

Chapter 2

Sikkim at a Glance

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CHAPTER – 2

SIKKIM AT A GLANCE

2.1 Physical Features

The 22nd state of the Republic of India, Sikkim is a tiny hilly state which is situated in the north-eastern part of India. The State is bordered by Tibet in the north, in the east by Bhutan, in the west by Nepal and in the south by the Darjeeling district of West Bengal.

Sikkim became a State of Indian union in 1975. Prior to that it was an independent Country ruled by the hereditary king. The Kazis were the Ministers of the Kings or Chogyals of Sikkim. They were large land owners. Along with the Kazis, there were British political officers during the British rule to look after the administration of the state (Bhasin:1946).

The capital of the State is Gangtok. The whole State is divided into four districts-North, South, East and West. The Headquarter of these four districts are Mangan, Namchi, Gangtok and Gyalshing respectively.

The total area of the State covers 7,096 square kilometres and it is 112 kilometres long from north to south and about 64 kilometres wide from east to west. Out of the total area of the State, 59.56 per cent falls in the North district, 13.44 per cent falls in the East district, 10.57 per cent in the South district and 16.43 per cent falls in the West district (Annual Report of State Mission Authority 2002-2003).

The state lies between 27° 00' 46" to 28° 07' 48" North Latitude and 88° 00' 58" to 88° 5' 25" East Longitude (Statistical Profile 2002). Sikkim is a land of natural resources. The region has dense forest, magnificent variety of flora and fauna, many glaciers, natural lakes, mountain peaks, passes, hot springs. The highest peak of the world- Mount. Kanchanjunga (28, 156 feet) is situated on the western border of Sikkim.

The word 'Kanchanjunga' means 'the five treasures'. These five treasures include salt, grains, medicines, precious stones, religious scriptures which are represented by the five summits of this mountain. Out of love and fear, the people of Sikkim worship the mountain which act as a protection wall to the inhabitants [Chakaravathi :2003]. Other important mountain ranges of Sikkim are: a) Singalila Range which separates Sikkim from Nepal in the west, b) Chola Range which separates Sikkim from Tibet and Bhutan in the east and, c) Pangolia Range which separates Sikkim from Bhutan.

82 per cent of the land in Sikkim is under forest area. Though a limited part is merchantable, forest is a source of food, fuel, medicinal plants and also a great source of revenue for the government.

Rivers

The two main rivers of Sikkim are Tista and Rangit. River Tista originating from the Tsolham lake in North Sikkim and Rangit originating from the Rathong glacier in the west Sikkim flow from the north to the south. The tributaries of Tista are Dikchu, Rangyong, Bakchachu, Rongpochu, Zemuchu, Lachung chu. Rangbang, Relli, Rathong, Kalej are the tributaries of river Rangit. These two rivers and their tributaries provide great potential for hydro electric generation. The estimated hydroelectric potential of the State is about 3000 mega watt. Tista stage (V)-510 mega watt power project is already under construction (Annual report of S.S.A 2004-2005).

Elevations

Sikkim is the land with varied elevation. On the basis of its elevation, the type of land is classified into (i) Lower hills—which is ranging from 270 to 1500 metres altitude, (ii) Mid hills—altitude ranging from 1500 metres to 2000 metres, (iii) Higher hills—altitude ranging from 2000 to 3000 metres, (iv) Alpine zone—with vegetation which lies above 3900 metres altitude, (v) Snow land—where snow covers up to 8580 metres altitude. Very high mountains without vegetation lies at this snow bound land.

Ranges

Climatically Sikkim can be divided into five ranges owing to extreme variation in elevation. The altitude below 610 metres above sea – level have Tropical climate. Sub-tropical climate prevails at an altitude between 610 to 1524 metres,

Temperate climate prevails between 1524 to 2743 metres altitude; from this altitude onwards upto the height of 3962 metres Sub-Alpine climate prevails and Alpine climate zone reaches up to 5182 metres altitude.

