Sikkim, a multiethnic state is officially composed of twenty different communities as per the 2011 census. Basically Sikkim has three ethnic communities; Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali. There is a consensus that Lepchas are the original population of Sikkim. The limboo, the Mangar and the Bhutia are the other communities who have come to Sikkim quite early in the Middle Ages (Namgyal and Dolma, 1908). Initially Bhutia's had the absolute majority of population in Sikkim. Like any other society Sikkim also has witnessed changes in the population structure. Gradually Sikkim witnessed change in the demographic profile with the influx of the Nepali community. The bulk of the population belonging to the Nepali community from other parts of India especially from west Bengal, Assam (India) and Nepal migrated and settled in Sikkim during the late and early 20th centuries. The process of migration further got accelerated after Sikkim became the protectorate of the British in 1861. This migration of population, particularly Nepalese led Sikkim into the road of population diversity.

It is understood from the historical prospective that the settlement of Bhutia’s in Sikkim basically began in the 15th and the 16th century. According to Maharaja Thutop Namgyal and Maharani Yeshey Dolma Namgyal (1908), the migration of Bhutia’s took place in various forms and ways. Since the establishment of Chogyal rule (Nangyal dynasty) in 1642, the population of Bhutia’s gradually expanded in Sikkim. The migration was also seen during the Chinese influence of Tibet and the escape of Tibet King cum religious head, His Holiness Dalai Lama into India.

Availability of limited source on the early demographic record of ethnic communities of Sikkim limits the study on the demographic profile of Sikkim. Only after 1888 when Sikkim came under British Superintendency, the population census was conducted by the British political officer in Sikkim. Before 1975, the population figures of the ethnic communities in Sikkim have also been drawn from Limboo chronicles and Lepcha folklores and legends. The Tibetans texts and traditions have also been the source for the record of ethnic population distribution in the early history of Sikkim.

According to Rishley, the first population census of Sikkim was held in 1891. It was the first ethnic wise population census of Sikkim. It shows that there existed about fourteen communities. The 1891 census gave rough population estimate of 30,458. With regard to population ratio the Lepchas stands at the top followed by Bhutia’s, Limboo’s, Gurung, Tamang's and others.

The first population census conducted in 1891 also reveals that Lepchas constituted the highest numbers of population with total 5762 persons. The male population included 2362 persons, females included 2399 persons and 1001 were children. Bhutia's were the second highest with total of 4804 persons, where the male population was 1996, 1960 were female population and 968 were children. The next highest population after Bhutia's were the Limboos constituting of total population of 3356, where male population comprised of total 1255 persons, female population included 1159 persons and 943 children.

The available data presents that even prior to the census of 1891, in Sikkim there existed a multi-cultural society. Apart from the Lepchas and the Bhutia’s the other communities like Limboo, Tamang, Rai, Gurung, Khambu, Brahman (Sharma), Chetri, Kami, Mangar, Newar and others lived in Sikkim. This indicates that the existence of other communities side by side has always been a threat to Bhutia paramountcy in Sikkim.

The demographic pattern underwent a great change with the Nepalese migration into Sikkim. The settlement of the Nepalese into Sikkim not only brought difference in the demographic profile but also created a new socio cultural life as the majority of the migrated Nepalese professed Hinduism.

Within a short span of time the Nepalese as a whole became the largest community in Sikkim, outnumbering both the Lepchas and the Bhutia’s. However, in political and administrative management of the country, the migrated group of people remained minor players till the merger of Sikkim took place in 1975.

Considering Nepalese as an industrious people they were welcomed by the Chogyal of Sikkim. Nepalese were engaged in extending the settlements by clearing the forests and increasing agricultural cultivation. They introduced new methods of agriculture including the terraced farming. The migration of Nepalese helped Sikkim in the attainment of development and prosperity in the agricultural and economic fields.
According to the population census of 2011, the highest number of Bhutia's are concentrated in the east district with 34043 persons, followed by south district with 13805 persons, west district with 13779 persons and north district with 7971 persons.

The census, 2011 gives the impression that the Bhutia population has decreased compared to the death rate. Though the rule of Bhutia's in Sikkim came to an end 42 years back, still they have been able to maintain their position to second largest community after Rai.

The paper has also extended to study district wise distribution of Bhutia Community in the state. It is noted that the East district comprises of the highest number, followed by south district, north district and then west district. Table below gives the picture of district wise distribution of Bhutia's in the state in 2006.

Table 2. District wise distribution of Bhutia community, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Bhutia population</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
<th>Sex ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>9221</td>
<td>4717</td>
<td>4504</td>
<td>13.42</td>
<td>955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>37818</td>
<td>19404</td>
<td>18414</td>
<td>55.03</td>
<td>949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>14177</td>
<td>7255</td>
<td>6922</td>
<td>20.61</td>
<td>954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>7500</td>
<td>3787</td>
<td>3713</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>980</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Socio Economic Census, Govt. of Sikkim, 2006

Bhutia's comprise of total 13.08% out of the total population in the state. It is evident that within the age group 60 and above have higher population than the lower ages. The highest percentage of population is seen within the age group of 75 and above. It shows that the birth rate within this community is low as compared to death rate.

The census, 2011 gives the impression that the Bhutia population has decreased over the decade. It enumerates that total Bhutia population is 69598 as against 70308 in 2001. According to the population census of 2011, the highest number of Bhutia's are concentrated in the east district with 34043 persons, followed by south district with 13805 persons, west district with 13779 persons and north district is the least Bhutia populated district with only 7971 persons.

Table 3. Percentage distribution of Bhutia population by age group in Sikkim, 2006

|----------|------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------|----------|

Source: DESME, State socio-economic status census, 2006

The population figure shows that in all the districts higher number of Bhutia population lives in rural areas. While making a comparative study between male and female population, the number of male population is higher than the female in rural areas. Only in west district female is slightly higher than the male population. The urban statistics show that in east, south and west district the female population has outnumbered the male population. The district where male population is higher in urban areas is the north district. In total, the female Bhutia population living in the urban areas is 9645 and that of male is 9097. At present the Bhutia population stands at 11.39 % of the total population in Sikkim. In the wake of time, the population of Sikkim has consistently increased. Sikkim witnesses an increase of 1.23 % in its population on yearly basis. The population census shows that there has been not much progress in Bhutia population as compared to population of the state.

REFERENCES: