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Changing Patterns of Demography in Almora District of Kumaun Himalaya in between 2001-2011

Dr. Puran ch. Joshi
Block Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, Almora, Uttarakhand, India
Dr. Deepak
Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, SSJ Campus Almora, Kumaun University, Uttarakhand, India

Abstract:
Demographic changes are the dynamics in the quantifiable statistics of a given population. Demography seeks to understand population changes by investigating such demographic components as gender, age, ethnicity, home ownership, mobility, disabilities, language knowledge, employment status and location. Present paper traces out the changing patterns of demography in Almora district in Kumaun Himalaya. Population density, sex ratio and literacy are the basic components which have been taken for this study.

Keywords: Demography, Sex ratio, Kumaun Himalaya, Population density.

1. Introduction
Almora is one of the most important Himalayan districts in India. It has unique diversity in various elements. But its population resource is one of the major issues in the present scenario. Almora consist of eleven blocks (Hawalbagh, Dwarahat, Bhainsiyachana, Dhauladevi, Takula, Chaukhutia, Tarikhet, Salt, Syalde, Bhikiyasain and Salt). In the recent past, Almora has shown a rapid growth of population and a large scale rural out migration which creation many socio-economic problems for the implementation of development programs in both rural and urban areas. The economic development of this region is mainly based on agriculture, but agricultural activities are not sufficient for the livelihood of the whole population of the region (Negi et al; 2007) A large section of the population; mostly male population is migrating from villages to the other parts of the country. In Almora there is hardly any family left in villages from which a member has not migrated to other states of the country in the search of livelihood and for better quality of life. The out migration of man power is closely related to the regional backwardness (Belwal and Bhatt, 2007)

2. Study Area
The Almora district is situated in Uttarakhand and is located at 29° 5' north to 29° 50' north and 79° 2' east to 80° 39' east. It is situated between Ramganga and Panar valleys and is interspersed with many smaller hill ranges like Ranikhet range, Syahi Devi range and regions like Salt-Manila and Dhikala regions. Almora district is surely a place with great weather, which is cold most of the times, with occasional rain. Almora is surrounded by other districts of Uttarakhand including Bageshwar and Chamoli on Northern side, Pauri on western side, Nainital on southern and champawat on the eastern side. The district is located in the Kumaon division of the state, the name of the sociocultural region of Kumaun is believed to have been derived from "Kurmanchal", meaning Land of the Kurmavtar (the tortoise incarnation of Lord Vishnu,Preserver of Hindu Trinity).
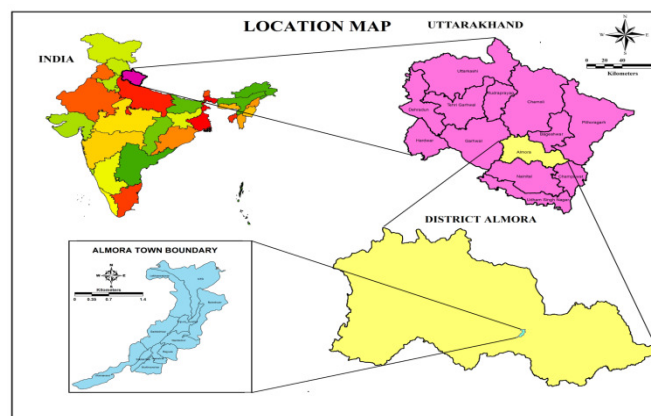

Figure 1: Location Map of the Study area

3. General Geography of the Study Area

The entire region falls within one physiographic unit, the Lesser Himalaya. The area, on an average, reflects a rough undulating terrain which is dissected by several small and large perennial and non-perennial streams. High mountain ridges and deep river valleys are the common features of the orography of the area. The altitudinal range of the relief varies from about 600 mtrs to 3000 mts.