Flora

On the basis of altitude and vegetation, Sikkim can be divided into three zones- (i) Tropical zones starts from sea level up to 1700 metres, where varieties of bamboo, sal, ferns, orchids are found, (ii) from 1700 metres to 4300 metres is Temperate zone where cherry, oak, chest nut, firs, pines, maples, magnolia are found. Up to 2000 metres altitude maize and rice are cultivated, at higher elevations wheat, barley and potato are cultivated, (iii) above 4300 metres altitude up to 5000 metres lies the Alpine zone. Cypress and giant cedars, premula dominate here. Vegetation disappears above 5000 metres altitude.

Sikkim is enriched by its floral wealth. There are about 4000 species of flowering plants. About 500 species of orchids, 300 species of ferns and its allies, about 30 species of rhododendrons which are locally called as 'Gurans' found in the state.

Fauna

There are about 500 species of birds, 600 species of butterflies, over 140 species of mammals in this area. Red Panda, musk deer, boar, leopard, cat, tiger, barking deer, sambar, black bear, ghoral etc are the wild animals found in this region.

Weather

The rainfall of this region varies from 1,250 millimetre to 3,500 millimetre annually. In the whole range of Himalayas, Sikkim is the most humid place. Because of this climatic condition, the region is considered the breeding ground for all kinds of diseases and pests both in standing crops and in storage (Bhasin : 1946). Rainy season starts from the month of May and continues upto end of October. Winter season of this place is very cold and dry and during the summer time, nights are cool.

Mineral Resources

This region is not very rich in mineral resources. Mineral resources mainly contain copper, zinc, lead, graphite etc.

Transport and Communication

Transport and communication system of the State was not very good in this region. But now the entire State is well connected by a network of roads, though there is still no railway connection in the State.

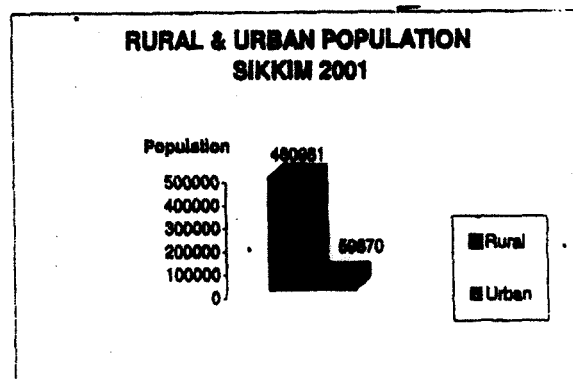
2.2 Demographic Features

The total population of Sikkim is about 5.40 lakhs (Census of India 2001) of whom 2.52 lakhs are female (46.7%) and 2.88 (53.34%) lakhs are male population. The State constitute only 0.05 per cent of the country's population. In the decade 1991-2001 there was an increase of 33 per cent population while over the century (1891-1991), population increased more than 12 times. There are 4 districts, 9 sub-divisions, 450 revenue blocks (villages) and 8 towns in this State. The density of population in the state is 76 persons per square kilometre. But density varied across districts. In East district it is 187 persons per square kilometre, in the North district it is 7 persons per square kilometre whereas the density of population of South and West district is 131 and 84 persons per square kilometre respectively. Concentration of population in the East district is therefore the highest whereas it has been noticed that the North district has the lowest share of the State's population. But area-wise North district occupies the first position comprising 59.55 per cent of the total geographical area of the State followed by West district (16.43%), East district (13.44%) and South district (10.57%). The total number of households in Sikkim is 1,14,223 as of 2001. There are 875 females per 1000 males which is much lower than that of national average of 933 females per thousand males.

The total number of literates in Sikkim in the year 2001 was 322828 of whom 191326 are male and 131502 are female. In 2001, the overall literacy rate in the State was 69.68 per cent. There is a disparity in the rates of literacy between male and female and in rural and urban areas. The literacy rate among the male was 76.73 per cent while it was 61.46 per cent among the female in 2001. The literacy rate in the rural areas was 67.67 per cent while it was 84.82 per cent in the urban areas in the year 2001. The average size of a household is 4.7. About 4,80,981 people live in rural areas and only 59,870 persons live in urban areas. According to Census 2001, about 89 per cent people live in rural areas whereas only 11 per cent live in urban areas. Except

