkim shares 0.05% of the total population.

Table 5.1.8. Employment and Income Characteristics (Rural) (Number in Lakhs), 2011

	Number of Households (in Lakhs) having Monthly income of highest earning household member					
	Less than Rs. 5,000		Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 10,000		Rs. 10,000 or more	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
India	1336.96	74.51	308.42	17.19	148.28	8.26
Sikkim	0.65	72.99	0.11	12.89	0.12	13.98

Source: Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011, Rural Development Statistics, GOI

The statistics on the employment and income characteristics in India and Sikkim shows that 72.99% of Sikkimese households have a monthly income of less than Rs. 5000, 12.89 % of households have a monthly income of Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 10,000 and 13.98 % of households are in the category of monthly income of Rs. 10,000 and above.

Section II

Occupational Pattern and Economic Status of Bhutias in the Pre- merger Period

The social stratification amongst the Bhutia community during the Namgyal dynasty gives a picture of the status of the Bhutias in social and economic aspects. The community was divided into royal families, *lamas*, *Kazis* and commoners. The *lamas*, who mostly belonged to the noble families of Tibet, became the guardians of the important monasteries in Sikkim. The monasteries during that time possessed huge land property over which the *lamas* enjoyed administrative control and managed the revenue of the monasteries. The *lamas* were also the principal advisers to the Chogyal in the affairs of the country. The third group, the *Kazis*, mostly belonging to the Bhutia-Lepcha group were the landlords or *zamindars*. As Sikkim was a feudalistic state, the *Kazis* wielded enormous economic and political power. Hence, in Sikkim, all land belonged to the ruler who used it at his own will and power. The Chogyal possessed absolute power and reigned over the land. He was the secular as well as the sacred head of the state. He was also the richest man, the largest single industrialist, and the biggest landlord of Sikkim (Sinha, 1975, p. 22).

In Sikkim, there existed a system of free employment of the peasants towards the land lords. The first factor was that the country did not follow any organised system of agriculture until the migrated Nepalese started the practice in the 19th century. There prevailed a system of shifting cultivation which prevented the peasants from occupying any land. The second factor being Bhutias' engagement mostly in trading and pasturage, they had very little knowledge of farming and agriculture. Apparently, the agricultural growth was unsubstantial. Initially, the revenue generated from the agricultural production was very meagre and hence the system of owning private land was not felt necessary. Third and most importantly, the land-holding system was such that the Chogyal was the absolute owner of the land in the country. It was impossible for the farmers to tie themselves to the land unless gifted by the ruler.

There existed two different types of taxation system: one for the Bhutias and Lepchas and the second type for the Nepalese. Limboos were included in the Nepalese group. An unequal tax system existed for these two groups. The Lepchas and Bhutias were charged 8 annas (half of a rupee), while the Nepalese were supposed to pay 14 annas as land revenue. The Bhutias and

Lepchas were exempted from paying any tax for grazing of animals (cows), but the Nepalese were imposed with tax of 8 annas for grazing of each herd. Hence, the Lepchas and Bhutias enjoyed some relaxation in the taxation system while the other group, the Nepalese were levied with heavy taxes. This, perhaps was the root cause of ethnic disparity and ethnic discontentment. It was only in 1747 that system of annual taxation was introduced by Rabden Sherpa Gyalpo, a Tibetan Regent deputed by Government of Tibet to look after the administration of Sikkim. A fixed system of revenue like *h bah-pa*, *b Zolung*, which means tax on forest produce and Tshong-skyed, an income tax were introduced (Subba, 2011, p 62).

Apart from agriculture, the Bhutias of Sikkim worked in different occupations to supplement their income. Among such occupations was pasturage carried by the Bhutias of the northern part of Sikkim, mainly by the Lachungpas and the Lachenpas. The rearing of yak, sheep and goat and its preservation was feasible only through a migratory movement. Along with this, they also practiced marginal agriculture and carried some trading activities within the borders. The trading was based on barter system. Timber, wood, dyestuffs and dairy products were the main items exchanged for Tibetan salt and wool. Hence, the occupation of Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung was intimately interwoven with pastoral activities, limited agricultural activities and trading (Bhasin, 2012, p 1.).

Some groups of Bhutias were into the trans-border trade, especially with Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. Trade with Nepal gradually slowed down because the traders had to cross very difficult terrain to trade with Nepal. The trade with Tibet continued till 1962, the year of Chinese invasion. This greatly affected the social and economic life of the people of Lachung and Lachen.

The Bhutia Kings of Sikkim were mostly influenced by Tibetan culture and tradition and also kept a close proximity with them right from the beginning and encouraged the practice of Tibetan culture and civilisation. The Tibetans influenced by Chinese arts and crafts, were engaged in carpet weaving and handlooms.²⁵ Carpets and woollen clothes were manufactured and this has been carried forward under Sikkim Handloom and Technical Institutions in the state. The Lepchas, however, not very much interested in the occupations followed by the Bhutias, and

²⁵During the tenureship of J.C White as Political Officer of Sikkim, a few weaving schools in Lachung were established. Later, a carpet factory was also established at Gangtok under the control and supervision of the Maharani of Sikkim.

more inclined towards bamboo works, were engaged in weaving and making of bamboo mats, vessels, ropes, baskets, etc.