The region can be categorized into the following climatic zones: (i) Warm sub-tropical zone: found at elevations 600 – 950 mts; mean annual temperature: 18.9° – 21.1°c (ii) Warm temperate zone: 950 – 1830 mts; 13.9° - 18.9°c (iii) Cool temperate zone: 1830 – 2440 mts; 10.3° - 13.9°c (iv) Cold zone: 2440 – 3000 mts; 4.5° - 10.3°c.

The monsoon season starts in July and can last till September. Snowfall is quite a regular phenomenon here since the temperature can fall up to -2 degree Celsius during the winter season.

Figure 2: Kumaun University Almora Campus during the snow fall

In natural vegetation Pine and Oak are the main trees, Kaphal, Buransh, Deodar, Uttis, Ayar etc. are other main species. Ghingaru, Kurie (lantana) Cactus & grass are found in dry areas.

The soil cover of mountainous parts of the region is thin. Thick layers of soils are distributed mainly in the valleys and broad river tracts. Absolute rock exposures are the prominent features of crystalline basements, particularly in the high altitudes of Himadri. Mainly on the basis of chemical composition and fertility of the soils, the study area can be divided into five main soil regions.

4. Discussion

Almora has a total population of 621927 persons as per the 2011 Census. This is 6.14% of the state's total population. The district has a rural population of 559595 (7.96% of Uttarakhand's rural population) and an urban population of 62332, forming only 2.04% of the state's urban population. It is obvious, therefore, that the urban population in the district is very small – only about 10% of the districts population is classified as urban.
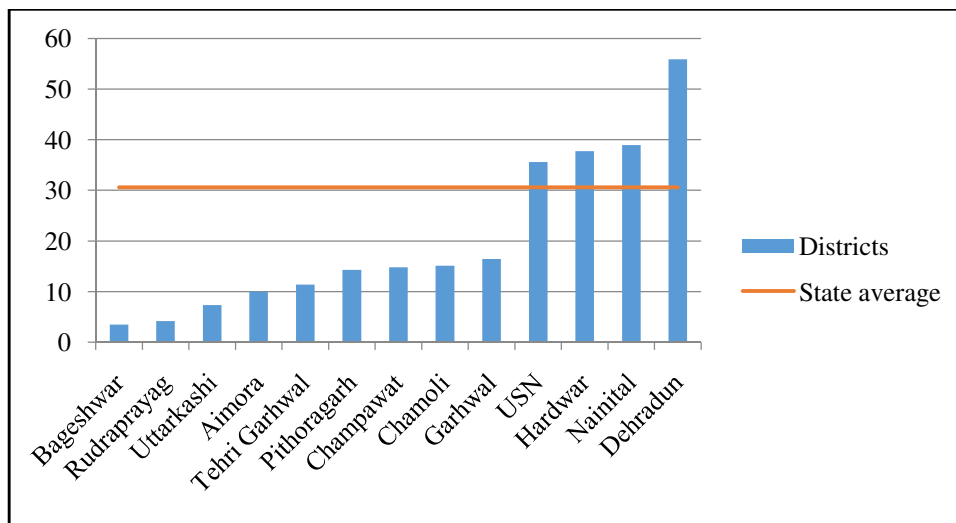