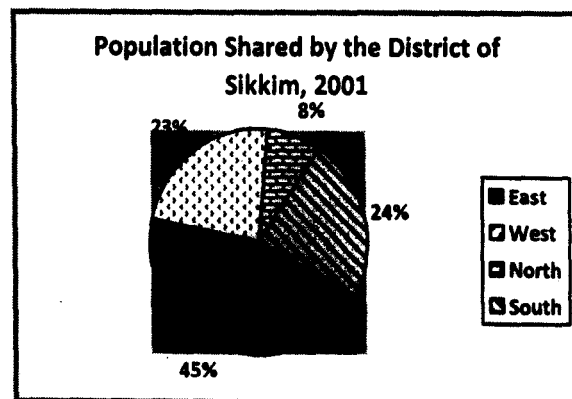
Gangtok, all other towns in Sikkim are too small for towns. Many towns in Sikkim are smaller than some villages. There are 20.6 per cent scheduled tribes and 5 per cent of the total population is constituted by scheduled castes. Religion-wise Hinduism is practiced by 68 per cent of the total population while 27 per cent are Buddhist and only 3 per cent of the total population are Christians.

Figure-1



Source: Primary Census Abstract, Sikkim, Census of India, 2001.

Figure-2



Source: Primary Census Abstract, Census of India, 2001

The Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese are the three different ethnic groups residing in Sikkim. Besides there are plainsmen too. The scheduled tribes are the Lepchas, the Bhutias, the Sherpas, the Limboos, the Tamangs and the scheduled castes belong to Nepalese service castes like Kami, Damai, Sarki etc (Lama: 2001, Choudhury: 2005).

Economy of the state is mainly based on agriculture. Rice and maize are the main crops. Apart from that wheat, potato, millet, barley, buckwheat, large cardamom,

ginger, orange are also grown. In western Sikkim, potato cultivation is increasing. In India, Sikkim has the largest area and highest production of cardamom (Joshi :2004). A fine variety of rice is also grown here. That is why Tibetans used to call this region as the valley of rice (Mahajan et.al:1991). Out of the total land utilization in the State, only 11 to 12 per cent area is available for cultivation. For rice cultivation, mainly terrace cultivation method is used and in few cases 'jhum' cultivation technique is used. Large cardamom and orange are two principal cash crops. Apart from these ginger and potato cultivation as cash crops are increasing. People of this region mainly use traditional agricultural implements and their dependency on monsoon rain water is still high. Hence productivity is stagnant and food production in the recent years has been declining. Lachen and Lachung are suitable places for apple cultivation. With the advancement in scientific research, tea cultivation has become a new venture of the state. To help and guide local efforts in cardamom cultivation, the Regional Office of the Cardamom Board of India was established here (Mahajan et.al:1995). Apart from that emphasis is being given on the development of floriculture and horticulture crops. Sericulture was introduced in the State in late 1970s. Due to non-traditional nature, it is not widely spread till date.

In the higher mountain valleys, instead of rice, other crops are grown and people of these areas are also engaged in cattle rearing and cottage industries. Poultry farming is also practiced in Sikkim.

Sikkim is an industrially backward state. The industries of the State can be classified as-cottage industries, small scale industries and medium scale industries. There are 367 small-scale units, 36 cottage industries, 3 medium scale industries and 3 Public Sector Undertakings in Sikkim. The Department of Industries has given emphasis on the promotion and development of small industries which generate employment opportunities to the local youths. At Singtam, a fruit preservation factory is functioning. A number of small industrial units are producing different products like wrist watch, bakery products, leather goods, washing soaps, jewellery etc. Rangpo (the copper mining town) can be called the only industrial town in Sikkim. This town is now known more for its distilleries than copper. At Melli, Jorethang and Temi, a few industries have come up. Temi Tea Estate (South district) is

the only tea estate in Sikkim which is popular for its superior quality of tea. Efforts have been made to promote and preserve traditional arts and crafts and for that reason in 1957 The Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom was established. Crafts such as wood carving, carpet weaving, traditional type of handloom, bamboo work, toy making, 'thanka' painting etc. skills are promoted and preserved.