The British presence and taking up of the administration of Sikkim not only introduced new revenue system but also many new occupational avenues were unfolded for the Sikkimese people. Many got into government services, mainly as contractors in the building of roads and highways, the task undertaken by the British to establish their trade relations with Tibet. The construction works also included building of government offices, residential quarters and dak bungalows. Through the opening of new government services and offices, a number of people got chances in government jobs, which resulted in the increase in the state economy as well. So apart from these occupations, the Bhutias also got entry into new occupations created in Sikkim. The spread of education further created opportunities for them to take up other occupations as a source of earning.

Throughout the rule of Chogyal Tashi Namgyal (1893-1963) many developmental changes were initiated. The first thing that happened was the abolition of feudalism in 1948 which was a menace to the country's development. The abolition of feudalism and landlordism made the *Kazis* and land holders lose their hold over the land and ultimately power over the peasants. By then, in Sikkim, different commercial networks like household industries, banking, transport services, communication and construction work were established. Many of the *Kazis* and landlords went for these services. Majority of the Bhutia aristocrats and *Kazis* became government contractors and entered the state's best service sectors. However, trade and business were captured mostly by the plainsmen, especially the Marwaris and Biharis (Sinha, 1975, p.68). The study undertaken by A.C Sinha in 1970 on the occupational background of the Bhutia families affirms that in Sikkim around 90% of the people were involved in agricultural activities.

Table 5.2.1. Occupational Background of Elites in Sikkim- 1970

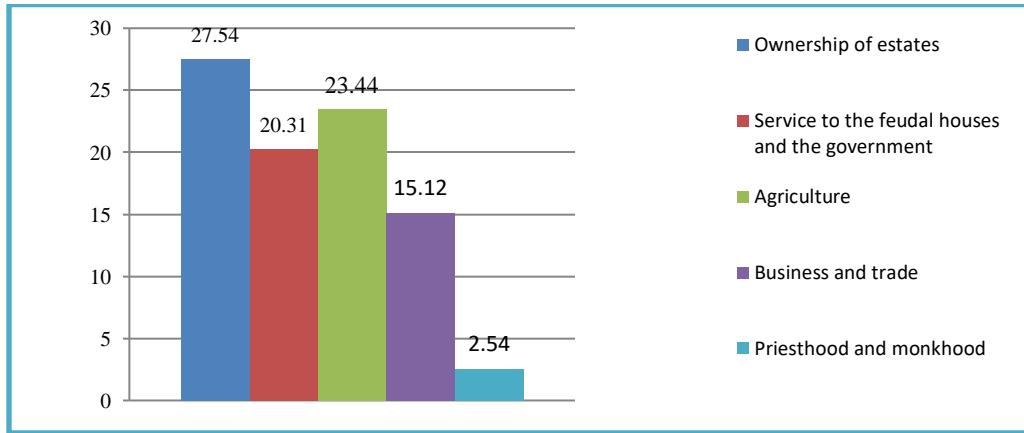
Sl. No.	Occupational Background	Number	Percentage
1	Ownership of estates	35	27.54
2	Service to the feudal houses and the government	26	20.31
3	Agriculture	30	23.44
4	Business and trade	20	15.12
5	Priesthood and monkhood	03	02.54
6	Unskilled labour	04	03.12
7	Others	04	03.12

8	No information	06	04.68
9	Total	128	99.87

Source: A.C Sinha, 1975, p. 68.

From the field study conducted by A.C Sinha in 1970, it is clear that the major occupation of the elites in Sikkim was agriculture. The highest number of elites in Sikkim were the owners of estates. Then, followed by agricultural land holders and government employees.

Fig. 5.2.1 Occupational Background of Elites in Sikkim- 1970



Source: Based on the table No. 5.2.1.

A graphical illustration on the occupational background of elites in Sikkim in 1970 shows that among the surveyed elite, about 27.54 % were owners of estates, while 23.44 % were engaged in agriculture. It shows that, 20.31% gave their service to the nobility and the aristocracy, and 15.12% were into trade and business. Only 2.54% of elites choose to concede their life into priesthood and monk-hood.

Table 5.2.2. Ethnic Affiliation of Elites in Sikkim

Sl. No	Ethnic Groups	Number	Percentage
1	Lepchas	18	14.10
2	Bhutias	25	19.10
3	Nepalese	54	42.20
4	Indians	23	17.94
5	Tsongs	3	2.34
6	Others	4	3.12
7	No Information	1	0.78

Source : A.C, Sinha, 1975.

As per the sample respondents of the study in 1970 by A.C Sinha on the ethnic affiliation of elites in Sikkim, it indicates that 14.10% were Lepchas, 19.10% were Bhutias and the Nepalese were the highest amongst the respondents as elite with 42.20%. By this time, i.e. 1970's, a bulk of the Indians (Plainsmen) (17.94%) and 2.34% were Tsongs (Limboos) were added as elites in Sikkim .

Table 5.2.3. Major Occupation of Elites in Sikkim in 1970 and Occupation of their Fathers

Sl. No	Details	Fathers Occupation		Incumbents Occupation	
		Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage
1	Agriculture	32	25.00	3	2.34
2	Ownership of the Estates	25	19.52	8	6.24
3	Business and Trade	22	17.16	15	11.72
4	Priesthood and Monkhood	4	3.12	5	3.90
5	Professions	32	25.00	44	34.36
6	Ex-Soldiers-cum-Contractors	-	-	12	9.37
7	Ex-Soldiers-cum-Voluntary Politics	-	-	12	9.37
8	Contractors-cum- Voluntary Politics	-	-	16	12.50
9	Others	10	7.80	10	7.80
10	No information	3	2.34	2	1.56

Source : A.C, Sinha, 1975.