Figure 3: Percentage of population in urban sector 2011

While the state as a whole has about a third of its population residing in urban sectors, the figure shows that this is driven by only four districts – Udhamsingh Nagar, Hardwar, Nainital and Dehradun. For all other districts, the proportion is much smaller than the state average. Almora is the fourth smallest in terms of proportion of population residing in the urban sector in 2011. With just a 10% urban population, it is one of the least urbanized districts of the state. This is also seen from the fact that Almora has only one Municipality and one Nagar Panchayat (Notified Area Council). There are no habitations listed as Census towns in the district.
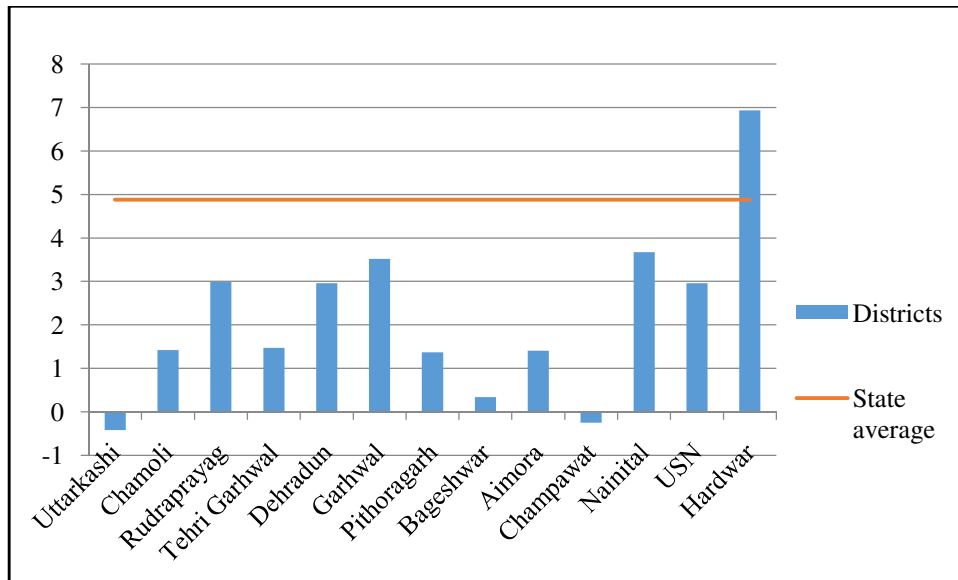

Figure 4: Urbanisation between 2001 and 2011

In terms of the change in urban population between 2001 and 2011, Almora again ranks quite low on the scale. For the state as a whole, urban population increased by about 5 percentage points over the decade. The biggest driver of this increase is Hardwar, where urban population increased by almost 7 percentage points. In case of Almora, however, the increase has been a miniscule 1.4 percentage points over the decade.
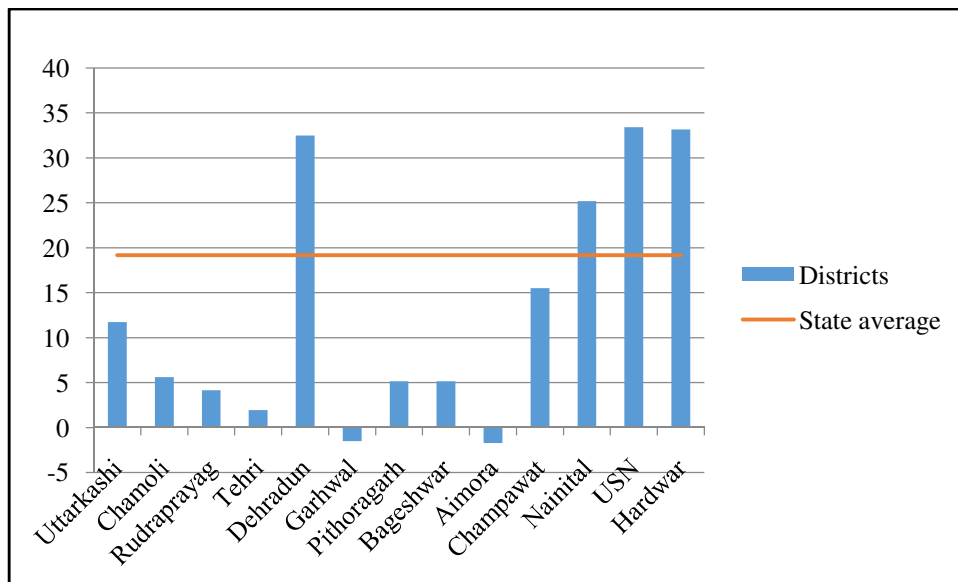

Figure 5: Growth in population 2001-2011

The overall population of the state has increased by 19.17% between 2001 and 2011. The rise in overall population is driven by four districts – Dehradun, Udhamsingh Nagar, Hardwar, and to a lesser extent, Nainital. These are the districts where large increases in population have been noted – largely in the urban sector, as seen earlier. All other districts have relatively small increases in population. In Almora, the overall population has actually declined by 1.42% over the decade. Almora and Tehri Garhwal are the only two districts where this has happened. It is likely that these hilly districts have seen large scale outmigration into other urbanized plains districts.

