CHAPTER – III

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

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3.1. Introduction

Sikkim lies in the heart of the towering Eastern Himalayas spread below the Mountain Khangchendzonga (8,534 meters), the third highest Mountain in the world. The state is bordered with Tibet in the Nortn, Bhutan in the East, Nepal in the West and West Bengal in the South with a total area of 7,096 sq. kms constitutes 0.22 per cent of the total geographical area of India, measuring approximately 100 kilometers from North to South and 60 kms from East to West. The elevation ranges from 244 meters to over 8,540 meters above sea-level. The State is situated between 880^0 00' 58" and 880^0 55' 25" East longitudes and 270^0 00' 46" and 280^0 07' 48" North latitudes. Tista and Rangit are the two major rivers with its origin Cholamu Lake and Rathong Glacier respectively. Amidst the grandeur of the mountain peaks, lush valleys, fast flowing rivers, terraced hills, Sikkim offers a paradise of experience. Within a matter of hours one can move from the sub-tropical heat of the lower valleys to the cold of the rugged mountain slopes that reach up to the areas of perpetual snow (Joshi, 2010). It became a full-fledged state of the Indian Union on 16th may 1975. The state has a open border with China. The present population of the state is 6, 07,688, distributed across its four districts; East 2, 81,293, West 1, 36,299, North 433, 54 and South 1, 46,742 (Census, 2011). The female population stands at 2, 86,027 against the male population of 3, 21,661 with a population density of 86 per square kilometer (Census, 2011). Its population of Scheduled Caste (Kami, Damai, Lohar, Sarki and Majhi) is 27,165 and Scheduled Tribe (Lepcha and Bhutia including Chumbipa, Dopthapa, Dukpa, Kagatey, Shrepa, Tibetan, Tromopa and Yolmo) population is 1, 11,405 respectively (Census, 2001). The population of Sikkim is of multi-ethnic and can broadly be classified into Tribal and Non-Tribal groups. Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalies are the main inhabitants of the state. The people from the plain mostly involved in Trade and Services represents a marginal group. Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity are the main religion follows by the people of Sikkim, as per the census

of India the population of Hindu is 3, 29, 548, Buddhist is 1, 34, 809, and Christian is 28,882 and 9,567 are others.

Table 3.1: Decade-wise Details of Population in Sikkim (1951-2011)

YEAR	TOTAL POPULATION
1951	137,798
1961	162,189
1971	209,843
1981	316,385
1991	369,451
2001	540,851
2011	607,688

Source: Census Reports 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011.

Sikkim is the second smallest state of India, after Goa. The state has 11 official languages; Nepali (which is its lingua franca), Bhutia, Lepcha (since 1977), Limbu (since 1981), Newari, Rai, Gurung, Mangar, Sherpa, Tamang (since 1995) and Sunwar (since 1996). It is the only state in India with an ethnic Nepalese majority. English is both the medium of instruction in schools as well as a language of communication in the state government. Hinduism and Vajrayana Buddhism are the predominant religions. Gangtok is the capital and the largest town. Economy of the state is basically agrarian and has a booming tourism industry.

The per-capital income of Sikkim stands at Rs.11, 356. The total area used for cultivation is 1, 09,068 hectares. From the total population 49.91% cultivators, 51.28% are non workers, 6.43% are agricultural labours, 39.31% are main workers and 9.41% are marginal workers. The literacy rate of Sikkim is 82.20% as per census 2011, male literacy is 87.30% and female literacy is 76.43% respectively. As per the census of India 2001 the total number of pre-primary schools are 978 out of which 739 are government and 2,39 are private. The total numbers of lower primary are 297 out of which 183 are government and 114 are private. The total numbers of primary schools are 390 out of which 313 are government and 77 are private. The total numbers of junior high schools

are 153 out of which 127 are government and 26 are private. The total numbers of secondary schools are 90 out of which 80 are government and 10 are private. The total numbers of senior secondary schools are 41 out of which 36 are government and 5 are private. The state also has 7 colleges and training institutes out of which 5 are government and 2 are private. It has 5 teacher training institutes out of which 2 government and 3 are private.

The state has taken many initiatives to develop its educational system to meet the demands of the people. But then it is observed that the state is still lacking behind especially in higher education. A vast majority of the graduates are compelled to go outside the state for their higher and technical education as most of the needed courses are not available. The state till 1998 did not have its own university except Manipal University which is private but at present the state has five Universities.