As explained earlier, there is either no or very little information available regarding the community wise occupational data in traditional Sikkim. However, the work of A.C Sinha, 1975, has been a great source of information with regard to the ethnic affiliation of occupation. The findings of his work reveal that among the surveyed elites, around 25% of their fathers were agriculturists, 19.25% were owners of estates, 17. 16% were traders and businessmen, 3.12% were monks and 25% were into different professions (government and private sectors). A comparative study with their children's occupation revealed that they opted other sources of occupation which their fathers never thought of. The respondents who had taken their job as Ex-Soldiers-cum-Contractors were 9.37%, Ex-Soldiers-cum-Voluntary Politics were 9.37% and 12.50% were Contractors-cum- Voluntary Politics. There was a rise in number of people who opted for new avenues of income. Decrease in agriculture as occupation was noticed from 25% (fathers engagement) as only 2.34 % of their children. Secondly, respondents as owner of estates

were 19.52 % during the respondent's father's time which reduced to 6.24 % in 1970. Similarly, the number of people engaged in business and trade fell from 17.16 % to 11.72 %.

Hence, it is clear that in the later phases, occupation had begun to change which is visible in the socio-economy of the country in general and Bhutias in particular. This trend is further supported by the case studies also. In three Bhutia dominated villages; Tathangchen in East district, Lachung in North district and Tashiding in West district also saw that agriculture was the occupation and a main source of income of the Bhutia people in the pre merger period. Gradually, transformations in the occupation pattern and socio-economic status were noticed. A shift in the occupation has been recorded during the merger period. Bhutias joined other services in bureaucracy, education, government development works, construction works.

Section III

The Occupational Pattern and Economic Status of Bhutias in the Post-merger Period

It has been discussed in the previous section how opportunities for new occupations and jobs have opened up in both the government and private sectors. The new democratic state initiated the migration of people, especially from different parts of the country and neighbouring countries like Nepal in search of new jobs. Not only was the demographic profile changed, but there were many new jobs and occupations. There was a demand for more skilled and educated manpower for the speedy developmental processes. In such situations, the Bhutias continued to play and occupy better places in the service sectors as compared to other communities in the state.

This section is an attempt to examine the occupational and economic status of Bhutias in the post-merger period. The distribution of the population on various occupational categories is considered to find out occupational pattern and economic position of the Bhutias in this context.

For specific communities in Sikkim, we have data from 1998 onwards. The Nepali group (Bahun or Sharma, Chhetri, Pradhan/ Newar, Gurung, Manger or Thapa, Tamang, Limbo, Rai, Sunwar and Dewan) occupied the highest number of gazetted posts in the state in 1998. Scheduled Tribe (Bhutia, Lepcha, Sherpa) stand second in the distribution of employees in all cadres of job in 38 departments.

Table 5.3.1. Community-wise Employment Status in 38 Departments, 1998

Sl. No.	Communities	Selection IAS/IPS/IFS	Gazetted Grade I	Gazetted Grade II	Non Gazetted III	Class IV
1	Scheduled Tribe	23	95	120	888	1115
2	Scheduled caste	2	7	15	143	450
3	Nepali (Total)	20	86	220	1634	4618
i	Bahun/Sharma	2	25	42	372	739
ii	Chhetri	6	11	35	318	752
iii	Pradhan/Newar	7	17	44	245	301
iv	Gurung	-	8	17	180	524
v	Manger/Thapa	1	1	16	74	208
vi	Tamang	1	5	12	158	555
vii	Limbo	2	3	14	151	586
viii	Rai	1	12	28	81	789
ix	Sunuwar	-	2	9	50	23
x	Dewan	-	2	3	5	2
xi	Giri/Sanyasi	-	1	1	16	44
xii	Jogi	-	-	-	2	13
xiii	Thakuri	-	-	1	4	3
xiv	Bhujel	-	-	1	10	29
xv	Thami	-	-	-	-	2
xvi	Others*	4	8	34	74	48

Source: Report of the OBC Commission, 1998. * Others include plainsmen (Bengali, Marwari, Bihari, Sweeper, Keralian, Rajasthani, Kashmiri, Mohamedian, Garali, Anglo Indian, Karmakar and Oria).

According to a comparative study of the employment status of the communities, Nepalese have the highest number of employees. Scheduled Tribe (Bhutia, Lepcha and Sherpa) have the second highest number of employees distributed across all levels of employment. The Nepalese share

the highest (74.3%) number of employees, while Bhutia represents 17.2% of employees and the Lepchas have 8.5% of employees in the state.

The Report on Statistical Profile published by Government of Sikkim (2004-05) highlights the Bhutias alone as having the highest number of employees in the state in 2002 (Table 5.3.2). The entire working population has been categorised as regular, worked charged, ad-hoc, muster roll and people working in other sectors.