Disaggregated block wise data is not so far available for the 2011 Census. In this analysis, therefore, we have made use of the 2001 Census for block wise analysis.
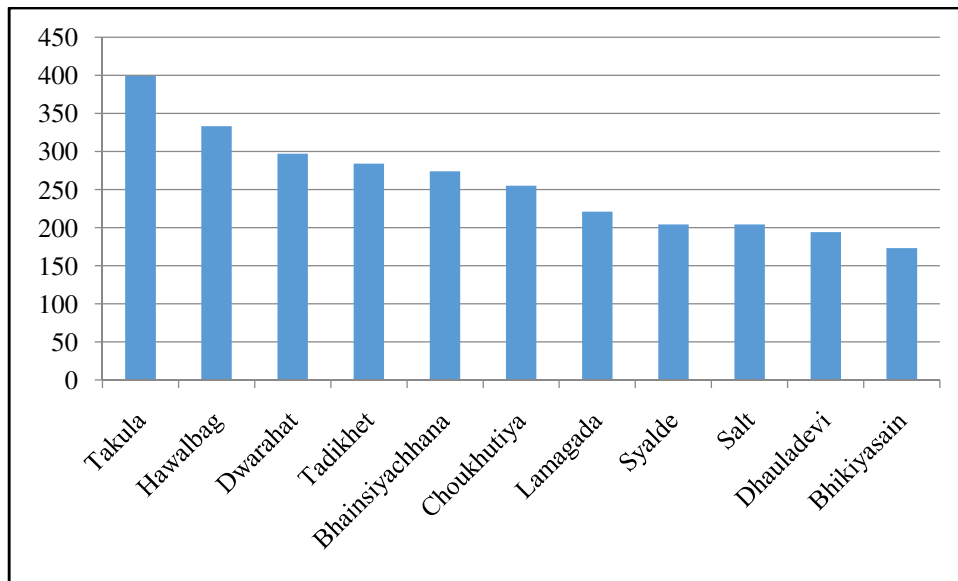
Figure 6: Population density 2001

The highest density of population is in Takula block (400 persons/ sq. km.), while the lowest is in Bhikiyasain (173 persons per sq. km.). Therefore we observe a huge diversity in the distribution of population across the various blocks in the district.

In 2001, the average population density in Uttarakhand was 159 persons per sq. km. Almora district, with a population density of 201, was more densely populated than the state average. Within the district, only the blocks of Syalde, Salt, Dhauladevi and Bhikiyasain have a lower than average population density. All other districts are much more densely populated compared to the district average.

Between 2001 and 2011, the density in Uttarakhand as a state has increased from 159 to 189 persons/ sq. km., which is a substantial increase. However, population density in Almora has gone down slightly from 201 to 198. This is another indicator of out-migration from the district.