3.2. People

Sikkim is a multi-ethnic state consists of Tribal and Non- Tribal groups. The Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalies are the main inhabitant of the state. The people from the plain mostly involved in Trade and services represent a marginal group.

3.2.1. The Lepchas

Lepchas are the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim, migrated from Mayel, a legendary kingdom on the slopes of Khangchendzonga. They called themselves, Rong Pa literally the Lepcha terminology refers to the beloved people of the mother earth or Rongkup (Children of Rong) since they followed Bongthing and worshipped the spirits of mountains, forests and rivers. Racially the Lepchas belongs to the Mongolian stock with oblique eyes small in stature and fair in complexion they are amiable, cheerful, hospitable, shy, good humored, sociable, indolent, docile and peace loving. Initially a higher concentration of Lepcha population was found in the Dzongu valley of North Sikkim. Their main habitations located on hill tops, which is almost inaccessible to others. Initially they were hunter and food gatherers and later entered into trade and agriculture and they grow cardamom, cinnamon, paddy and oranges. The tribe is noted

for their craftsmanship. Their knowledge on entomology is noteworthy to mention since the area is identified as one of the biodiversity hotspots where in there are numerous varieties or herbs and other living organisms. The Lepcha tribe is now spread in all parts of Sikkim because of the development of the network of roads, communications. Some of the population got converted to Buddhism and some converted to Christianity. The Lepchas have their own language and script and it is recognized by the Government of Sikkim and is now a medium of instruction up to Graduation level. They have held many important posts under various rulers of Sikkim and now they have come to the level of bureaucrats, ministers and hold other covetable posts under Government of Sikkim. In Sikkim legislative Assembly, 12 seats are reserved for Lepchas and Bhutias.

Table 3.2: Number of Lepcha Population (1840-1991)

YEAR	NUMBER OF POPULATION	PERCENTAGE TO TOTAL POPULATION
1840	3010 (Approx.)	43
1891	5762	19.1
1909	6000	9.7
1931	13,060	11.89
1951	13,625	9.89
1961	14,847	9.8
1971	22,306	12.4
1981	22,147	8.3
1991	56,904	14

Source: Gurung, 2011

3.2.2. The Bhutias

Bhutias migrated to Sikkim in the 15th century and are mainly descendants of the early settlers from Tibet and Bhutan. They accompanied ancestors of the first Chogyal Phuntsog Namgyal and settled in higher altitude, driving the Lepchas to the forests and lower valleys. The Bhutias are sturdy and well built with a good physique and Mongolian features. Their villages are big and are arranged in tiers on undulating hills. They follow Buddhism and the monasteries occupy a predominant place and play an important role in the socio-cultural life of the Bhutias. They prefer to live in patriarchal joint family. The Bhutia families are known as the category of village headmen and Landlords or Kazis.

The Bhutas promoted Jhoom (shifting) cultivation and grew paddy, kodo (millet), maize and other cereals. The Bhutias have imbibed the Tibetan Civilization and it is reflected in their dresses, ornaments, religion and scripts. Their language is known as Sikkimese language (Bhutia language). The Bhutia language is taught up to degree level. University of North Bengal has included Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo languages since 2000. Sikkimese Bhutia language is a State recognized language.

Monasteries, prayer flags, prayer wheels and chortens are a part of their lives. 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. They follow the Tibetan Buddhist calendar which has 12 years and 60 year cycles. The 12 years are named after 12 animals and the combination with 5 elements (namely wood, water, iron, fire and earth) is used for the 60 year cycles.

The Bhutias are expert weavers, the hand-woven rugs, carpets and blankets are very popular and quite high in demand. The theme of Bhutia art and paintings are derived from Buddhist spirituality 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. The Bhutia society is undergoing subtle changes owing to education, culture, social events, government jobs, political and constitutional safeguards and government employment. The Bhutias along with Lepchas have 12 seats reserved in the State Legislative Assembly.

Table 3.3: Bhutia Population (1840-1991)

YEAR	COMMUNITIES		
	Sikkimese Bhutia	**Bhutia Unspecified**	**Tibetan Bhutia**
1840	1995	N.A.	N.A.
1891	4894	N.A.	N.A.
1909	6000	N.A.	N.A.
1911	10411	12433	N.A.
1921	9639	9639	N.A.
1931	11070	15130	560
1951	15626	15626	N.A.

1961	36577	10762	6690
1971	36760	29875	33931
1981	21548	N.A.	4149
1991	65033	N.A.	N.A.

Source: Gurung, 2011

3.2.4. The Nepalese

The Nepalese comprise over 70 percent of Sikkim's population. They migrated from Nepal and settled in Sikkim in the last two decades of 19th century and it was encouraged by the British. The Nepali community of Sikkim is a mélange of various castes and a highly stratified society, speaking their own vernacular and having a culture of their own. They are divided into the Bahuns, Chettris, Newars, Mangers, Murmis, Rais, Limbus, Tamangs, Gurungs and scheduled caste namely Kamis, Damais and Sarkis. The New Nepali settlers were invited and brought as an agrarian force and promoters of sharecrops. They introduced the terrace farming to give the landscape an unimpeachable beauty and a sensible agricultural system which suited very much the terrain of Sikkim.

Nepali language, the lingua-franca of the State is spoken by all communities in Sikkim. This language is widely taught in schools and colleges in the State. It has received Constitutional recognition in the year 1992 and is included in the seventh schedule of the Constitution of India. Nepali language and literature are taught upto Ph.D level in Calcutta University, University of North Bengal, Allahabad and Banaras Hindu University.

Table 3.4: Nepali Population (1840-1991)

YEAR	POPULATION
1840	1995
1891	18,981
1909	5,000
1931	36,105
1951	97,863
1961	88,916
1971	1,34,236

1981	1,92,295
1991	2,84,520

Source: Gurung, 2011

It is essential here to point out that there are many people from other states of India settled in Sikkim. Firstly, the Marwaris belong to business community, who 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 and Haryana. These communities are also involved in business and other associated works and allied professions, rest of the people from other States are employed in Central and State Government jobs and in other professional areas like teaching and other technical areas.

It is interesting to note that there are many Tibetans settled in Sikkim and their status is same as prevalent in other parts of the Country. Still the Tibetans feel comfortable and are very much at home because of the similar culture, language, traditions, religion followed in Sikkim by the ethnic Sikkimese Bhutias and Lepchas.

3.3. Status of Education in Sikkim

Education in the state witnessed a rapid growth with the states merger in 1975 and in terms of infrastructure and training. There has been a notable decline in the school dropout rates especially in the lower grades and gender gap in school enrolment has also fallen down. The state has one of the lowest teacher-pupil ratios in the country. The state has since witnessed a marked improvement in its effective literacy rate (82.0 Per cent out of which 87.30% male and 76.43% female as per Census 2011), although female literacy is still lagging substantially behind.

There are numerous schools established in Sikkim affiliated either to the ICSE or CBSE board of education which is an epitome of the augmenting standards of Sikkim education. But, the major renaissance has been in the field of higher education, owing the fact that the number of colleges being established is met to the ever increasing demands of the career-minded pupils. There are all together 5 universities in Sikkim namely Sikkim Manipal University (1998), ICFAI University (2004), EIILM University (2006),

Vinayaka Missions Sikkim University (2008) and Sikkim University (2006) out of which 4 are private and 1 is government. The numbers of schools in Sikkim at present are presented below:

Table 3.5: Numbers of Schools in Sikkim 2011

Sl. No.	CATEGORY OF SCHOOL	EAST	WEST	NORTH	SOUTH	TOTAL
1.	LOWER PRIMARY	22	37	10	25	94
2.	PRIMARY	185	184	46	190	602
3.	JUNIOR HIGH	101	67	21	78	268
4.	SECONDARY	43	33	15	35	126
5.	Sr. SECONDARY	26	13	4	12	55
TOTAL		377	334	96	340	1145
6.	SSA	9	16	13	15	57
GRAND TOTAL		386	350	109	355	1202

Source: www.sikkim-hrd.gov.in/rti.htm, Department of Education, Government of Sikkim.
Note: SSA- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Govt. Schools As On 01.07.2011 and Pvt. School as On 27.09.2009.

The total number of schools at present in Sikkim is 1202 (including both govt. and private). From table-1 it is found that the north district has less number of schools in every stage of school as compared to other three district of Sikkim, this may be because of a relatively small population in north district i.e. 43,354 as per census 2011, comparison to other districts; east having a population of 281293, south 146742 and west 136299, respectively. On the other hand east district has the highest number of schools in all the categories of school except the number of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan it may be because the main focus of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is to benefit the people living in the rural areas and amongst the four district of Sikkim east district has comparatively more urban settlements. But, overall it seems that number of schools in Sikkim is distributed as per its size of population in all the four districts; east district (population: 281293 and no. of schools: 386), south district (population: 146742 and no. of schools: 355), west district (population: 136299 and no. of schools: 350), and north district (population: 43354 and no. of schools: 109).