Table 5.3.2. Community-wise Total Numbers of Employees – 2002

Sl. No.	Community/Caste	Regular	Work-charged	Ad-hoc	Muster Roll	Others/ PSU	Total
1	Lepcha	1902 (8.9%)	72 (4.8%)	19 (10.3%)	789 (8.1%)	171 (8.2%)	2953 (8.5)
2	Bhutia	4275 (20.2%)	229 (15.2%)	40 (21.9%)	1070 (10.9%)	361 (17.2%)	5975 (17.2%)
3	Nepali (Total)	15026 (71%)	1205 (80%)	124 (67.8%)	7890 (81%)	1565 (74.6%)	25810 (74.3%)
i	Bahun	2578	166	20	771	155	3650
ii	Bhujel	63	8	1	50	7	129
iii	Chettri	2674	286	18	1484	218	4680
iv	Damai	242	28	3	180	11	464
v	Gurung	1385	107	18	895	190	2595
vi	Jogi	5	2	-	7	-	14
vii	Kami	761	95	3	497	66	1404
viii	Majhi	7	-	-	9	3	19
ix	Manger	436	22	3	274	41	776
x	Pradhan	1394	127	8	428	54	2011
xi	Rai	2629	172	20	1229	346	4396
xii	Sarki	17	2	-	27	3	49
xiii	Sherpa	610	33	4	435	76	1158
xiv	Subba (limbo)	1328	63	12	827	230	2460
xv	Sunuwar	82	16	-	88	100	286
xvi	Tamang	1350	78	14	705	105	2252
xvii	Thami	5	-	-	2	-	7

xviii	Others*	1936	72	15	240	-	1723
	Total	21203	1506	183	9749	2097	34,738

Source: Sikkim – A Statistical Profile, Government of Sikkim 2004-05.

* Others include plainsmen (Bengali, Marwari, Bihari, Sweeper, Keralian, Rajasthani, Kashmiri, Mohamedian, Garali, Anglo Indian, Karmakar and Oria).

A comparative survey of the community wise employees (in both government and private) in the state in 2002 shows the consistency in the increase of employees amongst the Bhutia community. Though less in terms of number, (17.3%, Census, 2001), Bhutias have the highest number of employees in the state. Bhutias alone counts a total of 5975 employees. Chettri is the next group with 4680 employees and Rai in the third position with 4396 employees. Out of a total of 5975 Bhutia employees, 4275 are regular workers, 166 are on work charged, 20 are on ad-hoc basis, 771 are working on muster roll and 155 are employed in other private sectors in the state.

In the comparative study among communities, the Nepalese represent 71% as regular employees, 80% as worked charged, 67.8% as adhoc, 81% working on a muster-roll basis and 74.6% working in other sectors. About 20.2% of Bhutia's are regular employees, 15.2% are working as worked charged, 21.9% are working on ad-hoc basis, 10.9 % are working on a muster roll basis and 17.2% are working in other sectors. About 8.9% of Lepchas are regular employees, 4.8% are working as work charged, 10.3% working on ad-hoc basis, 8.1% are working as muster roll and 8.2% employees are working in other sectors in the state.

Consistency in the rise of employees among all three communities is noticed in the year 2006.

Table 5.3.3. Caste-wise Total Numbers of Employees – 2006.

Community	Government		PSU	TOTAL
	Regular	Non-Regular	Regular + Non-Regular	
Bhutia	5367	3481	530	9378
Lepcha	2325	2646	183	5154
Tamang	1702	1567	243	3512
Limboo	1980	2349	148	4477
Bahun	3711	2860	269	6840
Chettri	3092	3309	345	6746
Pradhan	1715	1149	194	3058

Rai	3279	3592	389	7260
Manger	659	731	96	1486
Gurung	1890	2125	298	4313
Sunwar/Mukhia	148	112	37	297
Bhujel	129	112	18	259
Kami	1089	954	164	2207
Damai	330	385	55	770
Majhi	21	43	3	67
Sanyasi/Giri	125	108	11	244
Sherpa	812	1004	101	1917
Dewan	23	27	0	40
Jogi/ Thai	13	7	5	35
Others	761	444	208	1413
Total	29171	27005	3297	59473

Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Govt. of Sikkim, 2006.

In the study undertaken for the analysis of caste wise employees in 2006, shows that 9378 (15.76%) of the Bhutia population were employed. Next, 7260 (12.2%) employees belong to the Rai group. Bhutias continued to be the community with the highest number of employees in the state. The State Socio-Economic Census, 2006 highlights in the comparative analysis of community wise distribution of employees that Bhutias are still the leading community. The number of employees from the community has increased from 5975 in 2002 to 9378 in 2006.

The argument put forward by A.C Sihha (2009) that one of the reasons for Bhutias' being observed in the higher bureaucratic posts in the state is their affiliation to the royal family as well as their high socio-economic status. Secondly, the educational background of the Bhutias has helped them to take a lead among all the other communities.

On the basis of the above descriptions, the Bhutias are identified as the elite group in the present day as well. According to Sinha (2009), the status-quo as elite is being maintained by the Bhutia group.

5.3.1. Income Status

Income as a determinant factor of socio-economic status is considered in many ways. In this family income and assessments of wealth are considered as important parameters. The collection of income also includes the measurement of total income, earned or unearned.