The data from the Census is further analyzed in a study on outmigration of youth from rural Uttarakhand (Grunawalt, 2012). The study notes that "The Garhwal (Pauri Garhwal) and Almora districts witnessed negative rural population growth rates. … Depopulation of the Garhwal and Almora districts and the significantly low population growth rates of other districts can only occur due to a movement of peoples. This conclusion is reached after considering that while child population growth rates have declined, they did not decline significantly enough to reduce population growth so dramatically. Given the respective growth rates of rural and urban populations, it can be safely concluded that much of the low population growth in the hills is the result of rural to urban migration." Reasons for migration were classified into push and pull factors. The main push factors are low productivity in agriculture, lack of earning opportunities within the village, lack of educational and medical facilities, lack of water, electricity and infrastructural facilities. The author underlines the issue of perceived risk in agriculture. The most important pull factors were the influence of returning migrants and their stories of economic opportunities in the large cities.
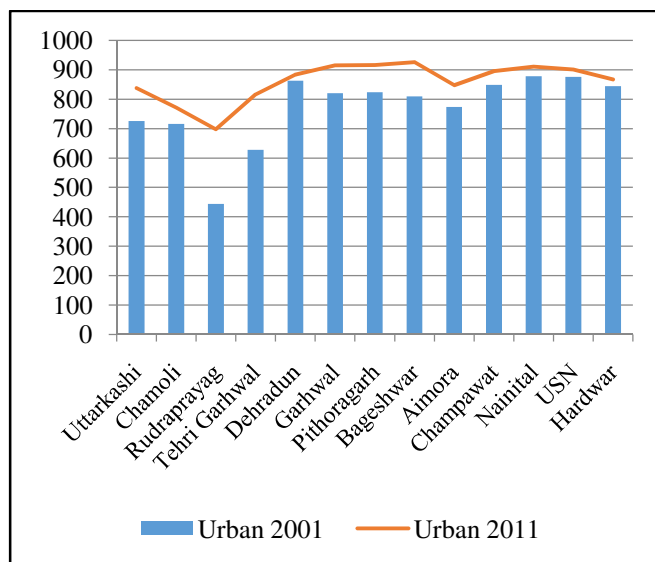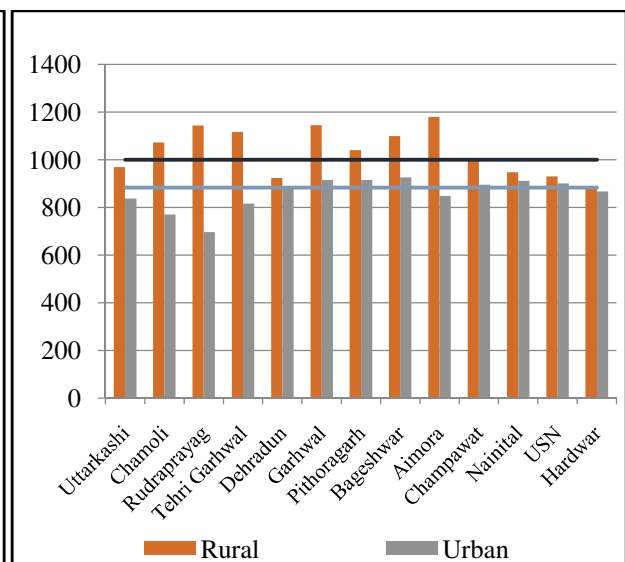

Figure 7: Urban sex ratio

Figure 8: Sex ratios 2011

Increase in male and female population has also been uneven across rural and urban sector. Female/ Male ratios over almost all districts are substantially lower in urban than in rural areas. As we have seen before, Almora has a very small urban sector, but the sex ratio there (848) is lower than the state average (883). On the other hand, the rural sex ratio (1180) is higher than state average (1000). The rural sex ratio in Almora is also the highest in all the districts of the state. Thus, like many other districts, women are concentrated in the rural sector and their percentage is lower in the urban sector. However sex ratios in the urban sector have somewhat increased during the decade. The largest increase has been in Rudraprayag and Tehri Garhwal. However, in Almora too, there is a substantial increase in the sex ratio from 774 in 2001 to 848 in 2011.
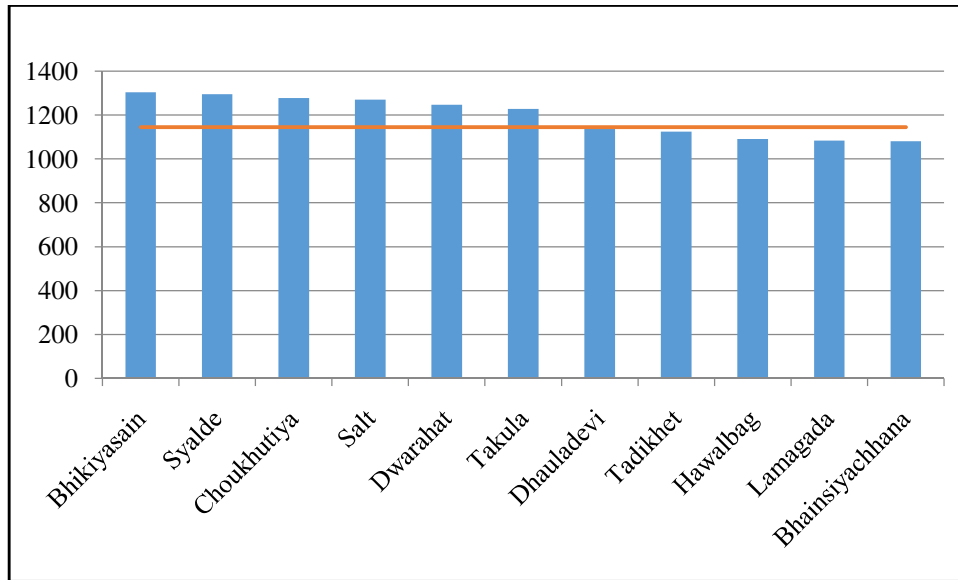

Figure 9: Rural sex ratio 2001

Block wise sex ratios are available only for 2001. These indicate that rural sex ratios in all blocks favoured the female population. In fact, rural sex ratio of Almora in 2001 was higher than the Uttarakhand state average (1007). The overall rural sex ratio for Almora in 2001 was 1145. Dhauladevi block is close to the district average rural sex ratio, while Tadikhet, hawalbag, Lamdaga and Bhainsiyachhana have rural sex ratios lower than the district average. However, Even the lowest sex ratios (in Hawalbagh, Lamdaga and Bhainsiyachhana), are over 1000.
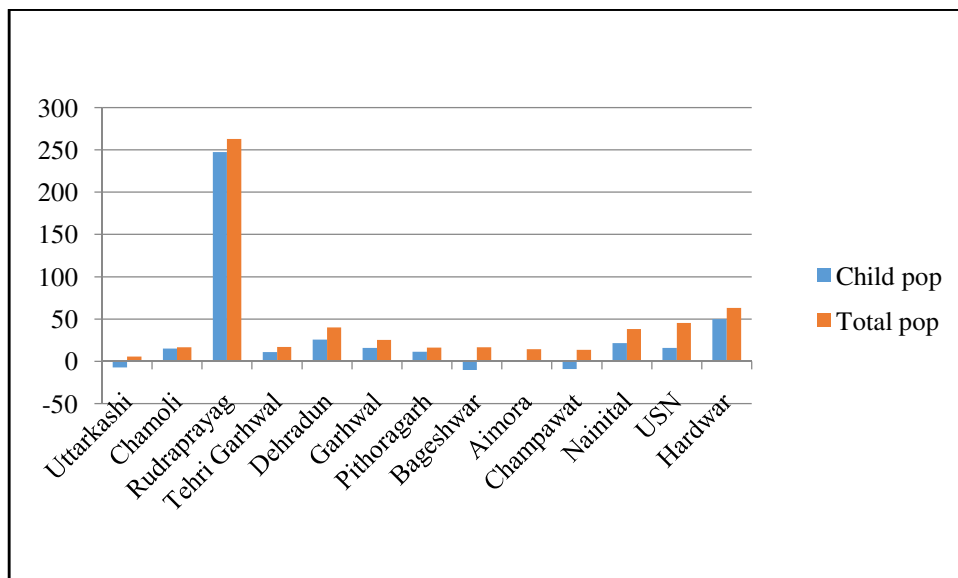

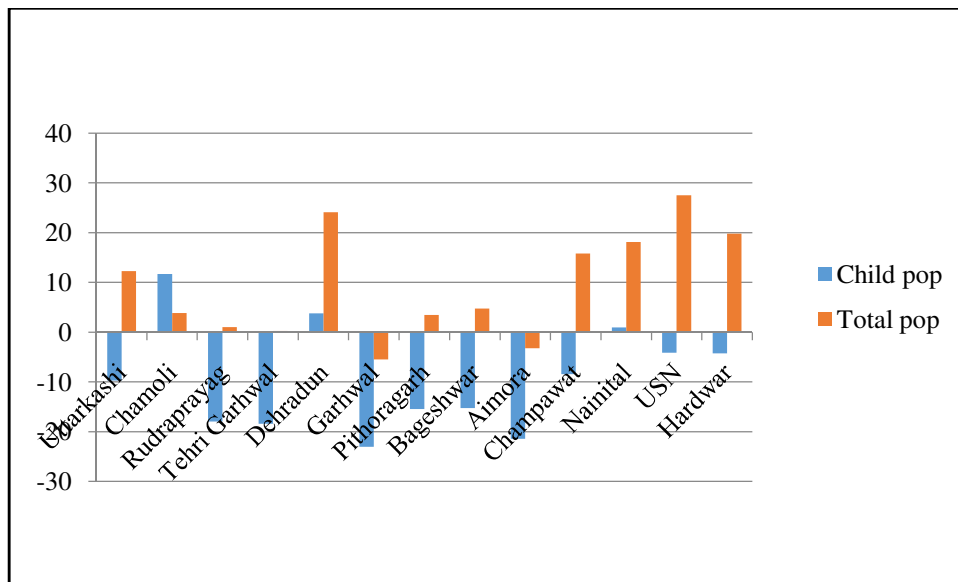*Figure 10: Urban Child and Total Population Growth 2001-2011*

Figure 11: Rural Child & Total Population Growth 2001-2011

The growth in child population in many districts is negative, especially in rural areas. It is likely that this, along with the sex ratios which are high in rural and low in urban areas, indicates that a large number of single men are migrating to the urban sector and leaving their families behind in the villages. Almora and Pithoragarh are the two districts where child population decline in rural areas is the highest. In case of the urban child population, most districts have indicated an increase (Rudraprayag stands out as the only district which has recorded a massive increase in total as well as child population in the urban sector). However, in case of Almora, this rise is so small (0.09% over the decade) as to be invisible.
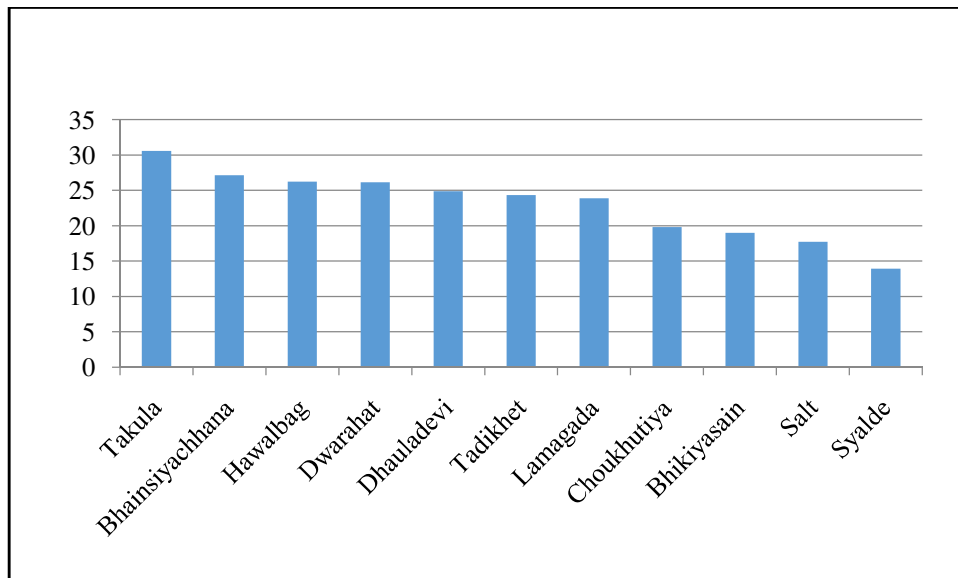