Besides agriculture and industry, tourism has also become an important part of the State's economy. Some of the important tourist places are Gangtok, Yumthang, Varsey, Rumtek, Tashiding, Pemayangtse monastery, Tshangu etc. There are about 200 monasteries in Sikkim. To promote tourism as an industry in the State, a Tourist Development Corporation was setup in the State during the 8th plan period.

On the basis of occupation, the people of Sikkim may be grouped in three different categories-main workers, marginal workers and non workers. In the year 2001, the total number of workers (main and marginal) in the State was 263320. The total number of main workers in Sikkim was 212478 in 2001, of which 131422 were cultivators, 16939 were agricultural labourers, 3250 were household industry workers and 111709 were other workers. There were 50842 marginal workers and 277173 non workers in the State. More than half (51.28%) of the total population of Sikkim is non-worker. In the sector of marginal workers, female workers are more than the male workers. In 2001, there were 6.69 per cent male marginal workers against 12.50 per cent female marginal workers in the State but in urban areas, the number of male marginal workers (4.35%) was higher than female marginal workers (1.99%) [Sikkim: A Statistical Profile 2002, Government of Sikkim].

2.3 Findings

The landlocked State Sikkim is bound by Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and Darjeeling district of West Bengal. This tiny hill State joined the motherland India in 1975. Before that it was an independent country where monarchy system used to prevail. The State used to be counted as an economically and politically backward one. But once democracy was established, the economic structure was built and total scenario regarding the development strategy was changed. 'Sikkim has recorded several significant gains in human development after merging with India in 1975.' (Lama: 2001)

Total area of Sikkim is 7,096 square kilometres which covers 0.22 per cent of the total geographical area of India. It is divided into four districts. The head quarter of North district is Mangan, followed by Namchi, Gangtok and Gyalshing for South, East and West districts respectively. The density of population in the State is 76 persons per square kilometre which varies district-wise. The density of population in the North district is only 7 persons per square kilometre while it is 187 persons, 131 persons and 84 persons per square kilometre in the East, South and West district respectively. The State is rich in its natural resources. Its rich civilization and cultural heritage gives the State an important place among all the states of India. The region has dense forest, rich variety of flora and fauna, different species of orchids, butterflies, mammals, birds and moths.

Rivers like Tista, Rangit and their tributaries flow in this region. The State has green valleys, mountains, peaks, varied elevations, different climatic ranges, different vegetation zones, and glaciers. Annual rainfall in this region is very high and it is a very humid place.

According to the Census of 2001, total population of the State is 5.40 lakhs of whom 2.52 lakhs are female and 2.88 lakhs are male population. The density of population is 76 persons per square kilometre. But district-wise the density of population varies. The sex ratio is 875 females per 1000 males which is very low compared to the national average. Rural population in the State is more than its urban population. East district has the highest share and North district has the lowest share of the State's population. Among the religious groups, Hindus are numerically dominant followed by Buddhists and Christians. Population of the State consist of three ethnic groups viz. the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese and some plainsmen too settled here generations ago.

The economy of Sikkim is mainly dependent on agriculture. Apart from agriculture, animal husbandry, tourism, forest resources also provide livelihood to the people. But in recent years, food production has declined. People depend on traditional agricultural techniques and monsoon rain water in most parts of the State. Moreover scattered and small land holding, shifting cultivation methods are also responsible for

low agricultural productivity. However there is immense scope for commercial crop or cash crop production.

Industrially the state is still backward. Some of the factors act as barriers to industrial development which are: (a) lack of physical infrastructure,(b)lack of raw material,(c)lack of skilled manpower,(d)lack of marketing facility,(e)lack of finance and credit facilities,(f) lack of land based resources and(g) high cost of infrastructure.

Recently private sectors with the partnership of the State Government, horticulture, floriculture and tourism industry has flourished in the State.In 2001,t otal workers in Sikkim was 263320.There were 50842 marginal workers and 277173 persons in the State were non workers in the same year.The number of female workers in the marginal sector was more than male workers in the State and its rural areas while in the urban areas,male marginal workers were more than their female counterpart.