Table 5.3.4.
Community-wise Percentage Distribution of Household by Income Category- 2006*

Community	Household	0 - 2500	2501-5000	5001-10000	10001-25000	25001-Above
Bhutia	14769 (13.2)	11.48	11.46	13.69	16.73	21.52
Lepcha	8041 (7.19)	7.70	7.59	6.88	6.44	5.59
Tamang	7718 (6.9)	6.51	7.44	7.39	5.92	4.73
Limboo	10672 (9.54)	14.40	10.26	7.82	5.83	4.17
Bahun	7680 (6.87)	5.37	6.17	6.91	9.41	10.41
Chettri	13509 (12.08)	11.83	12.68	12.30	11.38	9.09
Pradhan	4441 (3.97)	2.94	3.52	4.14	4.98	7.91
Rai	15430 (13.8)	16.43	15.15	12.78	9.82	9.18
Manger	3015 (2.7)	3.10	3.06	2.53	1.77	1.68
Gurung	6489 (5.8)	6.29	5.82	5.79	5.76	3.96
Sunwar/Mukhia	595 (0.53)	0.59	0.58	0.55	0.34	0.43
Thami	92 (0.08)	0.08	0.11	0.07	0.05	0.02
Jogi	94 (0.08)	0.11	0.11	0.06	0.03	0.02
Dewan	44 (0.04)	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.11	0.11
Bhujel	701 (0.63)	1.01	0.67	0.53	0.32	0.17
Kami	4715 (4.22)	4.44	4.71	4.05	3.37	2.49
Damai	2345 (2.1)	2.31	2.37	2.08	1.50	0.88
Sarki	216 (0.19)	0.33	0.21	0.14	0.10	0.04
Majhi	100 (0.09)	0.11	0.10	0.09	0.05	0.02
Sanyasi/Giri	263. (0.24)	0.26	0.24	0.19	0.25	0.22
Others	10901(9.75)	4.68	7.72	12.00	15.85	17.37
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Govt. of Sikkim-2006

*The income parameters starting from Rs.25.00 seems quite unreal during the period under review. The general impression one gets about the Bhutia community also is different and this is the data provided by the Government and this gives an idea of the economic status of the community in relation to others.

With regard to the distribution of households by income category in the state, the Rai community has 13.8 %, which is the highest number of households (15430) and the highest income bearer in the category of 0-10000. Bhutia is the second highest, with 14769 households, sharing 13.2% percent of the total households in the state. The Bhutias are the highest income earners in the income category of Rs.10,000 and above.

After the state picture, the study on district wise distribution of community wise households and their income is highlighted. This enables us to draw an assessment in the socio-economic status of Bhutia visa-vis other communities in the state.

5.3.2. District-wise Distribution of Household by Income Category

5.3.2.1. East District

The East district has a total of 53194 households, of which 7470 households (14%) belong to the Bhutias, which is the highest in the district. Chettri has 6342 households, followed by Bahun which has 5106. Among these, the Bhutia households are the highest income bearers in the category of Rs. 5000 and above income category, while Chettri (households) have the highest income in the category of Rs. 0-5000. In the category of households with an income higher than Rs. 25001, 892 households are Bhutias, the highest in the district.

**Table 5.3.5. Community-wise Distribution of Household by Income Category
East District, 2006**

Community	Household	0- 2500	2501-5000	5001-10000	10001-25000	25001 Above
Bhutia	7470	837	2326	1715	1703	892
Lepcha	2388	325	901	530	433	199
Tamang	4099	540	1770	1002	609	178
Limboo	2585	587	1222	557	317	102
Bahun	5106	579	1883	1143	1092	409
Chettri	6342	850	2668	1492	1016	316
Pradhan	2554	281	874	582	512	305
Rai	5743	932	2564	1252	743	252
Manger	1341	202	623	291	166	59
Gurung	2674	391	1075	636	459	113

Sunwar/Mukhia	315	51	136	79	32	17
Thami	77	14	42	12	8	1
Jogi	23	5	11	7	0	0
Dewan	31	1	4	6	14	6
Bhujel	307	67	131	72	29	8
Kami	2644	359	1178	588	409	110
Damai	1358	214	634	314	161	35
Sarki	85	18	37	18	11	1
Majhi	61	15	32	10	3	1
Sanyasi/Giri	158	27	58	33	31	9
Others	7833	660	2462	2010	1942	759
Total	53194	6755	20631	12346	9690	3772

Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, Govt. of Sikkim-2006.

5.3.2.2. North District

In total, there are 7184 households in the North district. The Lepchas are the most populous, with the greatest number of households, accounting for 2507 people (35%). They are mostly concentrated in the Dzongu block of North Sikkim. The Bhutias are the next group with 1776 households (25%) and 852 households are Limboo. In the income category among the three ethnic communities, the Lepchas are the highest income bearers in all the categories. Except in the category of Rs. 25000 and above, the Bhutias are the highest.

**Table 5.3.6. Community-wise Distribution of Household by Income Category
North District, 2006**

Community	Household	0 - 2500	2501-5000	5001-10000	10001-25000	25001-Above
Bhutia	1776 (25%)	192 (25%)	679 (19%)	513 (27%)	334 (33%)	58 (41%)
Lepcha	2507 (35%)	276 (36%)	1230 (35%)	596 (32%)	362 (36%)	43 (30%)
Tamang	365	35	202	99	27	2
Limboo	852	86	523	185	53	5
Bahun	40	2	8	17	11	2
Chettri	384	36	198	107	39	4
Pradhan	75	8	33	14	17	3

Rai	354	45	209	76	24	0
Manger	55	10	27	13	5	0
Gurung	83	11	41	19	11	1
Sunwar/Mukhia	27	2	14	10	1	0
Thami	1	0	1	0	0	0
Jogi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dewan	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bhujel	8	0	5	1	2	0
Kami	156	18	83	33	20	2
Damai	85	13	39	26	6	1
Sarki	4	0	3	1	0	0
Majhi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sanyasi/Giri	7	1	5	0	1	0
Others	405	27	136	141	83	18
Total	7184	762	3436	1851	996	139

Source: Socio-Economic Census, DESME, 2006.