Figure 12: Percentage SC+ST population 2001

The total SC+ST population of the district was 142005 persons in 2001. ST persons formed a minuscule part of this population – comprising only 878 persons. The remaining 141127 persons belonged to SC communities over the entire district. Within this, the rural sector, comprised the revenue area (designated as Blocks) and the forest area together. This rural area had 132827 persons belonging to SC communities, of whom 132649 were distributed in the various blocks. The figure indicates the distribution of this population. About a third of Takula residents belong to SC or ST communities, while at the other end, Syalde block has only about 14% of population belonging to these communities. The state average for SC + ST population in 2001 was 20.9% - therefore, the SC/ST population of Almora is lower than the state average.
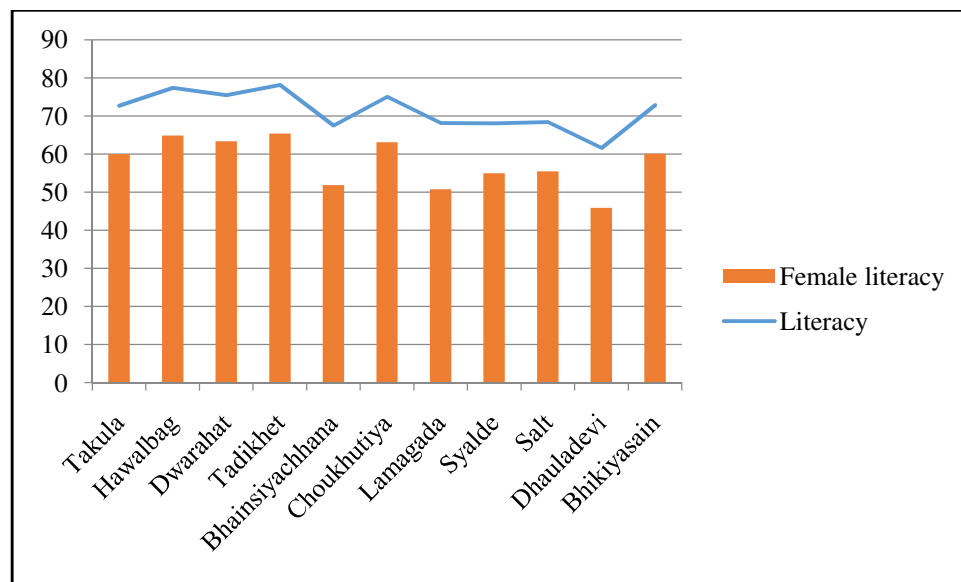
Figure 13: Aggregate and female literacy 2001

Literacy data is not available for 2011 census at the block level. The literacy rate of Almora in 2001 was 73.64%, wherein 89.2% males and 60.56% females were literate. Tadikhet and Hawalbag have the largest literacy percentages of 78 and 77% respectively. At the other extreme, Dhauladevi had the lowest literacy percentage of 62% in 2001. The percentage of literate women is much lower than the overall literacy percentage, especially in Dhauladevi, Lamdaga, and Bhainsiyachhana.

5. Conclusion

To sum up we can say that there are many dimensions of changing patterns of demographics in Almora district. Some people are migrating to big cities. Some are migrating to the towns situated in the district from their native villages. The highest density of population is in Takula block (400 persons/ sq. km.), while the lowest is in Bhikiyasain (173 persons per sq. km.).   According to the census some interesting fact have come out like rural sex ratio (1180) is higher than the state average (1000).

6. References

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