5.3.2.3. South District

The South district comprises a total of 26691 households. The district is mostly inhabited by the Nepalese, though the Bhutias and Lepchas are sparsely populated. The Rai community has the highest number of households with a total of 5789, followed by Chettri with 3738. Bhutia accounts for a total of 2710 households. In the income distribution, Rai leads in almost all the income categories. Bhutia households have the highest income in the category of Rs. 25000 and above.

Table 5.3.7. Community-wise Distribution of Household by Income Category- South District- 2006

Community	Household	0 - 2500	2501-5000	5001-10000	10001-25000	25001-Above
Bhutia	2710	312	1182	662	442	112
Lepcha	1330	216	629	282	163	40
Tamang	2069	292	1001	495	233	48
Limboo	1928	266	997	457	174	34
Bahun	1442	161	589	333	280	79

Chettri	3738	463	1818	865	496	96
Pradhan	1178	132	492	286	203	65
Rai	5789	948	2754	1302	616	169
Manger	927	127	477	210	92	21
Gurung	1627	178	747	421	240	41
Sunwar/Mukhia	145	20	79	31	12	3
Thami	3	1	2	0	0	0
Jogi	40	8	24	6	2	0
Dewan	11	2	4	1	4	0
Bhujel	184	36	108	27	12	1
Kami	1014	171	503	234	93	13
Damai	512	97	253	104	51	7
Sarki	55	11	33	7	4	0
Majhi	36	7	12	11	6	0
Sanyasi/Giri	37	2	20	6	7	2
Others	1916	173	669	508	450	116
Total	26691	3623	12393	6248	3580	847

Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, DESME, 2006.

5.3.2.4. West District

Limboos are the dominant group, with a total of 5307 households in the West district. Next is the Rai group with 3544 households, Chettri with 3045 households and Bhutias with 2813 households. As compared to East and North districts, Bhutias have a lower number of households in West district. The distribution of income by category shows that Limboos have the highest income in all the income categories, but only in the category of Rs. 25000 and above the Bhutia households take the lead.

**Table 5.3.8. Community-wise Distribution of Household by Income Category
West District-2006**

Community	Household	0 - 2500	2501-5000	5001-10000	10001-25000	25001-Above
Bhutia	2813	997	1058	354	315	89
Lepcha	1816	750	711	221	117	17
Tamang	1185	459	430	152	119	25

Limboo	5307	2194	1951	651	429	82
Bahun	1092	352	341	143	189	67
Chettri	3045	1060	1119	447	349	70
Pradhan	634	178	210	97	99	50
Rai	3544	1420	1403	394	257	70
Manger	692	292	273	84	33	10
Gurung	2105	701	802	294	251	57
Sunwar/Mukhia	108	47	38	9	11	3
Thami	11	2	5	4	0	0
Jogi	31	10	16	1	3	1
Dewan	2	0	1	0	1	0
Bhujel	202	103	64	25	10	0
Kami	901	357	392	104	40	8
Damai	390	147	158	49	32	4
Sarki	72	39	22	8	2	1
Majhi	3	1	2	0	0	0
Sanyasi/Giri	61	22	29	6	3	1
Others	747	92	267	180	172	36
Total	24761	9223	9292	3223	2432	591

Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, DESME, 2006

Form the analysis in the four districts, it is seen that though Bhutias are in the minority with regard to population and households, they are still the highest income bearers. The Bhutia households in all four districts are the highest income bearer in the income category of Rs. 25000 and above. The potential confounding factor may be that they are largely represented in the job sectors as well as they are the biggest land owners in the state.

5.3.3. Landholding Status

The pattern of land distribution is also one of the determining factors in studying the socio-economic status of the communities. Communities have been categorised along the lines of land distribution by land size. However, not much data is available in this area.

Table 5.3.9.
Community-wise Distribution of Land in Sikkim (1976–83) (Area in Hectares, Rent in Rs)

Caste	Total Paddy Fields		Total Dry Land		Wasteland		Cardamom	Total Cultivated Land	
	Area %	Rent in ₹	Area %	Rent in ₹	Area %	Rent in ₹	Area %	Area %	Rent in ₹
Bhutia	27.12	25.13	16.13	15.37	24.18	24.28	27.05	20.32	19.11
Lepcha	14.97	14.07		18.48	17.53	13.42	32.72	20.38	16.15
Nepali	57.19	64.74	60.80	64.95	67.10	62.00	62.25	22.37	58.66
Total Public	99.28	100.00	99.56	100.00	99.60	100.00	82.15	99.36	100.00
Grand Total	11,727.1	93,647.9	64,739.8	172,986.1	11,734.4	16,362.5	21761.7	109,963.02	82,996.4

Source: Sikkim Human Development Report 2001, p 42.

The table on ‘Community wise distribution of land in Sikkim’ highlights the distribution of different categories of land owned by different ethnic communities immediately after the merger and formation of the new government in the new democratic state (1976–83). The study of the land distribution is studied in the form of total paddy fields, total dry land, wasteland, cardamom area and total cultivated land.

Nepalis owned nearly 59 percent of total cultivated land in 1983, as well as the largest share of total paddy fields, dry land and waste land area. The community contributed the most (64 percent) to state’s total land revenue. The Bhutias and Lepchas own 20% of the land and 19% and 16% of the revenue generated by land, respectively. The two communities, Lepcha and Bhutia, have the largest share under cardamom cultivation.

The socio-economic census of 2006 presents the distribution of land by land size amongst different communities in the state. The statistics provided in the table illustrates the distribution of land among three ethnic communities: Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepalese in 1976-83.

Table 5.3.10. Community-wise Distribution of Land in Sikkim 1976-83 (Area in Hectares)

Communities	Total Paddy fields (Area %)	Total Dry Land (Area %)	Wasteland (Area %)	Cardamom (Area %)	Total Cultivable land (Area %)
Bhutia	21.12	16.13	24.18	27.05	20.32
Lepcha	14.97	---	17.53	32.72	20.38
Nepali	57.19	64.95	62.00	22.37	58.66

Source: Land Record Section, Department of Land Revenue, Govt. of Sikkim, Gangtok.

The distribution of land amongst Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepalese in Sikkim from 1976-83 reveals that the Nepali group has the largest cultivated land, i.e 58.66%. Bhutias and Lepchas share equal percentages of 20% each. In terms of cardamom land owned, the Lepchas have 32.72% of total land, which is highest among the three communities. However, it has to be mentioned here that Lepchas and Bhutias' percentage of land owned is as a single group, whereas the land owned by the Nepalese is the consolidation of total land of all the Nepali communities.

Table 5.3.11. Community-wise Distribution of Land by Land Size

Community	Less Than 1 Acre in %	More than 1 Acre less than 2.5 Acre	More than 2.5 Acre less than 5 Acre	More than 5 Acre less than 10 Acre	More than 10 Acre less than 25 Acre	More than 25 Acre	Grand Total
Bhutia	83.17	10.58	2.40	2.40	0.96	0.48	100.00
Lepcha	78.81	13.91	3.97	0.00	3.31	0.00	100.00
Tamang	86.84	7.89	0.00	2.63	2.63	0.00	100.00
Limbo	91.45	4.61	1.97	1.97	0.00	0.00	100.00
Bahun	88.15	11.11	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.74	100.00
Chettri	84.83	12.36	2.25	0.00	0.56	0.00	100.00
Pradhan	87.50	7.50	2.50	2.50	0.00	0.00	100.00
Rai	89.21	8.27	2.16	0.36	0.00	0.00	100.00
Manger	85.48	14.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Gurung	95.31	1.56	1.56	1.56	0.00	0.00	100.00
Suwar/ mulkhia	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Thami	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Jogi	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00

Dewan	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Bhujel	83.33	16.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Kami	87.50	12.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Damai	100.00	0.00	00.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Sarki	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maji	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sanyasi/giri	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Others	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Grand total	86.80	9.60	1.91	0.88	0.66	0.15	100.00

Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, DESME, 2006.

Among the various social groups in Sikkim, 83.17% of Bhutia households possess less than 1 acre of land. In the category of more than 1 acre and less than 2.5 acres of land, Bhutia households have a share of 10.58%. Around 2.40% of households possess more than 2.5 acres less than 5 acres of land, 0.96% possess more than 10 acres and 0.48% Bhutia households possess more than 25 acres of land.

We see Bhutia as the community with the possession of large land areas in the state. The various reforms and notification of the government has led to the protection of lands owned by the Bhutias and Lepchas. For example: Revenue Order 1 has been an advantage to Bhutias for possession of large lands amongst the communities in the state as it forbids the selling of land without prior permission of the Darbar.

Sikkim gets its name “*Denzong*”, which means “Valley of Rice”. Hence, paddy cultivation is an important crop for all the communities of Sikkim

Table 5.3.12. Community-wise Distribution of Households Possessing Paddy Land, 2006

Community	Less Than 1 Acre	More than 1 Acre less than 2.5 Acre	More than 2.5 Acre less than 5 Acre	More than 5 Acre less than 10 Acre	More than 10 Acre less than 25 Acre	More than 25 Acre	Grand Total
Bhutia	1897	805	176	81	38	20	3017
Lepcha	2043	562	102	26	14	10	2757
Tamang	612	206	27	9	3	0	857
Limbo	2124	573	81	16	13	3	2810

Bahun	2225	815	173	44	15	3	3275
Chettri	2365	881	166	43	22	4	3481
Pradhan	687	251	49	20	11	4	1022
Rai	1486	492	104	21	10	1	2114
Manger	242	63	10	1	0	1	317
Gurung	535	141	20	2	7	0	705
Sunwar/mulkhia	50	20	3	0	1	0	74
Thami	3	2	0	0	0	0	5
Jogi	12	2	0	0	0	0	14
Dewan	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Bhujel	169	46	3	1	0	0	219
Kami	444	151	20	1	1	0	617
Damai	159	37	6	5	2	0	209
Sarki	17	9	0	0	0	0	26
Maji	2	3	2	0	0	0	7
Sanyasi/giri	52	21	7	1	0	1	82
Others	44	20	4	0	0	3	71
Grand total	15170	5100	953	271	137	50	21681

Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, DESME, 2006

The table above gives us an understanding from the statistical figures that out of a total of 21681 households in the state, 3017 Bhutia households possess paddy land. Around 13.9% of the land is shared by the Bhutias. In the category of less than 1 acre, 1897 (12.5%) paddy lands are under Bhutia households. About 805 (15.7%) of Bhutia households possess more than 1 acre and less than 2.5 acres of paddy land. In the category of more than 2.5 acres and less than 5 acres, 176 (18.4%) households possess land and 81 (29.8%) of households possess more than 5 acres and less than 10 acres of paddy land. In the category of more than 10 acres and less than 25 acres, 38 (27.7%) households possess land and 20 (40%) of Bhutia households possess paddy land which is above 25 acres.

Table 5.3.13. Community-wise Distribution of Land under Cardamom by Land Size

Community	Less Than 1 Acre	More than 1 Acre less than 2.5 Acre	More than 2.5 Acre less than 5 Acre	More than 5 Acre less than 10 Acre	More than 10 Acre less than 25 Acre	More than 25 Acre	Grand Total
Bhutia	2135	870	296	104	53	22	3480
Lepcha	1969	900	299	90	29	7	3294
Tamang	313	69	14	9	4	0	409
Limbo	1670	378	86	23	9	2	2168
Bahun	756	181	52	11	6	0	1006
Chettri	1111	295	76	25	11	1	1519
Pradhan	180	38	12	6	7	1	244
Rai	1418	410	115	29	13	2	1987
Manger	171	68	15	2	2	0	258
Gurung	986	256	81	21	8	2	1354
Sunwar/ mulkhia	18	4	2	0	0	0	24
Thami	6	2	0	0	0	0	8
Jogi	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Dewan	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Bhujel	24	3	1	0	0	0	28
Kami	143	15	6	1	0	0	165
Damai	33	0	1	0	1	0	35
Sarki	9	5	0	0	0	0	14
Maji	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sanyasi/Giri	19	6	3	0	0	0	28
Others	9	1	0	0	0	0	10
Grand total	10975	3501	1060	321	143	37	16037

Source: Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, DESME, 2006

Cardamom has always been the major cash crop in Sikkim. The Lepchas and Bhutias have been cultivating cardamom. With regard to the community wise distribution of land under cardamom by land size, the highest number of Bhutia households in Sikkim possess land under cardamom. In 2006, the total number of households in the state with cardamom land was 16037, with 3480 (21.6%) being Bhutia households.

In the category of less than 1 acre, 2135 (19.4%) Bhutia households possess land under cardamom. About 870 (24.8%) of Bhutia households possess more than 1 acre and less than 2.5 acres of land under cardamom. In the category of more than 2.5 acres and less than 5 acres, 296 (27.9%) households possess land and 104 (32.3%) of Bhutia households possess more than 5 acres and less than 10 acres of land under cardamom. In the category of more than 10 acres and less than 25 acres, 53 (37%) households possess land under cardamom and 22 (54%) of Bhutia households possess land under cardamom which is above 25 acres. According to the state socio economic census data of 2006, Bhutias outnumbered the other communities in occupation and land under cardamom.

As discussed in the previous sections, Sikkim's economy has changed over the years, particularly after the merger with India. New avenues for economic development have opened up and job opportunities have diversified while land remains a staple source of income for the Bhutias with the new economic opportunities and they have emerged as economic elites.

The Bhutias have contributed to expansion of Gangtok as the capital of Sikkim. A small hamlet until the construction of the Enchey Monastery in 1840, Gangtok was a Buddhist pilgrimage centre. Today, with a population of a total 219450 (102846 rural and 116604 urban), it has become a major trading, business and administrative centre in the state. The literacy rate of Gangtok is 80.1%, where rural literacy rate is 73.9% and the urban literacy rate is 85.1% (Census 2011). The work participation rate of Gangtok is 49% (107521 persons). 81.4% are main workers and 18.6% are marginal workers. According to the 2011 population Census, Gangtok Sub-Division records 18.7% as cultivators (34.5% in rural and 0.7% in urban areas) and 6.1% as agricultural labourers (10.3% in rural and 1.4 % in urban areas).

New buildings, big hotels and restaurants have replaced the old houses and shops in Gangtok. The owners of most of the buildings and hotels are Bhutias. In most of the Bhutia owned buildings, hotels, private offices, private banks and shops are opened. Some of them are on rent and some are leased to Indian businessmen. For example, one of the oldest Yama building, located at M.G Marg, has been rented to HDFC Bank and businessmen. The famous Denzong Regency, which has one of Sikkim's Casinos, situated near Zero point, Technical, Gangtok is owned by Bhutia. Similarly, some big and renowned hotels like Hotel Keepsa, Hotel Yangthang Heritage, Hotel Summit Denzong etc. are owned by Bhutias. Bhutia buildings are leased out to open Shopping complexes like Pantaloons, banks and car showrooms. The buildings along the

stretch of Mahatma Gandhi Marg (M.G Marg) where we find big and small shops and hotels are mostly owned by Bhutias.

Agriculture has become the secondary source of income for the present generation of Bhutia people. They are more engaged in business and trade, tourism and salaried jobs. As per the data obtained from various census and case studies, the Bhutias as agriculturist and agricultural labour has declined, but they still own large landed properties in Sikkim.

The Bhutias and Lepchas, inspite of being original groups in Sikkim, have been outnumbered by the Nepalese. However, the indicators of the socio-economic status of different communities residing in Sikkim show that the Bhutias have still managed to retain their socio-economic status high in the state as compared to other communities. The reason why the Bhutias still enjoy a high share in bureaucratic posts in the state is their affiliation to the royal family as well as their high socio-economic status. Their educational background also helped them to take a lead among all the other communities.